

International Conference
**The Arab East and the Bedouin Component: Features and
Tensions from Late Antiquity to the Present**

Conference Abstracts

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Ahmed Abd-Elsalam

Bedouin law and the age of change: The example of the Huwaytat tribes

In 2006, during my fieldwork in Egypt and Sudan, I used to ask my informants – most of them tribal judges or tribal chiefs – what has changed in Bedouin law in the last 50 years? Most of them did not like my question. They were of the opinion that all Arab Bedouin belong to the same tradition and culture, the authority of their judges and practices depending on a kind of continuance of the ‘old tradition’ (*awa'id* or *sawalif*). One of the tribal chiefs of Awlad `Ali, namely Hamad al-Girba, one of the *umd*as of Awlad Kharuf, said once: ‘It is not the tribal law that has changed or can be changed, but the society. There are many rules that we judges and old people know, but we don’t like today to speak about them or to make them known.’ I heard the same in Sudan and you can hear it everywhere. These rules concern matters such as the abduction of women and the question of honor. They have been forgotten, because they are no longer followed by the younger generations. However, they still exist, and may be implemented. The Bedouin maintain that their legal practices are compatible with the Shari`a, but we knew that is not always the case. Many Bedouin practices were Islamized and there are other legal practices that were Bedouinized. So we can say there was always a dynamic of change in the Bedouin legal system. We may certainly claim that there is one system of Bedouin legal thinking, but there is diversity in the legal practices they follow and in the structure of the legal institutions of the various tribes, depending on the way the social and economic context has changed.

The history of the Huwaytat tribe offers a good example of this legal dynamic in the context of social and economic change. The Huwaytat live in at least three main groups – one in southern Transjordan, one in northern Hijaz and one in Sinai and the Egyptian Eastern Desert. The three groups belong to the same tribe and the same legal culture but differ from each other in terms of their economic life and juridical structure, and there are grounds for seeing a relation between the two. In my paper I deal with Bedouin law as a legal system and try to clarify some specific features of Bedouin legal culture in the Arab East.

خالد أبو الليل

صورة البدوي بين التاريخ والأدب الشعبي

بقدر ما تتفق بعض المصادر التاريخية المدونة مع النصوص الأدبية الشعبية (المدونة والشفاهية) في إطلاقهما مفردة "العرب" على "البدو"، وما يسبغانه عليه من صفات مشتركة، بقدر ما نجد بينهما من اختلافات مهمة في الصورة التي يرسمها كل منهما للبدوي. ولعل خير شاهد على ذلك التشابه والاختلاف معا ما نلمسه بسهولة عند مقارنة صورة البدوي/العربي في مقدمة ابن خلدون مع نظيرتها في السيرة الهلالية بشقيها المدون والشفاهي. وهو الأمر الذي يسترعي انتباهنا، ويستحق منا التوقف عنده، ودراسته.

تنطلق هذه الورقة من محاولة تحقيق مستويين للدراسة، هما:

1 - التعرف على الصورة التي قدمتها بعض المصادر التاريخية المدونة للبدوي، كما هو في مقدمة ابن خلدون، وكذلك التعرف على الصورة التي رسمتها له بعض النصوص الأدبية الشعبية، مثل السيرة الهلالية، ثم القيام بالمقارنة بينهما، مع محاولة دراسة أوجه التشابه والاختلاف بينهما.

2 - مقارنة صورة البدوي بين النصوص الأدبية الشعبية المدونة ونظيرتها الشفاهية. وسوف نعتمد لتحقيق تلك المقارنة - إلى جانب مخطوطات السيرة الهلالية المدونة - على عدد من النصوص الأدبية الشفاهية، التي تمثل عددا من الأنواع الأدبية الشعبية، مثل: الحكاية الشعبية والشعر الشعبي والنكت الشعبية. فهذه النصوص الشفاهية تقدم لنا مجموعة من الصور المختلفة للبدوي، ونسقا من مجموعة القيم والعادات والتقاليد التي يحملها البدوي ويتعايش معها. كما تعكس لنا - هذه النصوص - مجموعة من أشكال الصراعات الطبقية التي يعيشها مع عدد من الفئات الاجتماعية الأخرى، على غرار ما نلمسه من صراع البدوي/العربي مع الفلاح، والبدوي مع الحضري/ابن المدينة.

وسوف تعتمد هذه الدراسة على الدراسة الميدانية؛ لجمع النصوص الشفاهية (الحكايات والنكت والشعر) التي ستعتمدها الدراسة مادة لها. هذا إلى جانب الاعتماد - أيضا - على المنهج المقارن.

Nora Barakat

Marginal actors? The role of Bedouin in Ottoman administration of animals as property

Bedouin in the Arab provinces, and nomadic populations in the Ottoman lands in general, have largely been portrayed as marginal actors living on the ‘frontiers’ of Ottoman administration. This portrayal is related to scholars’ limited understanding of Bedouin contributions to local economies and their connections to both land and animals as property. This paper will begin to detail such connections by exploring the role of nomads in the province of Syria in two related phenomena: widespread cases of animal theft brought to various Shari’a courts in the province on the one hand, and a central imperial attempt to reform the administration of animals as property in order to reduce animal theft on the other. The paper will first utilize a case study of the district of Salt in southern Syria, where the local Shari’a court scribes recorded tens of cases of animal theft in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I will detail the various roles of people identified as Bedouin or nomadic in these cases and illuminate the ways in which property rights over animals were discussed in the setting of a rural district Shari’a court. I will then connect these cases to an empire-wide legislative attempt emanating from Istanbul in the early twentieth century. This legislation aimed to issue title deeds for livestock, regulate trade in livestock and generally tighten imperial administration of the use of livestock in order to reduce what was perceived as the increasing incidence of animal theft all over the empire. Reading these sets of archival documents side by side, I will show the ways in which imperial legislation followed the contours of and simultaneously attempted to shape the rural provincial economy. By focusing on the role of Bedouin in this complex process of implementing reforms in property administration, I will highlight their contributions to late Ottoman governance as well as social and economic life.

Johann Büssow

The `Anaza: Continuity and change in a tribal confederation in the modern Arab East

The aim of this paper is to provide an approach for a better understanding of the Bedouin tribal confederation, which is a prominent but somewhat ill-defined notion in the history of the modern Arab East. The underlying assumption is that confederations were important institutions that won the Bedouin political prominence and facilitated their accommodation to a rapidly changing environment. My contention is that the Bedouin tribal confederation in the Arab East is of necessity an abstract notion. It is best understood as an ‘imagined order’ that provides orientation within the complex and changeable social landscape of the arid regions. A Bedouin tribal confederation may include several layers of political hierarchy, but its degree of centralization is generally low. It is at once a community of tradition and a basis for mobilizing people into collective action. In addition, the repetitive structures of the confederation (e.g. subsections defined by genealogies, hierarchies of representatives) serve as a conceptual grid that makes a diverse and fluid social reality legible and accessible. By extension, it helps to establish social networks and interfaces for interaction for both insiders and outsiders (e.g. *madafas*, directories, online discussion boards).

In this paper, several ways in which the notion of the confederation was instrumentalized during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are illustrated by episodes from the history of the `Anaza. During this period, the name ‘`Anaza’ referred to two distinct but interrelated groups: inhabitants of the northern Arabian Peninsula and nomadic camel herders in the Syrian Steppe. Their paramount shaykhs wielded considerable political and military power under Ottoman and, later, colonial rule but lost much of it in the process of decolonization. However, the `Anaza confederation is still evoked as a political and cultural reference point in many parts of the contemporary Arab East. The paper presents aspects of the confederation from the perspective of four different types of social actors: shaykhly families, state governments, Bedouin commoners, and intellectuals. These actors all used the notion of the confederation for the promotion of particular interests and thereby stabilized it as an imagined order that spanned large parts of the region.

Greg Fisher

Between tribe and state: Arab tribal chiefs in sixth-century Syria and Iraq

Modern studies of tribal peoples by anthropologists such as Fredrik Barth, Philip Salzman, Lois Beck, and William and Fidelity Lancaster, have emphasized the importance of the tribal chief's position as a mediator and broker of disputes between the different segments of individual tribes. When tribes come into contact with powerful states, this essential mediatory position is sometimes translated to a wider arena, as tribal leaders become middlemen or brokers between the resources of the state and those of the tribe. Success in such state-tribe mediation is crucial for the continuing semi-autonomy of the tribe, and ultimately for the tribal chief's prestige and position. This paper applies these broad conclusions to an analysis of the position of the Jafnid and Nasrid Arabs allied to the Roman and Sasanian empires in the sixth-century, examining, in particular, the function of tribal mediators in ecclesiastical and court disputes in Constantinople and Ctesiphon. The paper contends that the success of the leaders of the Jafnid and Nasrid dynasties in extending their traditional functions as tribal middlemen to the arena of state politics was a major factor in the longevity of their imperial alliances. This conclusion is reinforced by the interpretation of the collapse of both dynasties as a result of their eventual failure as middlemen, implying as well that, contrary to what the ancient primary sources suggest, the Roman and Sasanian empires were well-acquainted with the politics of their tribal allies. Indeed, in common with some modern scenarios analyzed by Barth et al, the Roman and Sasanian empires actively exploited tribal chiefs, seeing them as the most efficient way to access the resource of the tribe. The paper thus draws parallels between the relationship between tribe and state in the ancient and modern Middle East, and emphasizes the usefulness of cross-disciplinary comparative analytical approaches.

Robert S.G. Fletcher

The `Amarat (`Anaza) and their shaykh: Bedouin politics in a partitioned Middle East

This paper is concerned with the wider question of how nomadic groups across the Syrian Desert have sought to position themselves in the face of imperial expansion and the growth of nation-states. It focuses on the political fortunes of the `Amarat (`Anaza) and their shaykh, Fahd bin Hadhdhal, in the years between the two world wars.

From Alois Musil and Carl Raswan to William Lancaster and beyond, the Anaza confederation have long attracted the attention of anthropologists and historians alike. But our knowledge of their past is still patchy and incomplete, with the history of the Ruwala better documented than that of the `Amarat, for example, and Fahd bin Hadhdhal a less familiar figure than Nuri Sha`lan.

This paper draws on the wealth of correspondence and reports that was generated by tensions along the Iraq-Nejd frontier in the 1920s and 30s. Together, they provide a rare opportunity to assess the leadership of Ibn Hadhdhal, as well as to recover something of the intentions and actions of ordinary `Amarat tribesmen. The paper argues that the gradual and cautious nature of British intervention in the steppe created new opportunities for Ibn Hadhdhal in the 1920s, but it also explores the causes and consequences of growing state intervention in the years that followed. It will suggest that the `Amarat were not simply adapting to a changed political environment, but that their actions worked to shape its dynamics in important and lasting ways. British and later Iraqi authorities may have come to assume a greater administrative responsibility for the desert over the course of the twentieth-century, but their actions owed much to previous patterns of activity and obligation. In that sense, this paper suggests that familiar narratives of the end of 'the age of the shaykhs' can be seen in a different light.

Kurt Franz

Four policies on the Bedouin, tenth to thirteenth centuries

The exercise of state power has been a matter of fact through all periods of Middle Eastern history. Nevertheless, ruling *effectively*, in pre-modern conditions, was always a difficult task. It was all the more tricky to gain and maintain the upper hand over groups as hard to control as nomads. When it came to the Bedouin, most rulers muddled through and rarely managed substantially to reduce their political and moral autonomy.

However, this paper is concerned with some of the few rulers who pursued a definite Bedouin policy. I shall present four cases, each of which demonstrates a particular strategy:

- Abu Sa`id al-Jannabi (chief *da`i* of the Ismailis of eastern Arabia, the so-called Qarmatians, early 10th c.) and the pastoral regime he established
- Sayf al-Dawla (Hamdanid prince of Aleppo, mid-10th c.), whose diverse policies culminated in relocation
- Berk Yaruq (Seljuq sultan in Baghdad, late 11th c.), who opted for military repression
- Baybars I (Mamluk sultan in Cairo, mid-13th c.) and his policy of co-optation

What did these policies consist in, and how did the Bedouin respond to them? How far were they effectual in their respective contexts and what followed from them in the long run for Bedouin-sedentary relations? Did they add up to a set of government measures that remained available or were they largely discontinued? In this enquiry, particular attention is given to the nature of the Bedouin groups concerned, and specifically to whether government interference could go as far as dividing and re-uniting them, or even creating tribes.

Waleed Gharaibeh

Paternal origins of the Arab pastoral nomads within the landscape and history of the Arab East

Paternal genetic relationships among the populations of Syro-Mesopotamia and Arabia were examined with the aim of identifying the demographic processes that accompanied the development of semi-nomadic ovicaprid pastoralism and fully nomadic camel pastoralism in that region.

Three-hundred-and-forty-two paternally unrelated male subjects from Syro-Mesopotamia, Arabia and neighboring regions were genotyped for 37 binary polymorphisms and 12 short tandem repeats microsatellite loci (STRs) carried on the non-recombining region of the Y-chromosome (NRY). This sample was analyzed in conjunction with NRY published data sets for over 80 related and neighboring groups.

The analysis shows that the pattern and estimates of STR variance for the settled, semi-nomadic and fully nomadic groups in the southern Levant are consistent with a model for the appearance of Levantine ovicaprid semi-nomadic pastoralism as an offshoot of settled agricultural animal husbandry sometime between the late 7th and the late 4th millennia BCE, followed by the appearance of fully nomadic camel nomadism as an offshoot of southern Levantine ovicaprid semi-nomadism around the end of the 2nd millennium BCE.

The results of this analysis clearly disprove the strong form of the ‘classical’ or ‘Khaldunian’ model for the relationship between the ‘Bedouin’ and the settled populations in which medieval Islamic dynamics are extrapolated back in time to prehistory.

The results of preliminary analysis of the relationship between oral history and NRY genealogies point to the importance of small-scale geography and are in disagreement with both the local folk histories and the assumptions of contemporary anthropologists.

Stefan Heidemann

**The rebellion of al-Asfar at-Taghlibi 395/1004-5 to 406/1016 in northern Mesopotamia:
Social base - history - religious and political goals**

In the Umayyad and Abbasid period, Northern Mesopotamia was a hotbed of religiously motivated uprisings, such as that of the Kharijites. The name Asfar seems to connect al-Asfar al-Taghlibi with a number of similarly named chiliastic leaders, who adopted the same name. Most prominent was the `Alid rebellion of a certain Abu Saraya al-Asfar in the time of al-Ma'mun.

It is surprising that al-Asfar's first followers in this rebellion, unlike other similar movements, were not from among the nomads, but were Muslims from the villages. He became a regional threat and was almost defeated by Byzantine forces before assembling new forces, drawing them this time from the Banu Kilab and Numayr Bedouin.

The paper attempts to contextualize the name al-Asfar, to deduce its possible religious and political implications, and to explore the nomad-sedentary interaction in the political vortex between the Abbasid/Buyid, Fatimid and Byzantine empires.

Joseph J. Hobbs

The unwritten landscape: Bedouin place-making in Egypt's deserts

Regardless of scale, many published maps of Egypt's deserts are short on place names. Bedouin 'mental maps' in contrast fill the wilderness areas of the Eastern Desert and Sinai with meaningful names. Bedouin transformation of space into place reveals a great deal about human and natural histories, interactions of these pastoral and foraging peoples with their environments, individual and kinship biographies, resource definitions and uses, and more. Like many categories of Bedouin knowledge, these toponymies are often unwritten, ephemeral, and evolving. Place names can be essential to the livelihoods and even lives of Bedouin peoples on the move, but are not so important to those who have settled. Just as local people can create and maintain places, they can also forget and lose them.

Clive Holes

Nabati poetry: The communal voice of the Bedouin

Bedouin have been composing oral poetry for at least fourteen centuries, and poetry at the traditional end of the spectrum was still being composed until forty or fifty years ago by Bedouin unable to read or write. It was archaic in several ways: its world and vocabulary were still those of seasonal migrations, desert encampments, droughts and dramatic storms, raising livestock, oryx hunting, and, going back further, but no more than a century, raiding and tribal battles. Intriguingly, however, the tradition has not died out, but reinvented itself. It has moved on in subject matter to critical and often highly amusing comment on international politics and controversial domestic issues, whilst retaining many traditional elements of sentiment, structure, diction and ‘world view’, shared by Bedouin poets from wherever they come, in a vast area that knows no national boundaries. Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Jordan, Iraq and Sinai all boast prominent Bedouin poets, and the network of cross-border tribal connections, reinforced these days by new electronic media, ensures that they keep in touch with each other. This common cultural patrimony is known throughout the region as *shi`r nabati*, literally ‘Nabatean poetry’, though it never had anything to do with the Nabateans of ancient history. This paper analyses short extracts from poems composed in the last forty years by Bedouin poets from Sinai, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, and examines the extraordinary popularity of the Abu Dhabi TV show *شاعر المليون*, now in its fifth season, in which *nabati* poets aged between 18 and 45, mainly from the GCC states, compete against each other before a large live audience and millions more television viewers to win the title and large cash prizes.

Kathleen Hood

Performance of the *dabka* and Bedouin identity in northern Jordan

Among the Bedouin tribes of the North Badia, Jordan, one of the main genres of music/dance currently performed at weddings is the *dabka*, a line dance with accompanying songs. Although the *dabka*, along with its non-Bedouin folksong repertoire, has long been common throughout the eastern Mediterranean among settled villagers, it is a fairly recent addition to the Jordanian Bedouin dance repertoire and, according to one consultant, was adopted in the 1960s. This time period roughly coincides with the period of settlement of the Bedouins that I interviewed, most of whom stated they ceased living a nomadic life during a period ranging approximately from 1965 to 1985. Because the adoption of the *dabka* dance and its song repertoire seems to parallel the path to settlement, I hypothesize that dancing the *dabka* exemplifies the Bedouins' adaptation to new circumstances, embodies their new status as settled Jordanians, and reconnects them across borders with the broader pan-Arab community. Originally associated with agricultural life and recognized as a wedding tradition, *dabka* is now recontextualized as a performance of Bedouin identity—particularly as embodied by young men at weddings, who use it as a means to display their strength, creativity, and agility. This paper, based on recent ethnographic research in northern Jordan, looks at the perceived nomadic-sedentary dichotomy and addresses the multi-directional and complex relationship between Bedouins, their local neighbors, and the national, regional, and international communities to which they belong in order to explore the adoption of the *dabka* by the Bedouins and to understand how it contributes to their identity.

Sulayman Khalaf

Conflict management and violence in changing Bedouin society: Evidence from the al-Raqqa region, north-east Syria

War and peace, conflict and cooperation have always existed in all human societies in a dialectical relationship with each other. Bedouin life historically expressed the simultaneous need for both peace and conflict. Bedouin tribesmen realized through the centuries that conflict could be eliminated from their life. So their tribal political wisdom evolved particular sets of values, norms, customs and strategies, and agencies by which to repress conflict, regulate it and/or control it.

Bedouin communities in the al-Raqqa region in north-east Syria nowadays lead a sedentary life, yet many tribal features continue to shape the socio-political and cultural components of their present-day life.

The paper is based on new field ethnographic data and will look at how conflict is managed, with a particular focus on the tribal mediation process that usually runs parallel to that of the state's legal system. The paper will examine the settlement of a number of homicide cases, as well as other less serious instances of conflict that occur much more frequently in people's lives, such as disputes over land borders, water rights, debts, water wells, and divorce.

Several interrelated sub-components of settlement will be explored, including: a) the initiation and continuation of the mediation processes by multiple actors and agencies, primarily tribal shaykhs, b) the strategic utilization of peace-directed tribal cultural values, customs and traditions that aid mediators in the management of conflict, c) the role and styles adopted by tribal shaykhs in performing their mediation function, d) the place of social honor as flexible cultural capital that tribesmen utilize during the settlement of conflict to enhance their social standing within their local communities, e) the way in which tribal law and settlement action strategies intersect, overlap, run parallel to, complicate and/or conflict with modern state laws and requirements for settling disputes between individuals or groups. The paper will also look at both change and continuity in tribal legal processes of conflict management as they operate within increasingly changing societies.

Konstantin M. Klein

Marauders, daredevils, and noble savages: The Roman perception of non-sedentary Arabs (3rd-7th centuries)

Raids by the nomadic and semi-nomadic Arab tribes in Late Antiquity appear as a constant threat to the Roman border at the desert fringe in the East. Recent scholarship on in so-called 'Frontier Studies' has investigated mainly in the Roman military attempts to get the problems of nomadic raids under control. However, the historical and archaeological evidence shows that the history of Arab-Roman coexistence should not be regarded one of military confrontation but rather as one of intercultural contacts and several steps towards acculturation.

My contribution aims to analyze the numerous Greek, Roman, and Syriac (and, to a smaller extent, Coptic and Armenian) sources describing the non-sedentary life of Arabs in Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Egypt, Sinai and the Arabian Peninsula, and to develop a typology of the Greco-Roman stereotypes regarding these people(s). Particularly by contrasting them with other non-sedentaries (e.g. the Blemmyes and the Nubians in Egypt) and other nations perceived from a Roman perspective as 'barbarians' (e.g. the Goths), it will be become clear that a nomadic lifestyle per se did not necessarily result in a thoroughly negative Greco-Roman perception (and thus in a pejorative literary description in the historiographical and hagiographical texts). This raises the question of exactly which aspects were assessed in a primarily negative or positive way by the Greco-Roman writers. Subsequently, the question arises as to whether there was a difference between pagan and Christian authors. The paper will show that the image of the Arab people was indeed reevaluated in Late Antique sources, leading to a more positive construction of the non-sedentaries. The archaeological evidence, which indicates that the Arabs never posed a major threat to the Roman Limes, will be contrasted with historiography that styles them as barbarians who haunted people's minds. Hagiography, in contrast, provides a record of Christian conversions and at the same time a literary motif that would reassure its readers and show them the transformative power of Christianity exercised through charismatic ascetics who were able to bring Christian civilization even to non-sedentary 'barbarians' such as the Arab nomads. This historiographical and hagiographical source material will be complemented by the rich epigraphic evidence of the area, ranging from Safaitic inscriptions to Greek, Syriac and Arabic epigraphy, which provides a first-hand testimony to the lifestyle or its originators. In a final step, the results

of this discussion will be compared with the later Islamic descriptions of nomadic lifestyles and the early Muslims' policies towards the nomads of the Arabian Peninsula.

The contribution will show how Arab tribes were ultimately integrated from the periphery into the center of Late Antique culture in the East. It also provides a new insight into the processes and methods of religious conversion in an area where religious affinities were to change as drastically as did the perceptions of nomadism.

Christoph Lange

‘The Cup of Blood’: The representation of Bedouins in Syrian television drama

In the light of the growing influence of mass media technologies in people’s daily lives, it is an important task to analyze how these technologies shape our perception and understanding of the social world. In the Arab World, television serials specially produced for the holy month of Ramadan, play a very famous and significant role in social life. These serials provide the still large number of illiterate people with a broad basis of communication and identification and, moreover, with a way to negotiate social relations in nation states that can be generally characterized as repressive.

In the first years after the emergence of these serials in the 1970s, a major and periodically returning theme has been the ‘Bedouin past.’ The first serials presented a mix of fantastic romanticism and cruel mockery about Bedouin backwardness, and later serials tended to continue this trope. Based on well-established stereotypes of Arab sedentary city dwellers about Bedouin life, this imagery has gained a stable position on Arab television screens.

This presentation is based on my ethnographic case study of the television serial *Finjan al-Dam* (The Cup of Blood), a Syrian production of 2008. I will show how sedentary elites of the Arab and Syrian media landscape produce and reproduce images of their ‘own’ Bedouin ancestry, traditions and culture (folklore). Through the case study, I will demonstrate that, although the wider public and the television producers believe that these images are ‘objective’ and ‘authentic,’ they are in fact only one mode (albeit a rather accepted one) of Bedouin representation. Furthermore, the interplay of social actors with divergent motivations in the process of production and distribution creates a complex and contested social representation of what is considered ‘Bedouin’ in the Arab region.

Michael C.A. Macdonald

The ‘north Arabian’ camel saddle and the supposed ‘Bedouinization of Arabia’

It is almost sixty years since Werner Caskel proposed the theory of the ‘Bedouinization of Arabia’ and Walter Dostal attributed it to the adoption by the nomads of the *shadad* or ‘North Arabian’ camel saddle. Both theories have been repeated and developed by later writers, most recently in 2003. Yet, if one examines carefully the iconographic, epigraphic, and historical evidence for the fighting techniques of the ancient nomads of southern Syria and Arabia, and compares it with the accounts of 19th- and early 20th-century Bedouin warfare, it becomes clear that there is no basis for the supposed change in military technology based on the use of the *shadad*. Similarly, an examination of the premises on which the theory of ‘Bedouinization’ was based in the light of later discoveries shows that it is no longer tenable. Instead, a much more nuanced and interesting picture emerges, supported not only by the historical and iconographic evidence but by the writings of the ancient nomads themselves.

Sebastian Maisel

The new rise of tribalism in Saudi Arabia

Tribalism is often portrayed as a pre-modern, antiquated form of opposition to the modern nation-state. Tribalism is also defined as the most common form of social organization in Arabia and the greater Middle East. In comparison with more Westernized political systems, the style of government in the hereditary monarchies along the Gulf is characterized as tribal too. However, this contrasts with the reports produced by these governments, who themselves see tribalism as a hindrance to the formation of modern civil societies. This paper points to a resurgence of tribalism in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Jordan and considers the role tribes play within the political and cultural environment.

Tribalism in the past has always been associated with nomadism, and nomadic Bedouin tribes were considered strangers who did not conform to the ways of the more educated population in the villages and towns of Arabia. Thus this paper also considers the changing role tribalism plays in the defining of identities, loyalties and lifestyles. It argues that while nomadism as a lifestyle has become almost completely extinct, tribalism as a mind-set has not. Furthermore, even rural and urban communities and identity groups have started to embrace the concept of tribal solidarity. This notion reaches a climax when the governments of all the countries in the Arabian Peninsula include selected tribal attributes in their national heritage and broader political and cultural system.

This paper explores the new relationship between tribe and state as well as the position of the tribe within Saudi society. It is based on fieldwork in the area and interviews conducted with tribal members and leaders, as well as with Saudi officials. Another major forum of tribal expression is found in online discussion boards, which serve as vehicles of tribal self-representation and whose contents have been analyzed with regard to new concepts of identities across political and hierarchical boundaries.

Astrid Meier

Framing the early-modern ‘Arab East’: Some remarks on marginalities, regional systems and border regimes

In my contribution, I would like to address some of the conceptual questions raised in the call for papers related to the ‘Arab East’ from a historian’s perspective. Having worked on two very different regional and temporal settings, where the ‘nomad’ or ‘Bedouin’ component figured in rather different ways, I shall address three interrelated topics, based mainly on a review of the existing scholarly literature.

I think it could prove useful to start with questioning our notions of marginality in order to come to a better understanding of the inner structuring of the spaces transcribed here as the Arab East, in particular in historical context when addressing the various perspectives evident in the source material available for such an enquiry. This will lead to a discussion of the ways various (sub)regional economic, social and political systems can be integrated into a more comprehensive setting, called here the early-Ottoman Arab East. Last, but not least it is also important to address the various border regimes, in terms of state policies, economic competition and integration, and social and cultural contact zones, that must feature prominently in any discussion of the shifting liminal zones that circumscribe the spatial construct under investigation.

Mostafa Minawi

The Hijaz telegraph line and a reassessment of Ottoman-Bedouin relations at the turn of the 20th century

In January 1901, Sadik el-Müeyyed Azmzade, the Yıldız Palace-appointed field leader of the telegraph line expansions from Damascus to Mecca, announced the arrival of the telegraph line in Medina, from where he had the honor of dispatching the first telegraph message to Istanbul. He states: *‘With the spirit of the blessed noble prophet, and in the shadow of the blessings of his majesty our greatest king, the distribution of the columns between Biyar Nasif and Medina has been completed. The work in this seventy-five kilometer stretch was completed in three days and the lines were connected with Medina.’* (Suriye, Damascus: 10-01-1901, 1)

However, what seemed thus far like a success story would soon change. For as celebrations of this success were taking place, reports of Bedouin sabotage of telegraph sections that had been completed reached Istanbul, putting a damper on this joyous occasion. Over the next few months, the reported incidents of sabotage would increase in both seriousness and number, as the telegraph commission attempted to push further toward Mecca.

The telegraph line project I refer to was a controversial extension of the telegraph line through the heartland of Bedouin territories from Damascus, following the main Hajj caravan route, to Mecca. This paper is part of a wider project in which I examine the Ottoman government’s strategy along the southern frontiers of the Empire in the eastern Sahara and the Hijaz at the time of European colonial expansion. Here I will focus on the Hijaz. I use the extension of the telegraph line as a case study through which to understand the Ottoman state’s strategy and the Bedouin reaction to it in these frontier regions. Using mostly sources from the Ottoman and British archives, I go beyond the highly inconsistent rhetoric of some Ottoman officials about the Bedouin of the region, who are described sometimes as *‘vabshi’* and sometimes as ‘allies.’ Focusing on the approach of the Ottoman imperial government, which adopted a more consistent rhetorical register that flies in the face of a so-called Ottoman colonial mentality or so called ‘Ottoman Orientalism,’ I will present my revisionary history of the relationship between the various levels of Ottoman government and the Bedouin tribes of the Arabian frontiers.

Laila Prager

Performing tribal histories in Bedouin soap operas (*musalsal badawi*): Diverging aims, addressees and self-perceptions of tribal film making in Syria and Jordan

Since the 1970s, an increasing number of television series dealing with Bedouin culture and society – usually designated as *musalsal badawi* – has been produced by the Syrian and Jordanian film industries. While the early *musalsal badawi* from the 1970s still shared some similarities with the ‘orientalizing’ Egyptian movies of the 1940s, in which Bedouin were depicted simply as representing the autochthonous ‘Arabs’, most of the contemporary *musalsals* exhibit a variety of images and ideas about the nature of ‘Bedouinity’ by addressing a wide range of historical, social and political issues.

Many of the contemporary *musalsals* are written, directed, produced, and sometimes also enacted, by Bedouins themselves. This gives rise to the question of whether such movies promote new images about ‘Bedouinity’ and modern tribal identities. Generally, the contemporary *musalsals* are depict historical events, which are reinterpreted from a Bedouin point of view and in which the Bedouin themselves appear as the major locus of historical agency. Thus, the present paper raises the question of whether such stories may be understood as representing counter narratives to mainstream history. This brings forward additional questions: Who decides upon the selection of the scripts? What tribal segment(s) claim to have authority over such counter narratives? What are the constraints that Bedouin film makers are exposed to when conceptualizing the story lines? This last question must be particularly addressed, since the audiences of these television-series are situated in highly politicized nation states that are subject to complex configurations of power. Often, the production of the *musalsals* is financed by high-ranking Bedouin shaykhs or tribal groups from the Gulf countries, who thereby promote their own vision of the interpretation of historical ‘events’. Though the *musalsals* are subject to the interplay of status and power, they are consumed and debated by a highly diverse group of viewers whose own interpretations depend on social class, gender, age, and their affiliation to different tribal groups and/or segments. It is thus important to analyze the diverging ideas and interpretations concerning the *musalsals* put forward by the audience, who thereby generate new meanings that the producers, directors and script writers never initially had in mind. In some cases, the competing interpretations of the *musalsals* have even led to the outbreak of new intertribal conflicts in some Middle Eastern nation states.

Being based on anthropological research undertaken among Jordanian and Syrian film makers, financiers, and consumers, the present paper aims to demonstrate the complexity of the seemingly unproblematic field of the Bedouin film industry by tracing the motivations and intentions of the various participants, their entanglement in relations of power and conflict, and their competing claims to have authority over the interpretation of the past.

James A. Reilly

Conflict and collaboration between town and steppe in Ottoman Hama

Working with archival and literary evidence, I will explore patterns of conflict and cooperation between the urban and steppe settings in the region of Ottoman Hama (18th-19th centuries) with reference to Bedouin groups. The evidence points to various kinds of business and trade partnerships, including a market in Hama oriented to the steppe and the Bedouins, and the existence of a resident ‘trade diaspora’ constituted of one particular tribal group whose notional home base was near Tadmur. On the other hand, conflicts and tensions between town and steppe are also apparent, whether in archival and literary reports of robbery, thievery and kidnapping; or in the literary evidence that writes Bedouins out of the urban community (passing over them in silence), or that explicitly condemns them as outside the bounds of civilized society. (For the latter, I will have to lean heavily on al-Makki’s early 18th century account from Homs, because it is a unique document from a town proximate to Hama, and in which Hamawis frequently make appearances.) I will try to make sense out of these seemingly antipodal indicators, to suggest a nuanced understanding of the urban-steppe relationship.

Thorsten Schoel

The aftermath of peace: On the consequences of the prohibition of mutual raiding and warfare for some Bedouin tribes

Raiding and warfare are known to have been central to Bedouin society and economy in the past. Mutual raiding in particular may be described as a *total social fact*. With colonialism came the suppression of both mutual raiding and inter-tribal wars. To understand the consequences of this change one must take a look at some of their implications: First, they required the spatial concentration of a tribe in times of threat for increased security in the event of confrontation and, as a result, fostered the tribe's social cohesion. Second, a section was never statically tied to its tribe but might instead attach itself to another shaykh and tribe. Military failure or success was certainly one of the reasons for such moves, as well as for the formation of inter-tribal alliances. Third, success in raiding and bravery in war, alongside generosity and some other character traits, were among the principal means of accumulating prestige and a personal reputation. Fourth, mutual raiding had been an important instrument for the redistribution of wealth and for a group's resilience after hardships such as a drought.

I argue that, due to the importance of mutual raiding and warfare for Bedouin culture, the suppression of these institutions by the colonial powers was one of the primary forces for social change among the Bedouin, though its effects may be less visible at first sight than those of, for example, the introduction of the truck. Examples of such effects include: The spatial scattering and consequently reduced social cohesion of the Sba`a; the re-emergence of the Hsana after having been reduced almost to insignificance by a series of wars; the coming to an end of what is often called the 'age of shaykhs'; and a probably reduced potential and altered paths for social mobility.

Frank H. Stewart

The two faces of the *khamisa*

Law always functions in such a way as to control, but not to eliminate, the use of violence. Where there is a state, the law will claim something close to a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. But where there is no effective central authority the regulation of the use of force means the establishment of rules about who can use violence and under what circumstances. This is done in the world community by international law and among the Bedouin by their customary law.

The way in which Bedouin law both legitimizes and limits the use of violence can be illustrated by their use of the word *khamisa*. For two hundred years – since the time of John Lewis Burckhardt – authors have striven to explain the meaning of this word. Most definitions speak in terms of a patrilineal descent group whose apical ancestor lies five generations back. But there are also many indications in the literature of the word being used by the Bedouin to refer to a corporate group that is evidently not constituted in this fashion.

The present paper shows that the word is in fact used in two distinct, though related, ways. In some contexts it refers to a corporate group, and here we can see the law legitimating the use of violence; in others it refers to certain of the agnates of a given man, and in these we can see the law constraining the use of violence.

Zoltán Szombathy

The Bedouin as informants in mediaeval Muslim scholarly culture

It is common in Arabic studies to state that the Muslim scholars of the first few centuries after the Hegira drew most of their information on the Arabic language and culture – such as early Arabic poetry, tales, proverbs, tribal genealogies and various other facets of pre-Islamic and early Islamic folklore in the Arabian Peninsula – from Bedouin informants. While this broad statement is evidently true to a large extent, too little attention has been accorded to the actual ways in which such massive data-gathering 'fieldwork' was carried out and to the problems attendant on such a colossal scholarly project. In contemporary anthropological research, there is a growing awareness of the serious methodological problems and limitations of both the fieldwork and the subsequent theorizing based upon it. It is worthwhile, then, to ask the same questions regarding the fieldwork methods of mediaeval Muslim scholars – essentially town-based specialists who were outsiders to the Bedouin communities they were studying – and the theories that they developed on the basis of the collected folklore material. Focusing on Arabic accounts of the collection of data about a number of important Bedouin poets of the early Islamic era, this paper will attempt to survey the typical fieldwork methods applied by Muslim scholars in the process of gathering Bedouin folklore, and to identify some of the problematic aspects of those methods.

Tariq Tell

A historical political economy of Bedouin-fellah relations along the frontier of settlement in Southeast Syria circa 1600-1851

A veil of ignorance still shrouds most aspects of the middle centuries of Ottoman rule along the steppe frontier of South-east Syria. However it can be safely said that imperial crisis and a 200-year wave of Bedouin infiltration combined to leave the desert marches in the grip of tribal leaders, whether nomadic or sedentary. To all intents and purposes, the Syrian interior appeared an empty frontier in the early nineteenth century, with, from the viewpoint of European travelers at least, a vast reserve of unexploited land. In the midst of this apparent plenty, the ruined villages and peripatetic fallahin encountered by John Lewis Burckhardt in the Hawran plains in the first decades of the 19th century appeared a result of the ‘oppressions of the government on one side, and those of the Bedouins on the other.’ Asked by Burckhardt ‘why no village in the Haouran [sic.] has either orchard or fruit trees, or gardens for the growth of vegetables,’ the fellah’s answer was ‘Shall we sow for strangers?’

Burckhardt interprets ‘strangers’ as ‘the succeeding inhabitants, and the Arabs (Bedouin) who visit the Haouran in the spring and summer.’ There is a degree of inconsistency in Burckhardt’s argument here as the ‘oppressions’ of the Ottoman government drop out of the picture, and it is notable that in Hani Hourani’s version of the encounter, the *fallab*’s answer is rendered ‘Shall we sow for the strangers or the Arabs?’ (*li-al-aghrab am li-al-a`rab*). The ‘*aghrab*’ are identified (following the local idiom of the East Bank villages) with the urban-based tax collectors of the Ottoman state, the political arm of a ‘semi feudal,’ tribute-extracting class, whose exactions parallel those of the Bedouin. Here, the fortunes of settled farming are tied to the fortunes of the ‘Tributary’ state as well as to the hardships brought by the incursions of the Bedouin. Yet this aspect of the retreat and advance of settled cultivation has been neglected in most histories of the frontier of settlement in Ottoman Syria. The predominant account favors a military-political explanation focused above all on what Talal Asad dubs the ‘Bedouin as a military force.’

Chroniclers versed in the European travelogues or immersed in the imperial archives have argued that the military political weakness of the Ottoman state after the 16th century led to chronic insecurity in the Syrian hinterlands. This opened the way for Bedouin dominance along the edge of the steppe, as nomadic camel herding tribes – the Bani Sakhr, the Huwaytat and

various factions of the `Anaza – intruded upon the settled zone at will. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the subjugation of the nomads by an imperial state armed with industrial era ‘tentacles of empire’ – notably breech loading rifles, the telegraph and the railroad – together with the implantation of Circassian settlers of ‘doughty’ stock as auxiliaries of the provincial authorities, led to agricultural revival and extension of settlement. In this – the conventional – version of south-east Syria’s agrarian history, the progress or retardation of settled cultivation is explained wholly by military and political factors. Martial qualities are attributed to the ‘essential’ characteristics of certain groups, the Circassians, and most importantly the *jamalla*, or camel-breeding Bedouin. A more or less stable hierarchy is held to result from these two assumptions, within which the more mobile camel-herders dominate and extract tribute (in the form of *khumma* or brotherhood payments) from the sedentary cultivators and semi-nomadic sheep herders. Bedouin power becomes a key factor in agricultural decline. Their impositions are blamed for the retreat of sedentary agriculture between 1600 and 1800 to a few pockets south of the Zarqa river and to the wooded mountains of ‘Ajlun.

This view of the ‘frontier of settlement’ has a long pedigree, evoking Ibn Khaldun’s description of the ruin of settled life in North Africa after the 11th-century invasion of the Bani Hilal (or at least colonial era interpretations of his work designed to highlight the barbarism and backwardness of North Africa under Muslim rule). There are however, revisionist views of the Hilalian invasion, which argue that it was driven by drought and famine in Upper Egypt, and that its success was aided – as Cahen argued some time ago – ‘by the collapse of other elements of power’ in the Fatimid Empire and its North African periphery. This paper attempts to transpose these arguments to the early modern Ottoman context, giving attention to the socio-environmental impact of the ‘Little Ice Age,’ the El Nino-driven droughts of the mid 18th century, and their impact on changing farm strategies and the culture of disease. Attention is given to shifts in the World System, and to the way the fiscal crisis brought by the 16th-century price revolution and shifting patterns of Eurasian trade interacted with the ‘rise of localism’ in Greater Syria. The aim is to use a local case study to aid the construction of a new macro-historical sociology of ‘tribal breakout’, one that gives attention to both the Khaldunian and the Tributary poles of the Ottoman social formation.

An implicit assumption of the conventional view of the frontier of settlement is that nomadism is inherently at odds with settled village life, a function of the Bedouins’ ‘warrior ethic’ and their disdain for farming and manual labor. Once again, Khaldunian antecedents can be invoked:

‘Whenever the Arabs (i.e. the Bedouins) conquer a country, ruin quickly descends up on it. [T]heir favorite occupation is trekking and roaming in the desert, and this is opposed to the establishment of a quiet and sedentary life, on which the growth of civilization depends.’ However, the more specific evidence deployed in support of these assertions is at best tenuous, for the most part drawn from colonial sources in thrall to the notion that the Bedouin were a separate ‘martial race.’ These fall foul of mounting research by archaeologists, anthropologists, agronomists and agricultural economists, which demonstrates that in the Syrian interior – as in other parts of the arid zone – settled farming and nomadism were more often complementary than competitive. For impoverished rural actors pursuing survival in an uncertain environment, diversification was often the optimal strategy, and both Bedouin and fellah coped with ‘idiosyncratic risk’ by investing in a spectrum of overlapping activities ranging from settled cultivation, through peripatetic farming to pastoralism.

The advantages of investing in a ‘multi resource economy’ undermine the idea of separate and discrete groupings of Bedouin and fellahin. It raises the possibility that agriculture could be pursued by tent dwellers, and take place undocumented by the European travelogues or Ottoman registers favored by historians. In similar vein, the portrait of victimized, peripatetic fellahin derived from Burckhardt ignores the possibility that their practices formed a rational strategy adapted to the realities of life in 19th-century Hawran. Cultivators moved from place to place, and left the land fallow, as a means of coping with an arid and unstable ecology, as well as to avoid the Bedouin. *Khumma* ties were often stable and long term, and had reciprocal and contractual aspects that often made them preferable to the exactions of the tax collector. Burckhardt’s focus on the lack of tree crops or vegetables neglects the possibility that, in a largely subsistence economy with underdeveloped infrastructure and fragmented markets, the returns from such crops were too meager to justify the intensive input of time and labor that their ownership entailed.

The notion of an inherent domination of nomad over cultivator that is central to the conventional narrative can also be challenged. It ignores the existence of powerful tribal confederations among the sedentary population, and the possibility that sources of social power other than the military or the political could produce centers of authority and influence among the more settled groups. Ironically enough, this was envisaged by Ibn Khaldun, who attributes *‘asabiyya* (group cohesion – for him the key source of social power) – to the sedentary Berbers of the High Atlas as well as to nomadic Arabs. Moreover, the sources of *‘asabiyya* for Ibn Khaldun are not

only religious ideology, nor a function of the essential characteristics of certain groups. *`Asabiyya* arises from the requirements for survival in a marginal environment that lacks the taxable resources necessary for routine state control. This imposes cohesive behavior upon its inhabitants as a result of the need to cope with the potential threat posed by armed and tribalized neighbors. The existence of group feeling also requires the prior existence of *ri'asa*, or the emergence of a distinct locus of authority possessed of the means and resources to enforce compliance by the locality or tribal group as a whole.

Tribal histories reveal diverse modes of *ri'asa* and group feelings in Ottoman Trans-Jordan, but provide no evidence that *`asabiyya* was restricted to camel herding Bedouin such as the Bani Sakhr or the Huwaytat. Local lore celebrates the predominance of the `Adwan – Sharifian emirs of a federation of sheep herders and fellahin – in al-Balqa'. It also records significant sheikdoms among the *nahiyat* chieftains of `Ajlun (in particular the Shraydah in al-Kura; the Frayhat in Jabal `Ajlun and the `Abaydat in al-Kfarat). In all of these cases, *za`ama* seems to have rested on control of the agrarian surplus through tribute or taxation rather than on the military advantages conferred by mobility or a warrior ethic. The surplus from trade, and the economic power conferred by the control of the markets on which the Bedouin depended, were also the foundations of effective *`asabiyyas*. Ma`an's location at the meeting place of the Syrian and Egyptian Hajj allowed it to deal with the Bedouin on equal terms, while the tribal stature of al-Saltiyyah in al-Balqa' increased with al-Salt's growing importance to trade with central Palestine in the early 19th century.

Rather than arbitrarily attributing *`asabiyya* to the Bedouin, it seems more fruitful to inquire into the conditioning role of different ecologies and modes of livelihood on the nature of tribal organization in village and steppe. Drawing on the institutional economy of ASARS (the Arid and Semi Arid Rain-fed Semi Tropics) and 'traditional' insurance systems, the paper will attempt to supplement the macro history of tributary decline and tribal breakout with a local level examination of the costs of collective action for Bedouins and sedentarists. It is hoped that this will yield an historically nuanced institutional explanation of the greater cohesion of the camel-breeding tribes, and a micro-political economy of the balance of power between desert and sown land that dispenses with the essentialist argument that the *jammala* Bedouin were an inherently more 'martial race'.

Isabel Toral-Niehoff

The Bedouin as a cultural reference in Andalusia: The case of the *'Iqd al-farid*

Though located in the far West and therefore distant from the epicenters of Arabo-Islamic culture and the living environment of the Bedouin, we can observe in Andalusia a striking obsession with topics related to the *jabilyya* and to the Bedouin (pre-Islamic poetry, genealogy, Arabic grammar and lexicography, tribal lore or *ayyam al-'arab*), whereas *hadith* science and *usul al-fiqh*, for example, remained rather unpopular in the first centuries of the Islamic dominion. Even Ibn Khaldun (d. 1406 CE) emphasized that Andalusian children started their school curriculum with the study of poetry and grammar, and not with the Qur'an, as was customary in the other Islamic regions (*Muqaddima*, ed. Quatremère 1873, 263). This phenomenon of Andalusian 'Arabism' ('arabismo') has been explained recently by referring to the problematic political and Islamic legitimacy of the ruling Umayyad dynasty in Cordoba, who had contested the claims of the Abbasids in Bagdad, and later the claims of the Fatimids in North Africa, wherefore they had to establish a sort of *idéologie omayyade* (Gabriel Martinez-Gros). In my opinion, it also reflects an obsession with identity issues, which is typical for cultural frontier regions. Further, according to Pierre Guichard's view, Arab tribalism was not only an important source of conflict in the first centuries of Islamic rule, but also a fundamental organizing principle in Andalusian society. Within this context, my contribution will focus especially on the literary configuration of the Bedouin as an important cultural reference of Andalusian 'Arabism.'

The *'Iqd al-farid*, the most famous and popular Andalusian *adab*-work, constitutes an appropriate source text: It was written in califal al-Andalus, it is extensively drawn from Oriental material, and it is commonly regarded as the most important representative text of Umayyad and pro-Arab bias. As an *adab*-work, it is highly intertextual, so we can properly investigate the web of references and the author's reshaping of known material; finally, it was immediately exported to the East.

Given the extensive size of the text (nine volumes in the current edition), my paper will offer a close reading of only a small selection of textual units (*akbbar*) taken from two chapters of the *'Iqd al-farid*: X the *Kitab al-Yatima fi nasab wa fada'il al-'arab* and XI the *Kitab al-asjada fi kalam al-'arab*. The intertextual web of these narrative units will be investigated in order to probe their deeper cultural meaning in a sort of 'thick description' (Clifford Geertz).

Brian Ulrich

Al-Ahnaf b. Qays and Bedouin leadership in the *amsar*

This paper examines the ways in which accounts of al-Ahnaf b. Qays al-Tamimi served to mediate the transmission of Bedouin leadership ideals into Islamic high culture. The Tamim were among the most important nomadic groupings of pre-Islamic Arabia, and, after distinguishing himself in the conquest of Khurasan, al-Ahnaf became their leader in the garrison town of Basra, where he lived for about thirty years. Copious material representing his activities during this period is found in al-Baladhuri's *Ansab al-Ashraf*, al-Tabari's *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa-l-Muluk*, and the *Naqa'id Jarir wa-l-Farazdaq*, among other sources, and in the view of this scholar is a reliable guide to his socio-political roles and general style. This material also represents him as the epitome of sagacity and mediation skills and a figure who is often represented as commenting on Bedouin as a group. This idealized figure, who would be claimed by several sectarian groups, served to Islamize aspects of Bedouin culture and represented a role model for future generations as part of the construction of an Arabo-Islamic cultural heritage.

Nicola Verderame

Folkloric objects or proof of modernization? Ottoman ambiguities towards the Bedouin at the World Columbian Exposition (Chicago, 1893)

World fairs deeply influences the 19th-century worldview of both Western and non-Western countries. The Ottoman Empire participated in all the main world exhibitions, displaying abroad a condensed image of the imperial domains for Western consumption. The Chicago World Columbian Exposition is by far the biggest and best documented effort of this kind. The main purpose of the Ottoman authorities in sending their representatives to the United States was that of showing the great economic, social and technological advancements of the empire. In addition, Ottoman entrepreneurs organized their own booths in Chicago for pure profit-making purposes. The Bedouin featured in both aspects of the Columbian display, including both the official state pavilion and the commercial area of the fairground. In the official display, they were presented as giving proof of the state's control over unruly elements in the provinces, while the commercial display featured *tableaux vivants* of Bedouin, as well as an Ottoman Hippodrome in which Bedouin horsemen performed. The aim of this paper is to shed light on this two-fold representation: the Ottoman participation in the Chicago exhibition constitutes a perfect case study for shedding light on a broader pattern in the relation between official and commercial aspects of the Bedouin presence in Ottoman lands. Bedouin are used by the authorities as proof of the modernization efforts of the Hamidian era, with pictures of Bedouin schoolchildren displayed in the empire's official pavilion. At the same time, they are the object of folkloric displays catering to both the Orientalist taste of the Western audience, and to a peculiar Ottoman Orientalism, which is revealed by the Ottoman accounts of the exhibition.