CHAPTER 25

Africa, Southwest Asia, and the New Imperialism
1800–1914

The rise of industrial economies in Europe drove European nations to expand their empires in Africa and Asia. In search of markets, resources, and occasionally adventure, Europeans gained control of an increasingly large part of the globe by way of commerce and colonization. At the same time, states like the Ottoman Empire mixed western European notions of civilization with their own cultures to develop alternative visions of a "modern society." The documents in this chapter present different perspectives on the global progress of modernization and westernization: from the Ottoman Empire's government as it sought to draw on modern Western ideas to reform and strengthen its state, from a leading voice of British imperialism, from an African who fought and then submitted to British colonial rule, and from Africans who endured terrible abuses in the Belgian Congo. All of the documents offer insight on how non-Western peoples adapted and endured as nationalism, progress, and empire changed their worlds.

DOCUMENT 25-1

SULTAN ABDUL MEJID
Imperial Rescript
1856

Building on the work of previous rulers to enact military and administrative reforms, many of which were inspired by modern Western institutions, Sultan Abdul Mejid or Abdülmècid (r. 1839–1861) instituted a period of "reorganization," or Tanzimat, in the aging Ottoman Empire. Various non-Turkish groups had been pulling away from Ottoman rule since the early 1800s, and large-scale violence against non-Muslim subjects was not uncommon. In this imperial rescript, or official proclamation, the sultan affirms his policy of "Ottomanism," or equal treatment of all citizens without regard to race, language, or religion. Ottomanism may be seen as a doomed and even hypocritical attempt to reassert central authority; however, the rescript represented real reform in Ottoman society.

Let it be done as herein set forth. . . . It being now my desire to renew and enlarge still more the new institutions ordained with the view of establishing a state of things conformable with the dignity of my Empire and . . . by the kind and friendly assistance of the Great Powers, my noble Allies. . . . The guarantees promised on our part by the Hatt-i Humâyûn of Gûlânîhâ, and in conformity with the Tanzimat, . . . are today confirmed and consolidated, and efficacious measures shall be taken in order that they may have their full and entire effect.

All the privileges and spiritual immunities granted by my ancestors from time immemorial, and at subsequent dates, to all Christian communities or other non-Muslim persuasions established in my empire, under my protection, shall be confirmed and maintained.

Every Christian or other non-Muslim community shall be bound within a fixed period, and with the concurrence of a commission composed of members of its own body, to proceed with my high approbation and under the inspection of my Sublime Porte, to examine into its actual immunities and privileges, and to discuss and submit to my Sublime Porte the reforms required by the progress of civilization and of the age. The powers conceded to the Christian Patriarchs and Bishops by the Sultan Mehmed II and his successors, shall be made to harmonize with the new position which my generous and beneficent intentions ensure to

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1 the Great Powers, my noble allies: During the Crimean War (1853–1856), the Ottoman Empire fought with Great Britain and France against Russia.
2 The guarantees . . . Gûlânîhâ: The Noble Rescript of 1859, also written by Sultan Abdul Mejid, guaranteed personal security, a fair tax system, controlled military conscriptions, and full rights to citizens regardless of faith.
3 Sublime Porte: The term refers to the Sultan and his sovereignty.
4 Christian Patriarchs and Bishops: Ruling officials of the Greek and Armenian churches in the Ottoman Empire.
5 Sultan Mehmed II: Ottoman ruler from 1451 to 1481.
of the deputies of the Muslim, Christian, and other communities, and freedom of voting in the Councils. . . .

As the laws regulating the purchase, sale, and disposal of real property are common to all the subjects of my Empire, it shall be lawful for foreigners to possess landed property in my dominions. . . .

The taxes are to be levied under the same denomination from all the subjects of my Empire, without distinction of class or of religion. The most prompt and energetic means for remedying the abuses in collecting the taxes, and especially the tithes, shall be considered. The system of direct collection shall gradually, and as soon as possible, be substituted for the plan of farming, in all the branches of the revenues of the state.

A special law having been already passed, which declares that the budget of the revenue and the expenditure of the state shall be drawn up and made known every year, the said law shall be most scrupulously observed. . . .

The heads of each community and a delegate, designated by my Sublime Porte, shall be summoned to take part in the deliberations of the Supreme Council of Justice on all occasions which might interest the generality of the subjects of my Empire. . . .

Steps shall be taken for the formation of banks and other similar institutions, so as to effect a reform in the monetary and financial system, as well as to create funds to be employed in augmenting the sources of the material wealth of my Empire.

Everything that can impede commerce or agriculture shall be abolished. To accomplish these objects means shall be sought to profit by science, the art, and the funds of Europe, and thus gradually to execute them.

READING AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What specific measures does the sultan take to ensure religious and ethnic equality? What do these measures imply about life in the Ottoman Empire before the rescript was issued?

2. The sultan is careful to extend military service to people of all religious and ethnic backgrounds. How does this right compare to rights regarding public employment, education, taxation, and real estate?

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*Farming: Tax farming, in which the government contracted with private financiers who collected taxes for a profit.*
3. The rescript mentions communities of Christian and non-Muslim people and villages or small areas where all people share a common religion. What does this imply about the integration of different religious groups in Ottoman society?

4. In explaining the purpose of his rescript, the sultan refers to the "dignity" of his empire and mentions the Ottoman Empire's relationship with European "Great Powers." How do you think the ideas of religious equality, social reform, and international relations and the dignity of the empire work together?

**DOCUMENT 25-2**

An Ottoman Government Decree on the "Modern" Citizen

1870

In June 1870, this official document was presented to Firhan Pasha, an Istanbul-educated sheikh of the Shammar tribe in what is now Iraq. The document drew on Western notions of "civilization" in order to push the local Bedouin population, a formerly nomadic people, into settled agricultural life. It demonstrates that the Ottoman Empire was challenged by divisions within its Muslim populations as well as those between Muslim and non-Muslim groups. With the rise of ethnic nationalisms in the late 1860s, the rift between Arab and Turkish populations in the Ottoman Empire would widen and further weaken the empire.

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 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 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 Sharia (body of Islamic religious law). After proving that this is contrary to what has been commanded and is prohibited in all religions and in the Mohammedan Sharia, 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 these 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 Sham clan. Furthermore, we recommend that these lands be designated as a Mutassarifiya [provincial government within the Ottoman Empire] and be named as Sandjak [province] of Sham, and that the [people] of the clan of Sham 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 Mutassarifiya, like the Mutassarifiya of al-Muntalak, and this Mutassarifiya should be placed under your authority, O, Pasha!... Because these people are used to being Bedouins, and because it will be difficult to

READING AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the motivation for this decree? What specific situation does the Ottoman government feel must be remedied?

2. The decree distinguishes between Bedouins and non-Bedouins. What are the assumptions behind these different definitions? Do you agree with them?

3. How does the document use religion to make its argument? How does it use the idea of civilization? How do the two ideas work together, or separately, to define both the Bedouin and those who have attained the "virtues of humanity"?