Modern Middle East

Sources in the History of the

North Carolina State University

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PART I

How to Read a Primary Source

INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER 1

Central Political Reforms and Local Responses

The military defeats suffered by the Ottoman Empire in the eighteenth century and the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon in 1798 ushered in a new era in the Middle East and North Africa. It appeared to local observers that European forces suddenly were more powerful and certainly were more expansionist. By no means did this perception lead local inhabitants to assume the overall superiority of European culture, politics, or civilization. The defeats, however, did result in a certain amount of soul-searching by government officials and intellectuals. Many responses were proposed and sometimes adopted, though not always successfully. One of the lessons drawn out of the defeat by some Ottoman officials was the need to modernize the empire and its bureaucracy.

The Tanzimat was a period of reform that began in the 1830s and lasted through the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after World War I (tanzimat is a Turkish word meaning "reorganization" or "restructuring"). In response to the decreasing military, political, and economic power of the empire, reformers (first the Young Ottomans, and later the Young Turks) embarked on a series of programs to modernize the imperial government and the way officials related to subject people across the various lands under imperial rule.

The notion of "modernity" was not easily or completely definable, but to government officials—especially those trained in Europe or European schools—modernity meant an increase in central government control and a shift from treating the population as "subjects" to treating them as "citizens."

Without assuming radical and rapid changes, we can still observe that such changes were attempted by studying the first three documents in this chapter. The first document, the Hatt-I-Serif decree, proposed a reform project to secularize the Ottoman courts and bring a greater degree of central control over the administration of the empire. The second was an attempt to transform the sociopolitical organization of the Ottoman Empire from the millet (sectarian communities) system to one of Ottoman citizens subject to the secular laws of the empire. The third document is an imperial decree presented to an Ottoman official in the province of Mosul (in modern-day northern Iraq) with regard to the nomadic tribes that predominated in the region. The opinion of the Bedouins expressed here provides valuable clues as to how some Ottoman officials understood the goals of the Tanzimat.

The fourth document, from the writings of the satirist Mirza Malkum Khan, provides glimpses of internal criticism of the Iranian government's and Islamic intellectuals' responses to European incursions. Malkum satirizes both groups and lampoons their efforts as half-hearted attempts to hold on to bygone days and waning powers. Although the great majority of the Iranian population probably disagreed—or at best partially agreed—with him, his satire is still important because it provides a critical perspective on the encounter between the Middle East and Europe.

Responding to Tanzimat reforms as well as to the growth of European cultural influence in the Middle East and North Africa, several Muslim intellectuals and religious reformers sought to influence the outcomes of these changes in ways that fit their own worldview. Two key Islamic voices responding to European imperialism are those of Jamal al-Din Al-Alghani (document 5) and his disciple Muhammad 'Abduh. Both men confronted an environment in which Islam and local cultures faced external pressure and criticism—direct and indirect. While some Muslim thinkers preferred to reject all attempts at reconciliation with European ways of life, these two sought some accommodation between the technological superiority of the West and their notion of Islamic society, traditions, and mores. Regardless of the degree of their success or failure, both thinkers were influential in shaping this cross-civilization dialogue and remain icons in the Muslim world.

The last document in this chapter indicates how after some seventy years of reform one minority—the Jewish community in Baghdad—evaluated the modernization of the Ottoman Empire.

1. The Hatt-I-Serif Decree Initiates the Tanzimat, or Reform, Period in the Ottoman Empire, November 3, 1839

In the Tanzimat period of Ottoman history, attempts were made to modernize the empire and enable it to withstand European imperialist pressures. The aim of the Hatt-I-Serif decree—clothed as it was in the religious legitimacy of the Shari'a—was to allow the Ottomans to establish a stronger central government by means of reforms in the tax collection and military service systems. The purpose of these reforms was to weaken provincial governors' holds on their territories and simultaneously provide the central Ottoman government with more resources with which to face the European military and political might. The reforms were never fully implemented,
but more important than any immediate changes was the fact that this decree initiated the period of Tanzimat, which lasted through the end of World War I, and whose impact went beyond military and political matters to touch social and cultural aspects of life in the Ottoman Empire.

All the world knows that since the first days of the Ottoman State, the lofty principles of the Koran and the rules of the Sheriat were always perfectly observed. Our mighty Sultanate reached the highest degree of strength and power, and all its subjects [the highest degree] of ease and prosperity. But in the last one hundred and fifty years, because of a succession of difficulties and diverse causes, the sacred Sheriat was not obeyed nor were the beneficial regulations followed; consequently, the former strength and prosperity have changed into weakness and poverty. It is evident that countries not governed by the laws of the Sheriat cannot survive.

From the very first day of our accession to the throne, our thoughts have been devoted exclusively to the development of the empire and the promotion of the prosperity of the people. Therefore, if the geographical position of the Ottoman provinces, the fertility of the soil, and the aptitude and intelligence of the inhabitants are considered, it is manifest that, by striving to find appropriate means, the desired results will, with the aid of God, be realized within five or ten years. Thus, full of confidence in the help of the Most High and certain of the support of our Prophet, we deem it necessary and important from now on to introduce new legislation to achieve effective administration of the Ottoman Government and Provinces. Thus the principles of the requisite legislation are three:

1. The guarantees promising to our subjects perfect security for life, honor, and property.
2. A regular system of assessing taxes.
3. An equally regular system for the conscription of requisite troops and the duration of their service.

Indeed there is nothing more precious in this world than life and honor. What man, however much his character may be against violence, can prevent himself from having recourse to it, and thereby injure the government and the country, if his life and honor are endangered? If, on the contrary, he enjoys perfect security, it is clear that he will not depart from the ways of loyalty and all his actions will contribute to the welfare of the government and the people.

If there is an absence of security for property, everyone remains indifferent to his state and his community; no one interests himself in the prosperity of the country, absorbed as he is in his own troubles and worries. If, on the contrary,

the individual feels complete security about his possessions, then he will become preoccupied with his own affairs, which he will seek to expand, and his devotion and love for his state and his community will steadily grow and will undoubtedly spur him into becoming a useful member of society.

Tax assessment is also one of the most important matters to regulate. A state, for the defense of its territory, manifestly needs to maintain an army and provide other services, the costs of which can be defrayed only by taxes levied on its subjects. Although, thank God, our Empire has already been relieved of the affliction of monopolies, the harmful practice of tax-farming [attitare], which never yielded any fruitful results, still prevails. This amounts to handing over the financial and political affairs of a country to the whims of an ordinary man and perhaps to the grasp of force and oppression, for if the tax-farmer is not of good character he will be interested only in his own profit and will behave oppressively. It is therefore necessary that from now on every subject of the Empire should be taxed according to his fortune and his means, and that he should be saved from [any] further exaction. It is also necessary that special laws should fix and limit the expenses of our land and sea forces.

Military matters, as already pointed out, are among the most important affairs of state, and it is the inescapable duty of all the people to provide soldiers for the defense of the fatherland [vatan]. It is therefore necessary to frame regulations on the contingents that each locality should furnish according to the requirements of the time, and to reduce the term of military service to four or five years. Such legislation will put an end to the old practice, still in force, of recruiting soldiers without consideration of the size of the population in any locality, more conscripts being taken from some places and fewer from others. This practice has been throwing agriculture and trade into a harmful disarray. Moreover, those who are recruited to lifetime military service suffer despair and contribute to the depopulation of the country.

In brief, unless such regulations are promulgated, power, prosperity, security, and peace may not be expected, and the basic principles [of the projected reforms] must be those enumerated above.

Thus, from now on, every defendant shall be entitled to a public hearing, according to the rules of the Sheriat, after inquiry and examination, and without the pronouncement of a regular sentence no one may secretly or publicly put another to death by poison or by any other means. No one shall be allowed to attack the honor of any other person whatsoever. Every one shall possess his property of every kind and may dispose of it freely, without let or hindrance from any person whatsoever; and the innocent heirs of a criminal shall not be deprived of their hereditary rights as a result of the confiscation of the property of such a criminal. The Muslim and non-Muslim subjects of our lofty Sultanate shall, without exception, enjoy our imperial concessions. Therefore we grant perfect security to all the populations of our Empire in their lives, their honor, and their properties, according to the sacred law.

As for the other points, decisions must be taken by majority vote. To this end, the members of the Council of Judicial Ordinances [Medlis-i Ahkam-i Adliyye], enlarged by new members as may be found necessary, to whom will

Translated by Halil Inalcik, from the Osmanli text in Tarih-i Vekayi as reproduced in Tanzimat (Istanbul, 1940) after p. 48; checked against the text in Latin Turkish characters in A. Serif Gökcebayli and S. Kılıç eds., Türk Anlumluca Metreleri (Ankara, 1957), pp. 3-5, a text that appeared in Döntü, 1st ser. 1: 4-7. This document may also be found in J. C. Harewicz, The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 269-271.
be joined on certain days that we shall determine our Ministers and the high officials of the Empire, will assemble for the purpose of framing laws to regulate the security of life and property and the assessment of taxes. Every one participating in the Council will express his ideas and give his advice freely.

2. Sultan Abdul Majid's Islahat Ferhani Decree Reaffirms the Privileges and Immunities of Non-Muslim Communities in the Ottoman Empire, February 18, 1856

On February 18, 1856, Sultan Abdul Majid issued a decree that aimed to make equal all of the citizens of the Ottoman Empire regardless of their religion. Although in part this reform was an attempt to please the British, it was also a serious attempt to transform the population of the empire from "subjects" to "citizens." By so doing, the reforming elite of the empire hoped to deter the rise of nationalist movements based on religion, such as the one that had separated Greece from the empire in 1829. Moreover, the decree was intended to limit the ability of the European powers (most notably France and Russia) to claim the right to protect their coreligionists in the empire from religious discrimination. Although this decree did not stop such interventions—in 1861, for example, French troops landed in Lebanon to protect the Catholics of the area—it marks a historical moment of transformation in the nature of the empire.

Let it be done as herein set forth.

To you, my Grand Vizier Mehmed Emin Aali Pasha, decorated with my imperial order of the medjidiye of the first class, and with the order of personal merit, may God grant to you greatness and increase your power.

It has always been my most earnest desire to insure the happiness of all classes of the subjects whom Divine Providence has placed under my imperial scepter, and since my accession to the throne I have not ceased to direct all my efforts to the attainment of that end.

Thanks to the Almighty, these unceasing efforts have already been productive of numerous useful results. From day to day the happiness of the nation and the welfare of my dominions go on augmenting.

It being now my desire to renew and enlarge still more the new institutions ordained with a view of establishing a state of things conformable with the dignity of my empire and the position which it occupies among civilised nations, and the rights of my empire having, by the fidelity and praiseworthy efforts of all my subjects, and by the kind and friendly assistance of the great powers, my noble allies, received from abroad a confirmation which will be the commencement of a new era, it is my desire to augment its well being and prosperity, to effect the happiness of all my subjects, who in my sight are all equal, and equally dear to me, and who are united to each other by the cordial ties of patriotism, and to insure the means of daily increasing the prosperity of my empire.

I have therefore resolved upon, and I order the execution of the following measures:

The guarantees promised on our part by the Hatti-Humayoun of Gulhane, and in conformity with the Tanzimat, to all the subjects of my empire, without distinction of classes or of religion, for the security of their persons and property, and the preservation of their honor, are to-day confirmed and consolidated, and efficacious measures shall be taken in order that they may have their full entire effect.

All the privileges and spiritual immunities granted by my ancestors ab antiquo, 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 ad hoc 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 Mahomet II and to his successors shall be made to harmonize with the new position which my generous and beneficent intentions insure to these communities.

The principle of nominating the patriarchs for life, after the revision of the rule of election now in force, shall be exactly carried out, conformably to the tenor of their firmans [Ottoman imperial decrees] of investiture.

The patriarchs, metropolitans, archbishops, bishops, and [rabbis] shall take an oath, on their entrance into office, according to a form agreed upon in common by my Sublime Porte and the spiritual heads of the different religious communities. The ecclesiastical dues, of whatever sort or nature they be, shall be abolished and replaced by fixed revenues of the patriarchs and heads of communities, and by the allocations of allowances and salaries equally proportioned to the importance, the rank, and the dignity of the different members of the clergy.

The property, real or personal, of the different Christian ecclesiastics shall remain intact: the temporal administration of the Christian or other non-Muslim communities shall, however, be placed under the safeguard of an assembly to be chosen from among the members, both ecclesiastics and laymen, of the said communities.

In the towns, small boroughs, and villages where the whole population is of the same religion, no obstacle shall be offered to the repair, according to their original plan, of buildings set apart for religious worship, for schools, for hospitals, and for cemeteries.
CHAPTER 1  Current Political Reform and Local Reforms

The Middle East and North Africa are the Middle East of each other. And the Middle East is a region with a long and complex history, shaped by a variety of political, economic, and social factors. The Middle East and North Africa are characterized by a mix of authoritarian regimes and democratic movements, with varying levels of political participation and freedom.

The political landscape of the Middle East and North Africa is characterized by a wide range of political systems, from authoritarian regimes to more democratic systems. In many countries, the ruling parties have a strong influence over the government, and there is limited political opposition. In other countries, there is greater political participation and competition, with multiple political parties and a more open political system.

The Middle East and North Africa are also characterized by a variety of social and economic challenges. Many countries in the region are facing high levels of poverty and unemployment, and there are significant disparities between urban and rural areas. The region is also experiencing rapid urbanization, with many young people moving to cities in search of better opportunities.

The political and social challenges facing the Middle East and North Africa are complex and multifaceted, and require a range of solutions. This chapter explores some of the key political and social issues facing the region, and examines the role of political reform and local initiatives in addressing these challenges.
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chapter 1: central police reform and local progress
Religious Effects, 1850s

4. Why did Mahatma Gandhi attribute India's success to both religion and government?

The doctrine of nonviolence, which is based on the principles of religion, is an important aspect of Gandhi's philosophy. He believed that nonviolence is not just a principle, but a way of life. It is a way to live in harmony with others and to achieve peace. Gandhi's nonviolent resistance movement was based on the belief that nonviolence is the highest form of love and can overcome all forms of violence. In his view, nonviolence is a powerful tool for social change and can be used to achieve political and social goals.

Gandhi also believed that the Indian government should be based on the principles of democracy and social justice. He believed that the government should be representative of the people and that it should work for the benefit of all citizens. Gandhi was a strong advocate for education and believed that education is the key to social and economic development. He believed that education should be free and available to all, regardless of their social or economic background.

Gandhi's teachings have had a significant impact on India and the world. His philosophy of nonviolence and social justice has inspired many people around the world. His teachings have also been influential in the development of other movements, such as the civil rights movement in the United States and the struggles for freedom in other parts of the world.

Gandhi's work has also had a significant impact on Indian politics. He believed that politics should be based on the principles of democracy and social justice. He believed that the government should be representative of the people and that it should work for the benefit of all citizens. Gandhi's ideas have influenced many Indian political leaders and have been incorporated into the Indian Constitution.

In conclusion, Gandhi's teachings have had a significant impact on India and the world. His philosophy of nonviolence and social justice has inspired many people around the world. His teachings have also been influential in the development of other movements, such as the civil rights movement in the United States and the struggles for freedom in other parts of the world. His ideas have also influenced many Indian political leaders and have been incorporated into the Indian Constitution.