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State and Tribe in Ottoman Eastern Turkey: A Historical Anthropological Approach

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Introduction

In analyzing pre-capitalist state formations, one of the principal problems that concern social scientists is the nature of the state and the limits of the central power. The conventional understanding of "state" tends to overemphasize the state's organizational power in society. It also seeks a divine origin to the state; this was particularly so in most medieval and even in early modern states, including the Ottoman Empire. This approach either attributes naturally intrinsic, God-given administrative skills to certain peoples or "nations", or refers to the modern concept of nation-state, which obtain its legitimacy not from a heavenly power but directly from the people. Therefore, the state here is sanctified either in the sense that it is the instrument for the realization of a common identity on earth or by presenting it as the only form of representation of suzerainty, through which the people develop themselves as a nation within the political boundaries of their state. Nevertheless, the recent analyses criticize the notion of the state as a unified, centralized and autonomous political actor that can be exactly distinguished from all other social patterns (Alon 2005: 215). The works by Timothy Mitchell (1991), Roger Owen (1992) and Sami Zubaida (1993), convincingly suggest that the state should be seen as a

"political field" rather than an omnipotent power. There are many different actors in this field to compete for resource, influence and local or general power.

Both notions contribute to the tendency to extend the idea of absolute suzerainty and domination of the state to all governmental practices and experiences; the state here acts unilaterally as the only legitimate power. This tendency, at the same time, has a pragmatic aspect in that the people construct a "national" history for self-legitimacy. Thus, here one is faced with a conception of an anachronistic form of state, which has historical continuity and yet itself does not belong to this history. It is this approach that makes it difficult to fully identify and comprehend the different nature and role of politics in periods prior to the rise of nation-states.

This study examines and explores the place of the state with particular emphasis on diverse forms of appropriation of political power and somewhat problematic center-periphery relations within the context of tribal structure in Ottoman Turkey. The points to be addressed are the following: the criteria for centralization in state formations of pre-nation-state; the place of tribal (i.e. *aşiret*, *kabile*, *cemaat*) and religious (i.e. *tarikât*)* groups as local power bases and as means of politics in such state formations; their relations with the central power; and how the local powers reconciled with the center, and how this was perceived on both sides?

The Tribe in the Middle East

Tribe has a special place in Middle Eastern societies. This social organization forms the socio-cultural basis of the economy, which, in this particular region with a low population density, relies heavily on stockbreeding. To give an example, nomadic tribes in Iran prefer Khorasan and Azerbaijan primarily because of the vast pasturelands for their flocks (Morgan, 1988: 6). No pre-capitalist state with limited technological means and aims, fundamentally different from modern forms of statehood, can easily extend its domination to such areas by destroying this basis. Instead, such states often try to

* For the Ottoman terms, modern Turkish spelling is employed throughout the study.

generate solutions based on the existing socio-cultural ground. They can only maintain their influence and domination over such regions by institutionalizing their aims, which should be in harmony with that structure. As will be demonstrated below, the history of Ottoman rule in eastern and southeastern Turkey can be seen as a manifestation of constant efforts to reach or generate such solutions. It can also be read as a history of conflicts and compromises where such solutions fell short.

Such an understanding of tribe in the context of the Middle East is fundamentally different from the classical understanding of Anglo-Saxon concept of *tribe*, which generally derives from African, American or Oceanic anthropological research on hunter-gatherers, horticulturalists and intensive agriculturalists. The concept *aşiret*, on the other hand, derives from an Arabic root and the social organization it refers to has developed and spread over a wide geographical area stretching from North Africa and the Middle East to Caucasus and the Eurasian steppes. The essential difference between *aşiret* and the tribal organization of the colonized world is primarily the political content attributed to it. *Aşirets* played an important role in political relations not only in the pre-capitalist state formations, but, as shown by Yoav Alon in his work on Transjordan (see Alon 2005), they were also among the main actors in modern nation-states under construction.

In *aşiret* formation, common descent cult is almost fictive and it depends on common political and economical goals. The reason for this is their movement in lands which are often open to attack. The form of the political and economic union here is largely shaped by the necessities for the movements of large groups of human and animals, controlling vast tracts of lands to feed them, and organizing economic activities on the land. Therefore, tribe in the literature of anthropology is described in a much wider framework varying from a corporate one to non-corporate, from a socio-economic formation to an administrative one, from a sub-ethnic unit to an unit embracing ethnic, even national affinities, from a clan based kinship organization to politically oriented one, and from a loosely bound network to a much strait one.¹ Furthermore, there are evaluations that include also sedentary factors in the definition of the tribe in the Middle Eastern context,

¹ See Smith 1903; Musil 1928; Mitchell 1956; Bates 1973; Black-Michaud 1975; Lindner 1982; Goody and Marx 1990; Khoury and Kostiner 1990; Lapidus 1990; Lindholm 1996; Tapper 1983, 1997.

without limiting it only to pastoral-nomadic activities (see Antoun 2000).² It is clear now that the essential difficulty stems from the usage of a single concept or term in western languages (i.e. *tribe*) for all that variety, diversity and even ambiguity in certain cases.

Modern anthropological studies, however, tend to define tribe by according to the attributes of *aşiret* formations of Eurasia, Middle East and North Africa referred to above. In this definition, blood bond is not essential and blood relations are usually established by marriages at the level of sub-groups within a tribe. However, even this represents a temporary situation since it is always possible in changing conditions for such sub-groups to change their tribal affiliations. As a sub-group, for example, *kabile* is based on a conical clan model of lineage whereas in the larger *aşiret* model the dominant familial form is a segmentary lineage system which does not involve hierarchical relations among participant groups.³ These sub-groups are equal horizontally and the *aşiret* they together constitute has a chief who possesses and exerts less power than his counterparts in *kabiles*. The authority of the *aşiret* leader is organizational and coordinative rather than dictatorial. This appears to be quite natural when one takes into consideration the basic need for the component elements of *aşiret*, to act in concert. Along with the term *kabile*, in places where Turkish and Kurdish tribal structures are dominant, these groups appear under different names such as *oymak*, *oba*, *boy*, *tire* and *taife*. In times when conditions force them to act together in larger groups, there may even emerge *aşiret* confederations, which in many ways function like state organizations. As will be pointed out below, principalities or emirates (*beylik* or *emaret*) often consisted of such confederations, and sometimes resembled ethnicities or assumed ethnic characteristics.⁴

As a socio-political formation, “tribe” can also be defined in comparison with other categories of political power and tribal organizations such as “state” and the “emirate” or *beylik*. “State” in this respect refers to a territorial entity with more or less clearly

² There are abundant examples about *aşirets* engaged in sedentary way of life or specialized activities such as transportation, horse breeding, pass guarding, and the like. For sedentary forms of *aşiret*, see Saydam 2005.

³ For segmentary model, see Sahlins 1961; Lindner 1982.

⁴ See Beşikçi 1969a, 1969b; Engels 1978; Hütteroth 1959; Lindner 1982, 1983; Tapper 1997.

defined borders and a central administration, though limited and weak in terms of materializing its goals. It usually contains a diverse population. The *beylik* assumes almost all features of the state, except for population diversity. The tribe (*aşiret*) or sub-tribe (*kabile*) is, according to Evans-Pritchard, a *political group*, which defines itself with a territory (Tapper 1990: 50-51). In the Middle East, however, tribes are structures intertwined with the state, and exist in close cooperation with it. Unlike the dynamic that anthropologists have previously ascribed to tribal societies, tribes in this region have often been the principal structure on which emirates and sometimes states relied. In Lambton's definition (1954: 6), even the strongest administrations have transferred most of their authorities to the tribal chiefs in their regions. Referring to the history of Iran, he then gives an example that illustrates constant conflicts between the elements of *aşiret* and non-*aşiret*. According to Lambton, various dynasties in Iran have based themselves on *aşiret* power, and *aşirets* have always had a determining role in shaping the history of Iran.

Eickelman's study of Middle Eastern societies (1989: 127-8), refers to a tribal category used by state authorities for "administrative purposes" when talking about different conceptualizations concerning the tribes in the region. He points out that typical examples of this kind are seen in the Ottoman Empire and Iran as well as countries with a colonial past such as Morocco. Though based on concepts at a local level, the administrative assumptions concerning the nature of tribe have been reformulated by imperial powers. Such concepts are usually based on corporatist identity, which is often linked to territorial borders. Since many *aşirets* did not in fact have such borders, in this definition, tribal leaders were often granted concessions or privileges and authority as dependants of the state. The leadership here may not be based on the local concepts of power, but, sooner or later, should harmonize itself with them.

As a political organization beyond the concept of *kabile* in the Middle East, *aşiret*, which appears either as the basis for the types of complex political formations like *beylik* and state or as a threat to them, is not a static form of social organization. In other words, it is not a system that emerged at a particular moment of history and has forever remained

structurally unchanged. The structures of *aşirets* continuously change in accordance with changing needs, displacements and fragmentations, resulting from various kinds of pressure. Each time, they reproduce their myths accordingly and (re)place the dichotomy of ally and enemy (or “we” and “other”) in new myths. This is also true for the Turcoman, Kurdish and Arab tribes of Ottoman eastern and southeastern Turkey. However, certain larger groupings owed their long survival to the degree of resistance they developed against imperial powers. Among these centers of resistance, one can name the big tribal federations of Dumbuli, Pinyanishi and Ertushi in the regions south of lake Van and Hakkari, Millis in the Mardin region, and the Cizre (Al Jazirah) Emirate and Bedirhanis in the Cizre-Botan region.

Tribe and State in the Ottoman Empire

The aim of the pre-capitalist state, as in the case of the Ottoman Empire, was primarily to secure a regular flow of income from the area of domination to the center and to struggle against any barriers to this process without endangering the basis of its legitimacy. The security and maximization of surplus was thus essential for its survival. In order to achieve this, along with military power, it needed a basis of legitimacy that would enable it to deal with the vassals under reasonable terms. As will be seen below, the Ottoman state in this respect had certain advantages under Selim I (1512-1520) compared to its rivals in the Middle Eastern context. First of all, being the protector of the holy cities, Mecca and Medina, and holding the symbols of the caliphate alone was a significant advantage for the Ottomans. Furthermore, this gave the Ottomans enormous prestige and ideological superiority vis-à-vis their main rival in the East, Safavid Iran, which also had imperial claims for legitimacy, though based on a more legendary basis.

However, since the pre-capitalist state structure was based essentially on agriculture and needed stability and protection for its agricultural production, which constituted the primary source of revenue, the power of the state in the Middle East was seriously undermined vis-à-vis that of the tribe. This in turn often led the state to behave politically. Efforts by the state to minimize the harm caused by pastoralist groups to agriculture were considerably jeopardized by natural limitations on communication and

transportation, particularly during times of military involvement. On the other hand, tribal organizations, which generated their own legitimacy primarily from within, still needed, or welcomed, the legitimizing role of the suzerain power as an external factor to further strengthen their positions. This again contributed to the previously mentioned interdependency between the tribes and the imperial powers.⁵

This is what helped the Ottomans in their eastern policy and is the key to understanding their influence and domination in the region. It should not be forgotten, however, that such interdependence was established on a fine balance. This was mainly because of the independent nature of tribal structures. Such structures, especially when strained, show a tendency to act on their own and create difficulties for the center, i.e. the political center of the imperial power. This is also the main reason behind the autonomous character of the Ottoman administration in the region. It is well known that the Ottomans did not, or could not establish in larger parts of eastern and southeastern Turkey their usual provincial administration based on the institution of *timar*, which was, in essence, a kind of military fief system. This meant a compromise for both sides and is also a clear manifestation of such interdependence at work (Kılıç 1997:116-142; Ünal, 1999b; 1999c; Öz 2003; Sinclair 2003).

One can observe such a relationship particularly in the southeastern corner of Turkey. This region roughly comprises the present-day provinces of Van, Hakkari, Siirt, Şırnak and Mardin. Sinclair (2003: 119), referring to the same region, emphasizes its natural boundaries, which ensured a good degree of economic self-sufficiency, and its tribally based principalities. There are several reasons for this. First of all, this region is the most

⁵ Rhoads Murphey (1986) points to three dimensions of relations of the tribes with other actors in Ottoman territory. One is the relationship between the tribes and merchants; the second is the relationship between the tribes and the settled population, and the third one is the relationship between the tribes and the central government. One must bear in mind that all defined relations by Murphey are the cases in which the state has a primary interest. An interesting proof of this is the very fact that Murphey has been able to study all these relationships through the records kept by the state bureaucracy such as *Şer'iyye Sicilleri* and *Mühimme (Evâmîr-i Sultâniyye)* series.

mountainous area of Turkey and offers suitable ecological, economic and geographical conditions for tribal structures to survive without much change. Secondly, the tribes of the region reveal ethnic diversity; in the Mardin and Siirt regions, where the landscape reveals a transition from plain to mountainous features, one finds Arab tribes. These tribes were dominant in the region during certain periods in history, though their domination gradually diminished as Kurdish tribes expanded in the region during the nineteenth century. Furthermore, one also observes a dense Turcoman transhumance in the same region from the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries (see Gündüz, 1997). Third is the religiously diverse character of the region. Along with the dominant Sunni Muslim tribes, there emerged during the Ottoman-Safavid rivalry a heterodox Shiite tendency in the region. To this picture should be added the Yezidis and local Christian elements such as Assyrians, Chaldeans and Nestorians. Foreign missionary activities in the nineteenth century also brought about an increasing number of Protestants and Catholics to the tribes of the region. Despite this diversity, it is interesting to observe the co-existence of diverse ethnicities and religions within a same tribal organization (see KAYNAK 1998). This shows that the form of tribal organization in the region became important enough to subdue other kinds of identity, and survived as an extremely resilient form of social organization. This is what made neighboring states realize the importance of this phenomenon when establishing and maintaining their power in the region.⁶

⁶ The tribes Zerzari (Şemdinan), listed in the works of Mamlukid historians, and Ertuşi and Pinyanishi, which were mentioned in *Şerefname* as great tribal confederations living in the area south of Lake Van, still exist today. Similarly, the Milli tribe of the Mardin region is seen from the 16th to the 20th century as the dominant element of the area. These are only some examples of the endurance of such structures (see Yalçın-Heckmann 1991: 47; KAYNAK 1998: 154, 159-60; Aydın, et al, 1999). This continuity and resilience of course does not mean the non-existence of intra-tribal conflicts. Such conflicts in fact prevented the tribal form from developing into other forms of statehood. The conditions referred to above and these conflicts, on the other hand, did not always make it easy for the states to intervene to dissolve tribal structures. Instead, there often appeared forms of confederative unions. Among them can be mentioned the emirate (*mîrlik*) of İzzeddin Şîr I, who united the Hakkari tribes and extended his dominion up to the regions of Van and Gevaş. Another important example is the emirate of Bedirhanis who dominated the areas between the Hakkari mountains and Karacadağ. The emirate of İzzeddin Şîr came to an end upon his defeat in Van in 1387 by Tamerlane's army, after which it continued in Hakkari as a vassal

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As is well known, the relations of the Ottomans with the tribal political structures of southeastern Turkey started in the sixteenth century when they took decisive action against their rivals, the Safavids of Iran. Shah Ismail of Safavid Iran, relying heavily on the heterodox Turcomans of eastern Turkey and Iran by instrumentalizing and politicizing Shiite Islam, had already been trying to establish itself in the region. Upon the defeat of the Shah's army by the Ottomans at Chaldiran in 1514, the Sunnite Kurdish *mîrs* of the region joined the Ottomans and recognized their suzerainty under the autonomous administrative organization developed by İdris-i Bitlisî, who was serving the Ottomans as a native of the region.⁷

We know that the Ottoman Sultan, Selim I, authorized Bitlisî in the final arrangements of the Ottoman administration in the region and, in 1515, sent him blank official papers bearing the imperial *tuğra* for him to fill in as he thought fit in the name of the Sultan to be given to local Kurdish *beys* (Sevgen 1982: 30). With Bitlisî's successful policy, while the Kurdish *mîrs* of the region recognized the Ottoman as their suzerain, the Ottomans on the other hand left much of the authority and initiative in the hands of the traditional local elements. The Ottoman policy toward the region through Bitlisî's arrangements appears to have aimed at maintaining the domination of noble Kurdish families and consolidating their power by further granting them new titles, namely governorships or *sancakbeyliği* (Yalçın-Heckmann 1991: 262, fn. 59). It would be wrong of course to explain the hereditary rule of these *beys* in the region as Ottoman governors by simply referring to the role of Bitlisî. His role in this process seems to be no more than one of having masterful organization all this in the name of the Ottomans. Regional conditions as well

of Tamerlane (Yalçın-Heckmann, 1991: 48; EI, 1981:459). Bedirhanis on the other hand maintained a semi-autonomous position until the mid-nineteenth century.

⁷ For some interesting details of this process of incorporation through İdris-i Bitlisî, see especially Sevgen 1982 and Akgündüz 1991: 198-215. However the reader should be warned particularly about Akgündüz's unscholarly nationalistic approach and interpretation concerning this process.

as the political rationale of an agricultural economy in a sense made such a policy inevitable. The Empire could not even effectively manage a central administration in its core areas in the Balkans and Anatolia for more than a couple of centuries. Provincial governors or *beylerbeyis* of the region were all appointed from the center and they were not Kurdish. But, as will be seen below, the power of these officials vis-à-vis the district governors or *sancakbeyis* of local origin was significantly limited. As van Bruinessen points out (1992: 145), unlike the Aqqoyunlu and Safavid policy of diminishing the power of local ruling families in the region and appointing administrators of Turkish origin or less noble Kurds,⁸ the initial Ottoman policy of consolidation of pre-Ottoman local aristocracy developed and changed, as the central control diminished, into dividing these local powers and playing them against each other.

Unlike the policies of the Aqqoyunlus and the Safavids, the Ottomans, in their struggle against the Safavids during the 16th and 17th centuries, developed policies secured the support of the alliance of the former independent emirates of the region.⁹ The Ottoman policy remained more or less unchanged even in cases where some emirates changed sides; the Ottoman administration always reallocating their lands and re-granting their former positions to members of the same *mîr* families when these families re-allied themselves with the Ottomans.¹⁰

⁸ This “appointment” policy does not seem to have helped the imperial powers’ control of the region. On the other hand, it shows that the Ottomans approached the region with much more of an imperial mentality while other states established themselves on an ethnic basis and showed rather sectarian (*mezhebî*) characteristics relying more on the survival of tribal blood groups.

⁹ An imperial decree sent to Zeynel Bey, the beğ of Hakkari, orders him to always keep an eye on the situation of the enemy, and in the event of a military activity, to make an attempt, with the help of the other *beys*, to solve the problem. Copies of the same decree were also sent to Yusuf Bey of Hakkari, Han Mehmed of Cezire, Şeref Han, Mahmudi Hasan Bey, and the *beys* of Hazu and İmadiye. See BOA MD 38:195 (7 C. 987/1579).

¹⁰ The emir of Bitlis, Şeref Han IV, took refuge in Safavid Iran during the reign of Süleyman I, and was eventually killed by Ulâma Pasha, the former Safavid governor of Azerbaijan who later took refuge under the Ottomans. Ulâma Pasha’s rule in the Bitlis region ended upon the arrival of İbrahim Pasha, the Ottoman Grand Vizier, who installed Şemseddin III, the son of Şeref Han IV as the *emir* of Bitlis. However, like his

These grants and positions were not an act of gratitude for these Kurdish *beys*, i.e. local rulers. They were clearly the result of both the imperial politics and of the conditions, potentials and targets of the pre-capitalist state. It was this seemingly flexible policy that, from the initial conquests onward, facilitated the formation in eastern and southeastern Turkey of administrative units which recognized Ottoman suzerainty in different positions to varying degrees. For instance, in the province of Diyarbekir at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the districts of Cizre, Eğil, Palu, Genç and Hazzo were administered as *hükümet*, whilst those of Çermik, Sağman, Pertek, Mazgirt, Kulp, Atak, Mihrani, Çapakçur, Siirt and Meyyafarikin were granted as *ocaklık*. The districts of Çemişgezek, Siverek and Ergani on the other hand were assigned as *arpalık* and Nusaybin, probably together with Mardin, was ruled as *voyvodalık*. Only the districts of Ruha (Urfa), Diyarbakır, Hasankeyf, Akçakale and Sincar were administered as normal *sancak* within the *timar* system, i.e. as part of the direct administration of the Ottoman Empire (Turan 1962: 201; also see Kodaman 1987: 13-4).

father, Şemseddin soon recognized the overlordship of the Safavids, and he he was forgiven by Sultan Süleyman, but when he did the same, the Ottoman sultan appointed him as governor of Malatya. Rejecting this appointment, Şemseddin this time took refuge under the Shah of Iran. His son, Şeref Han V, the author of the *Şerefname*, was born in Iran. While Şeref Han was governor of Nahçıvan, the Ottoman Sultan, Murad III, appointed him after much effort as governor or *beğlerbeği* of Bitlis, and, upon Seref Han's request, additionally gave him the province of Adilcevaz (Sevgen 1982: 41, 43, 46. For the appointments, see BOA, MD 32: nos. 81, 168; MD 32: no. 506; MD 32; no. 514; MD 32; no. 543). Furthermore, the tribe of Jirki was also put under the command of Şeref Han during times of war (Sevgen 1982: 49. BOA, MD 32: no 592). The imperial order sent by Suleyman I to Kurdish *emirs* who were fighting the Safavids on the side of the Ottomans, reads: "... the provinces and castles that have been held as family estates as [*yurtluk* and *ocaklık*] from ancient times and other places granted to them by imperial diplomas [*berat*] are all given to them. Furthermore, these provinces, castles, cities, villages and estates [*mezraa*] with all their revenues are granted to them as private property [*temlik*] to be inherited from father to son... When the *bey* dies, his province is not to be abolished but to pass down to his son; if he has many sons, they are to share the castles and other places among themselves as they wish. If they cannot reach agreement, the *beys* of Kurdistan will intervene, and according to their decision, the sons will own these places by way of private property until their family lineage ends. If the *bey* dies without heirs or relatives, his province will not be given to outsiders; the *beys* of Kurdistan will decide to whom among the regional *beys* or their sons should be granted these places" (Sevgen 1982: 42, citing TSMA, E. 11969).

In eastern Turkey, a number of urban centers with their environs, such as Harput, were defined as typical *sancak*, and were thus included in the *timar* system. On the other hand, other neighboring regions were ruled hereditarily by pre-Ottoman local noble families based on powerful *aşirets*. Such a system was not applied in Harput primarily because of the lack of a strong tribal basis in this particular area, where only a few small tribal elements or *cemaats* were found (Ünal 1989: 33-4).¹¹ Similarly, the Bitlis Emirate was also preserved within the Ottoman system by establishing relations based on recognition of mutual interests. The *emîrs* of Bitlis were, in Sinclair's words, "not only loyal but also fully supportive of the empire, aiding its defensive arrangements in ways such as channeling information from spies to the central authorities" (Sinclair 2003: 122. See also Evliya Çelebi).

On the Iranian frontier, a number of confusions occurred in the sixteenth century when the Ottomans and Safavids confronted each other. The *bey* of Mahmudi, ruler of the region between Van and Hakkari, during the first half of the sixteenth century, sided with the Safavids unlike the other *beys*. However this continued only until the Ottomans' set up of the province of Van in 1548. The Ottoman policy on the eastern and southeastern frontiers remained flexible mainly due to such confusions, and, in sharp contrast to the compulsive policy of the Safavids, tended to preserve the status quo of the *emirs* and *beys*.¹²

By the seventeenth century, the Ottoman administration appears to have established its relative domination over the local elite of the south-eastern frontier region. Certain strategies were employed during this process. The principal means of integration with the center, which held the right to grant fiefs or *timar*, and the magnates, that became representatives of the center, were ethnic bonds, the cliental system as well as marriages.¹³ Some *beys* in regions such as Şehrizer, Hakkari and Cizre were acting as if

¹¹ For the provinces given as *yurtluk-ocaklık* and *hükümet* in upper Euphrates and the exceptional case of Çemişkezek, see Ünal 1999a, 1999b, 1999c; Yılmazçelik 1999.

¹² For lake Van and its environs in the sixteenth century, see Ünal 1999d; Sinclair 2003; Öz 2003.

¹³ To give some examples, while tribal leaders of the province of Şehrizer were given permission to settle abandoned lands of the region with their tribes (MD I: doc. 1117, January 1555), the Ottoman administration granted fiefs (*timar*) to two sons of Şehsuvar Bey, the bey of Şehrizer from the Sarılı tribe,

independent rulers. For instance, the *beys*' right to divide their lands among their sons did not always conform what is understood as Ottoman centralism. Zahid Bey of Hakkari is a good example of this point. He ruled this region almost independently under the Safavids until the mid-seventeenth century, and later on, under the Ottomans. He divided his emirate between his two sons, one ruling the area around the Bay castle near Çölemerik while the other ruled the lands around the Vostan castle near Gevaş. Zahid Bey's family, together with members of the Şembu family, effectively maintained this domination in the region under Ottoman suzerainty right up until the middle of the nineteenth century.¹⁴

Relations between the state and tribes in districts of the region which were administered within the *timar* system were established and carried on in a different manner. In the early sixteenth century following the Ottoman conquest, Mardin, which appears as a center of a sub-district (*kaza*) of the district of Amid, had a greater portion of tax revenues assigned as imperial domain which was directly administered by the central state. A significant portion of the other revenues assigned as *has*, *zeamet* and *timar*, however, were left in the hands of the local magnates and tribal leaders. In such a policy, which involves conciliatory power sharing, local magnates continued to maintain their

“upon his own request” (see MD I: 2918, in the year 1556). Similarly, in the same year, relatives of Bekir Bey, one of the *beys* of Şehrizer, were granted *timars* and a governorship (*sancak beyliği*) (MD I: 2024). Furthermore, Gazanfer, son of İmam Kulu, the military commander of Siverek, was also granted a *timar*, as was a cousin and a *kethüda* of the governor of Hasankeyf, Şemseddin (MD I: 1757; MD 2: doc.182).

¹⁴ With the efforts of the governor of Van, Hakkari was brought under Ottoman control in 1534. However, the sons of the ruler of the Hakkari region, Melik Bey, son of Zahid Bey, soon chose to serve the Safavids. With the expansion of Ottoman rule in the region, intra-dynastic conflicts within the Hakkari Emirate gained momentum and Hakkari saw 23 *beys* within a century. The alliances, which are clearly described in the *Şerefnâme*, often changed; members of the ruling family of Şenbû in particular were not only in constant internal conflict, but frequently changed sides between the Ottomans and the Safavids. Van Bruinessen (1992: 149) interprets the situation as follows: "Other sons governed sub-districts of Hakkari as representatives of their father, in the same way that Ottoman Sultans and Persian Shahs appointed their sons as provincial governors, with the dual aim of centralizing the administration within the family and of keeping their most dangerous rivals far away from the capital."

tribal based social and economic domination by incorporating themselves into the Ottoman ruling class (*askerî*). Already in 1564, among *timar*- and *zeamet*-holders in the district of Mardin, there were 13 tribal chiefs (*mîr-i aşiret*) and some 130 leaders of sub-tribes (*cemaat* and *kabile*) (see TD 304). Furthermore, from the second half of the sixteenth century, these local tribal elements showed significant development in acquiring administrative positions over other tax revenues in the region, including larger imperial domains (*padişah hassı*), as either *voyvodas* or by way of *iltizam* or tax-farming. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there appeared a visible struggle for the administration of local tax-revenues, even leading to conflicts between appointed Ottoman officials and these local elements largely through the tribal power. The power of the Milli family of this particular region is a good example. In order to maintain the control of tribal power in the region, the Ottoman administration was often induced to change the provincial center of the Mardin district from Diyarbekir to Bagdad or sometimes even to Mosul.

Parallel to the dissolution of the *timar* system and the accompanying Celali uprising, which was particularly strong in Anatolia and the Syrian provinces from the late sixteenth century onward, relations between the Ottoman administration and local tribes deteriorated. Accordingly, the attitudes of the tribes towards the Ottoman rule in the region began to change. This was primarily due to the struggle to keep the privileges that tribal leaders obtained through revenue grants under the *timar* system. The breakdown of this vulnerable balance within this system, therefore, often pushed tribal elements into challenging positions outside central control.¹⁵ It is interesting to note that the lines

¹⁵ We see in Ottoman records instances of situations in which tribes and tribal elements did not fulfill their responsibilities towards the Ottoman government and turned into rebels. To give some examples: the leader of the Mıŝki tribe in the district of Mardin, Feyyaz, who also held a *timar* of 6000 *akçes*, “became a rebel and escaped”; this caused serious loss for the Ottoman treasury since the yearly tribute to be paid by his tribe could not be collected and sent to İstanbul (MŞS 259: doc. 207). A group of people from the *mezraa* of Şeybani, which belonged to the tribe of Behramki, attacked the men of Hüseyin Ağa, the Police Chief of Mardin, and stole their animals, food and goods such as carpets and rugs (MŞS 259: doc. 15). Similarly, Kalenderoğlu Ali of the Milli tribe did not pay his tribute to the Ottoman treasury and became a “rebel”

between the conflicting sides were not always clear. A striking example of this situation can be found again in the Mardin district. The Police chief of Mardin, who, as representative of the central Ottoman administration, fought the tribal leaders was himself of tribal origin, his being *subaşı* of the region did not deter him from involvement in unlawful activities.¹⁶

The seventeenth century was also a period during which the system of *voyvodalık* gained momentum in the region. The sub-districts and even districts in this part of the Ottoman Empire gradually turned into areas administered by *voyvodas*. In this system, many villages of imperial domains, most of whom were abandoned during the Celali terror, were farmed out to local tribal leaders in return for a certain amount of yearly payments to the central treasury. The Ottoman central administration began to loosen its already limited direct control in this region during this process. In the meantime, the peasants living in the ever-decreasing number of *timar* villages began to leave their lands in larger numbers and move to places outside the *timar* system, i.e. *hükümet* and *yurtluk-ocaklık* areas, such as Cizre, Palu, Eğil, Genc, Kulp, Meyyafarikin, Pertek and Mazgird. This tendency to escape taxation also accelerated the process of depopulation in certain parts of the region. Earlier examples of such a process can be followed from the *mühimme* records from the late sixteenth century onwards (see for example, MD73: 574). It can be said that the spread of tax-farming and the resulting struggle over the *voyvodalık* of Mardin, which assumed both political and military power via local economic resources, turned the relations between center and periphery in the region into a fierce conflict.

("ehl-i fesat ve şâki olmağla"); he was ordered to be sent into exile in Cyprus but could not be found (MD 73: doc. 517, in the year 1594).

¹⁶ To give but one example: because of the oppression of the *subaşı* or the police chief, the inhabitants of the village of Koçhisar (or Kızıltepe), whose tax revenues were assigned as imperial domain or *havass-ı hümâyûn*, fled to the city of Mardin in the early years of the seventeenth century (MŞS 259: doc. 47). In another instance, Hasan and Bünyad of the police corps or *ases*, misused their authority and abused villagers in their region. In the imperial decree sent to the judges or *kadis* of Diyarbekir and Mardin, it is stated that many villages were abandoned because of their abuse (MD 71: 45, in the year 1592).

Such disagreements, which was intensified during the seventeenth century, point to a dilemma on the part of the Ottoman administration which reveals also the general problem of imperial rules in pre-capitalist relations of production: being unable to collect revenue owed to the central treasury, the Ottoman administration went into conflict with its own regional official on the one hand, and, under such circumstances, it had to recognize the power of the whole family of its official in the region.¹⁷ There are also cases where recognition by the State of the power of certain members of the family was challenged by other members of the family. The Ottoman administration often found itself helpless, neither being able to prevent nor settle disputes among neighboring emirates. To give one example, one can mention the attacks and plunder of the ruler of İmadiye to Cizre in the 1590s, which resulted in the death of numerous inhabitants of the town (Aydın at. al. 1999: 161). The Ottomans also found it increasingly difficult, from the second half of the seventeenth century on, to direct the tribes to theatres of war.¹⁸

¹⁷ In 1598, the Governor of Diyarbekir, Kurt Ahmed Pasha, requested from İstanbul the governorship of Habur for Mehmed Bey, the leader of the Milli tribe; Mehmed Bey was also allowed to obtain certain tax farms or *iltizams* of İstanbul. Shortly after, Mehmed Bey's relations with the Pasha deteriorated and he "rebelled". We learn from the Pasha's letter sent to the *kadi* of Mardin that since his arrival in Diyarbekir, Mehmed Bey (referred to as Mîr Mehmed) paid the treasury only a little portion of the amount he was supposed to pay. Despite all warnings, Mehmed Bey did not fulfill his obligations and following a clash with the men of the Pasha's deputy or *kaymakam*, Yusuf Ağa, he was wounded and fled to the mountains. Upon hearing of these events, the Ottoman administration issued a *fetva* to "dispose of" Mehmed Bey and granted the leadership (*mîr-i aşiretlik*) to Nevruz Bey from the same family. This was soon followed by Yusuf Ağa's official announcement in town that "all members of the tribe should come in three days to meet Nevruz Bey and recognize his leadership" (Akdağ 1975: 467-9).

¹⁸ In 1594 the Ottoman government ordered the *bey* of Cizre to attend, with all his tribes, the war against the enemy in his region on the borderland. This order was renewed three months later (see MD 67: doc. 161, 316, 317; MD 71: doc. 72, 109; MD 73: doc. 142, 251). Similarly, a century later, in 1689, in the imperial decree sent to the leaders of Yeni İl, Aleppo Turcomans, Kilis and Rişvan *Ekradı* (Kurds), and to the tribes of Bozulus, Rakka, Maraş and Adana as well as to the *voyvoda* of Mardin, it is complained that they had still not joined the army with their military forces, thus deserving punishment ("*gavga-yi hümayun için memur olan Türkmân ve Ekrad dilâverleri evvel baharda Edirne sahrasında liva-i hazra-i resulullahın tahtında mevcud bulunmak üzere bir kaç defa evâmir-i hümayunum gönderilüp tenbih-i hümayunum olmuş*

Repeated examples of such cases show eventual loss of control by the Ottoman administration in the region. As the vulnerable relations between the central power and local tribes and tribal elements were seriously undermined, the non-centralized structure of administration, which was loosely institutionalized from the very beginning, developed further until little practical Ottoman rule remained in the region. One might say that this situation continued until the late nineteenth century, when the Ottoman administration engaged in long and painful efforts of centralization, aiming primarily at the re-settlement of tribal elements of the region.

The most important strengths of the tribes in the region vis-à-vis the central state were their potential threat to major trade routes and their geographical distance to the center. Therefore, certain *hükümet*s and *yurtluk-ocaklık* districts such as İmadiye and Cizre, which were ruled on the basis of tribal social and political structures, were an integral part of the constant struggle for control over the transit trade in the region. The revenues deriving from the customs dues and urban economy depended primarily on the proper functioning of the transit trade. The safeguard of these routes through which the goods from India and Iran were transported to Ottoman markets, and to Istanbul, also required a reasonable degree of stability in the relations between the Ottoman administration and these nearly independent emirates of eastern and southeastern Turkey. Local tribes in the region appear to have always had effective control over certain parts of the trade between Iraq and Anatolia, and, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, conflict between the tribes for such control intensified. The Ottomans on the other hand developed their own strategy for dismantling the major tribal confederations into groups and driving petty rival tribes into the area. As part of this policy, the confederation of Bozulus Turcomans, who spent the summer in the high pasturelands of Erzurum and Erzincan, and wintered

idi, sizden sebil-i dinde külli gayret ve hamiyet ümid olunmağla şimdiye değin ordu-yu hümayunuma munzam olmanız lâzım iken rûz-ı hızır mürûr ideli bu kadar zemandır henüz gelüp irişmediğünüzden itaba müstehak olmuşuzdur."). The decree, which was written in mid-July, had to be renewed twice; first in early June, 1691, and second in January 1692 (see Ahmet Refik 1989: 90).

around Mardin and Diyarbekir, was dispersed.¹⁹ In their place, the Ottomans tried to settle Kurdish and Arab tribes. As Salzman points out (1995: 136), this was done deliberately, not involving in the process unreliable groups.

However, the entrance of Kurdish tribes, who were much more difficult to keep under control, into the region and their occupation of winter pastures belonging to the Bozulus Turcomans around Mardin caused greater troubles for the Ottoman administration.²⁰ In the 1640s, first the Arab tribe of Anezes moved northward into the Syrian deserts, to be followed by the Şammars. Mevalis were driven further north and the area of the middle Euphrates passed into the control of these Arab tribes. Under the circumstances, the Ottoman policy towards the region was to dismantle the groups seriously threatening their rule, and to control the Kurdish, Turkish and Arab tribes by resettling them in designated areas in the region. During this process, which usually did not yield the desired results, the state had to resort to military expeditions against major tribes, among whom were the Millis, the Tayys, and the Yezidis of the Sincar (Sinjar) region (Salzman 1995: 236-8). The Ottoman administration also undertook administrative measures to stabilize tribes, and thus securing the trade routes and maintaining the flow of revenues deriving from customs dues. The most typical attempt in this respect was to change the boundaries of the provinces of Diyarbekir and Baghdad. This was in vain, as the northward movement of Arab tribes had negative impacts on the Turcoman and Kurdish tribes of first Syria and Iraq, and later of Mardin and Diyarbekir, deepening the competition and conflict among tribes.

¹⁹ For the Bozulus Turcomans, see Gündüz 1997.

²⁰ The Ottomans, who pursued the traditional policy of dividing both Turkish and Kurdish tribes of the region into sub-groups and settling them in different areas as much as possible, later on faced severe difficulty in resisting the advance of the Arab tribes into the same region, thus paying the price for dismantling these Kurdish and Turkish tribes. This difficulty is clearly reflected in the Ottoman official documents. For examples, see MD 47: doc. 5, in the year 1582; MD 70: doc. 171, in the year 1591.

Towards Centralization

The conflicts continued for almost a century and a half between the great Arab tribes of Anezes and Şammars in the region, forcing other local tribes to take sides, and nearly halting the regional trade and transportation, leaving many villages in ruin. During this period, the Ottoman administration tried hard to play major tribes against each other, and at times even had to seek the protection of the Tayys (Guest 1987: 59). Finding themselves outside their traditional areas of transhumance and influence, the tribes in the region further accelerated their plundering activities and resistance to the central state. In this respect, the first half of the eighteenth century increasingly witnessed the spread of brigandage and desperate resistance of tribes such as the Millis to the policies of exile and re-settlement developed against them by the Ottomans.²¹ In the midst of this tribal

²¹ Millis, Şakakis and other tribes together with the Yezidis moved to the Erzurum region, where they caused trouble for the inhabitants of the Tercan, Kiğı and Kurtucan districts. Because of this, they were asked to return to their places of origin, but their failure to obey the orders in 1701 led the governor of Erzurum, Numan Pasha, to force them back and, when necessary, to punish them (Halaçoğlu 1991: 46). In 1707 the Millis were forcefully settled in their original areas in the district of Mardin, where they already possessed a number of villages (Orhonlu 1987: 110). It appears that the environs of Mardin were depopulated and some villages were abandoned during these movements. Another manifestation of this was the fact that the Ottoman administration tried to settle Cihanbeylis, Şihhasanlıs and Dedesülüs of the Gerger district of Malatya province in these areas in the same year despite the fact that they had already been exiled to the Rakka region for their rebellious acts. But, it becomes clear from the Ottoman records dated 1713 that these people also left the area (Halaçoğlu 1991: 135-6). It seems that the Mardin and Nusaybin regions witnessed such flights of these tribal elements as well as of the villagers during the years 1715 and 1716 mainly because of banditry by tribes; the Ottoman government kept trying to resettle these areas by issuing imperial orders (Halaçoğlu 1991: 135). The *aşiret* of Milli continued their activities in and around Diyarbakir even after 1707. It was therefore decided that their sub-tribes (*kabiles*), Bamran, Düdegân, Sefergân and Ömergân were to be sent into exile in Rakka in 1711 (Halaçoğlu 1991: 114). In the same years, other Milli sub-tribes, Bahaeddinli, Cemaeddinli, Hasanlı, Bindanlı together with the sub-tribes of Harbendeli, Badıllu, Mamavi, Bozkoyunlu, Anterli, Koçur Avşarı, Güneş, Ömerli, who were settled in Kars and Çıldır regions, were again seen in the Diyarbakir and Mardin areas (Orhonlu 1987: 95). These *asirets* did not go to Rakka and continued to harm the inhabitants in these areas. Those who were sent to Rakka returned upon the dismissal of the Rakka governor; they returned upon receiving a letter from Haydar Bey and Mustafa Bey, sons of Milli İsmail Bey, the *voivoda* of Mardin, which states that the decision of their resettlement in Rakka was cancelled. They carried on with their usual brigandage in the

world, the Ottoman government tried to hold on with ever-diminishing control as it moved from regional centers to nearby tribes, and from there to administrative units like *hükümet* and *yurtluk-ocaklık* districts.

One of the most significant results of the clashes between nomadic tribes and the Ottoman administration was, as already hinted above, the abandonment of villages and arable lands from the seventeenth century on. The ever-present problem of nomads' attacks on cultivated lands along the routes they followed during their seasonal migration between summer and winter pastures continued throughout the nineteenth century. This was one of the reasons behind the Ottomans' attempts to resettle the most troublesome tribes in designated areas, such as Rakka. The most notable example of this was the problems caused particularly by the confederation of Milli tribes in the large area stretching from Rakka in the south to Çıldır in the North. However, the Ottoman administration succeeded neither in controlling their movements nor in resettling them in areas around Rakka. Similarly, the harm caused by the Arab tribes of Aneze and Şammar in the region continued even until the early twentieth century. Such tribal pressure not only resulted in the desertion of large tracts of land by the peasants, bringing about a serious drop in agricultural production and partial renomadization, but it also caused a considerable loss of tax revenue for the state treasury. The well-known Ottoman policy of settlement and improvement (*iskân ve islâh*) of tribes, which became vital for the Ottoman governments of the Tanzimat period particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century was a natural outcome of such a chronic problem.

region. In 1713, the Governor of Rakka was once more instructed to send these *aşirets* back to Rakka (Halaçoğlu 1991: 52-3). This imperial order had to be resent many times by 1718 (Halaçoğlu 1991: 114). In the same year, the Milli *aşiret* together with Badıllu, Zerci and their dependants Şakaki, Şarkıyanlı, Beyzeki sub-tribes raided the provinces of Hınıs, Tekman, Pasin, Kiğı, and Tercan on the way to their summer pastures. They were ordered to go back and settle in the Diyarbekir region (Halaçoğlu 1991: 136, dn. 85). Similarly, in 1720, the *aşiret* of Şammar of the region was also ordered to settle in the abandoned villages and *mezraas* of the Şeyhler area in the Province of Hama (Orhonlu 1987: 108). It was followed by the reiteration, in 1724, of the order concerning the resettlement of the Milli *aşiret* in Rakka (Halaçoğlu 1991: 52).

As Rogan notes (Rogan 2003: 1), borders, frontiers, margins and peripheries including South Eastern Turkey and Kurdistan, were always "the zones of fusion and transition where hybridity is the norm and orthodoxy the exception" until the Tanzimat era. State law was often subordinate to customary law, which examines the role of *aşiret* in center-periphery (i.e. palace-province) relations. However after the Tanzimat, with modern institutions and centralization adopted by the Ottoman state, frontier power bases relied on big *aşiret* confederations resisting the centralizing efforts of the modern state apparatus.

The reason behind the decisive action of the Ottoman administration to solve this problem only after the 1860s was, again, related to the conditions of the pre-capitalist state. The Ottoman state, which began the most comprehensive process of reforming its structural organization in the early nineteenth century, had achieved by that time a considerable improvement in army, bureaucracy, communication and transportation. This did not only increase the efficiency of the Ottoman administration in the region; it also required increased centralization, and eventual consolidation of central power vis-à-vis the periphery. The response of the regional powers to the Ottoman centralization was not simply a re-affirmation of their "autonomous" positions. Instead, local tribal powers were now pushed to a more dependent position where they could survive only by fulfilling certain functions of the modern central state. The relations between the center and the periphery in the context of eastern and southeastern Turkey during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries evolved around this dynamic. Local powers which attempted to move beyond this matrix, on the other hand, were eliminated in one way or another.

One of the underlying consequences of this process was the gradual transformation tribal formations relying largely on nomadism and pastoral economy, i.e. animal husbandry, into peasantry, as a new way of resisting changing conditions. This, however, seriously diminished the tribal structures particularly in areas subjected to a large-scale process of internal migration and, to a lesser degree, the proletarianization that followed. Nevertheless, although these factors were instrumental in the final dissolution of the tribal *asabiyye*, those who were able to establish a functional tie with the state or who managed to merge

their economic power based on landownership with the traditional-legal state authority succeeded to a certain degree in delaying such an end. Another interesting consequence of the same process was the successful use by the tribal leadership of channels of political participation offered by the modern state to maintain their power and legitimacy in the region.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- BOA Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Istanbul)
EI Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition
MD Mühimme Defteri (BOA, Istanbul)
MŞS Mardin Şeriye Sicilleri (National Library, Ankara)
TD Tahrir Defteri (Kuyud-u Kadime, Ankara)
TSMA Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi (Istanbul)

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