

## ORDERING THE PAST OF OTTOMAN YEMEN, 1872-1914<sup>1</sup>

History of course, is never merely the narration of the past. By the eighteenth century, and with unveiled clarity in the nineteenth, it is also a chosen battleground on which the Enlightenment carries out its multipronged mission against religion, superstition and ignorance, and affirms its conception of progress<sup>2</sup>.

Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire*.

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**A** series of campaigns that the imperial army conducted from its strongholds along the southern Red Sea coast of the Arabian Peninsula between 1870 and 1873 added vast territories to the Ottoman domains.

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<sup>1</sup> This article is largely based on a term paper that I wrote for a graduate seminar on the late Ottoman Empire that was taught by Ariel Salzmänn at NYU in the Spring of 1999. It takes up and further elaborates arguments that I first formulated in Thomas KÜHN, *The Colonial Discourse of Ottoman Rule In Yemen, 1872-1918*, unpublished essay submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Master of Studies in Oriental/Modern Middle Eastern Studies, University of Oxford, May 1998. Funding for the additional research that was necessary to write this present version has been provided by the SSRC IDRF program and the American Research Institute in Turkey (ARIT). For important comments and criticism on earlier versions of this paper I am particularly grateful to Bernard Haykel, Zachary Lockman, Ariel Salzmänn, and Paul Sedra (all at NYU) and to Jens Hanssen (University of Toronto), Christoph K. Neumann (Bilgi Üniversitesi, Istanbul), and Emma Sinclair-Webb (University of London). Needless to say the responsibility for interpretations and mistakes is entirely my own.

<sup>2</sup> Uday Singh MEHTA, *Liberalism and Empire. A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought*, Chicago/London, 1999, p. 83.

While Ottoman military forces had managed to gain a foothold around Ḥudayda and in the coastal region of ‘Asīr from the late 1840s, a first attempt to occupy Ṣan‘ā’ and the surrounding highlands in 1849 had failed. Much of this part of southwest Arabia, which the government sought to organize as the new Province of Yemen<sup>3</sup> (*Yemen vilāyeti*) after 1872, had been part of the Ottoman Empire from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. This first period of Ottoman rule in the area came to an end in the 1630s when the Qāsimīs, a local dynasty of Zaydī Imāms, drove out the Ottomans and established an independent polity that was to last for the next two-hundred years. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the Qāsimī state had largely disintegrated<sup>4</sup>, giving way to a number of local rulers who had managed to establish their own power-bases in ‘Asīr, in Kawkabān, in the Jabal Ḥarāz region and around Ḥujjarīya south of Ta‘izz<sup>5</sup>.

As was the case with imperial expansion in general during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Ottoman conquest and administration of southwest Arabia did not only involve those familiar “tools of empire” (as Daniel Headrick puts it) as steamships, the telegraph, quinine, and the repeating rifle<sup>6</sup>. In seeking to organize these territories as the Province of Yemen the Ottomans also relied on many of the concepts and practices that were characteristic of the modern state. As I will argue, from the early 1870s Ottoman bureaucrats and intellectuals drew on Orientalist themes derived from the context of European imperialism to construct the past of the newly conquered province in ways that legitimated the Ottoman presence.

<sup>3</sup> For some time between the late 1840s and 1872 the territory that the Ottomans held in the coastal region had been administered as the Province of Yemen (*eyālet-i Yemen*).

<sup>4</sup> Paul DRESCH, *A History of Modern Yemen*, Cambridge, 2000, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> The Ottoman re-conquest of Yemen has to be seen within the broader framework of the profound transformations that government agencies and society in the Ottoman Empire underwent from the late 18th century. Ottoman rulers and their supporters sought to shore up the empire’s defense against both increasing European encroachments and secessionist movements at home by re-organizing their administrative bodies and armed forces in ways that adapted European-style know-how to local needs. In this connection, territorial expansion to establish more direct control over the empire’s Arab borderlands in North Africa, geographical Syria, and the Arabian Peninsula was meant to provide more security against European encroachments and more resources to finance a greatly expanding army and bureaucracy. Cf. Eugene L. ROGAN, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire*, Cambridge/New York, 1999, p. 1-6, 9-17.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Daniel R. HEADRICK, *The Tools of Empire. Technology and European Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford, 1981, for instance, p. 58-79, 96-104, 206.

As Jens Hanssen, Ussama Makdisi, and Wendy Shaw have recently shown, there was a discernible and significant tendency on the part of the Ottoman bureaucratic elite—particularly from the reign of ‘Abdülhamîd II (1876-1909) onward—to adopt the cultural trappings of European imperial states, including an interest in archaeology and Orientalist styles in the visual arts, in an attempt to depict the Ottoman pasts in ways that would foster the elaboration of an Ottoman identity and help legitimate the empire both domestically and in Europe<sup>7</sup>. However, focusing primarily on the paintings of ‘Osmân Hamdî Bey and his activities as archaeologist and director of the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul, Makdisi and Shaw in particular have argued that Ottoman usages of Orientalist images and constructions of the past were markedly different from those that we come across in the context of contemporary European empires. For instance, the government-sponsored excavations in Şayda and Baalbek or ‘Osmân Hamdî’s Orientalist paintings have been interpreted not as reflections of an imperialist posturing towards certain peoples of the empire but as part of an Ottoman project of nation-building that was meant to ensure the empire’s survival in the face of foreign encroachment and internal nationalisms among subject peoples<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> See Jens HANSEN, “Imperial Discourses and an Ottoman Excavation in Lebanon,” in *Baalbek: Image and Monument 1898-1998*, ed. Helene SADER, Thomas SCHEFFLER, and Angelika NEUWIRTH, Stuttgart, 1998, p. 157-172, Ussama MAKDISI, “The “Rediscovery” of Baalbek: A Metaphor for Empire in the Nineteenth Century,” in SADER, SCHEFFLER, and NEUWIRTH, *op. cit.*, p. 137-156, Wendy SHAW, “The Paintings of Osman Hamdi Bey and the Subversion of Orientalist Vision,” in *Aptullah Kuran için Yazılar. Essays in Honour of Aptullah Kuran*, ed. Çiğdem KAFESCİOĞLU, Lucienne THYS-ŞENOCAK, Istanbul, 1999, p. 423-434.

<sup>8</sup> MAKDISI, *op. cit.*, p. 153-154, 156, SHAW, *op. cit.*, p. 426, 431. Hanssen, by contrast, views, for instance, archaeology as an instrument of Ottoman imperialism towards the population of the empire’s Arab provinces *in general*. See HANSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 157, 158, 171. In so doing he implies that the politics of centralization that the Ottoman government pursued in these provinces since the *Tanzîmât* can without exception be considered imperialist. Such a generalization, however, seems to me highly problematic because it does not distinguish between those parts of the Arab world that had been under the rule of the sultans for three centuries or more (for instance, parts of the Bilād al-Shām) and borderlands, such as Yemen where local leaders had for all intents and purposes opted out of the imperial system, claiming for themselves the title of caliph and establishing a polity that was to remain independent for more than two hundred years. Even if the Ottomans represented the people of the Bilād al-Shām and those of Yemen in somewhat similar terms it is necessary to ask whether imperialism is an accurate description of the politics of centralization towards the former who – at least among their elites – had developed often very close cultural ties to the imperial metropole since the 16th century. Even though an in-depth discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this article I would nevertheless like to suggest that it is crucial to raise the question of where to draw the line between the expansion of modern state structures and practices on the one hand and imperialism on the other.

In this article I hope to demonstrate that this was only one aspect of a more complex picture. Ottoman writings on Yemen show that Orientalist themes and constructions of the past were used not just defensively but also to justify the conquest and subjugation of local populations<sup>9</sup>. More specifically, it is my argument that in this connection Ottoman authors drew on themes very similar to those elaborated by contemporary British, French, Russian, and Japanese imperialists<sup>10</sup>. By deploying Orientalist conceptions, such as cultural decline and despotic rule, Ottoman bureaucrats and intellectuals ordered the past of the *Yemen vilāyeti* in a way that was to provide evidence of the cultural inferiority of the local population *vis-à-vis* their conquerors and, hence, the need for “civilizing” Ottoman rule. It is in these representations of indigenous society that we find precisely those stereotypical references to violence, bloodshed, and oppression that were conspicuously absent from the renderings of the Ottoman past that ‘Osmān Ḥamdī produced in his paintings<sup>11</sup>.

More important, whereas in the case of Yemen these historical narratives, too, were originally used to justify a civilizing mission that was to assimilate the local people into a nation state-in-the-making, I argue that from around 1908 they provided the basis for an argument whereby this part of the empire should be ruled as a colony. This reflected what I see as a major change of perspective among Ottoman officials from the early 1880s. It was around this time that they realized that assimilation in the form that had originally been imagined would not work and that Yemen could not be ruled like a province on the same footing with *vilāyets* such as Bursa, Konya, or Syria (Sūriye), under Ottoman rule for three centuries or more.

However, it is necessary to stress that what we observe is not a wholesale adoption of Orientalist perspectives—as we know them from the

<sup>9</sup> Exploring the issue of which audience these writings were meant to address is an important aspect of my research project on Ottoman rule in 19th- and early 20th-century Yemen but beyond the scope of this article. The fact that most of the writings under study were published in Ottoman Turkish in Istanbul suggests that in large measure the conquerors were talking to themselves and that the elaboration of Ottoman concepts of empire was closely connected to the emergence of an imperial public sphere with Ottoman Turkish speaking bureaucrats among its most important participants.

<sup>10</sup> For the Japanese case see Stefan TANAKA, *Japan's Orient. Rendering Pasts into History*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1993, Mark R. PEATTIE, “Japanese Attitudes towards Colonialism, 1895-1945,” in *The Japanese Colonial Empire, 1895-1945*, ed. Ramon H. MYERS and Mark R. PEATTIE, Princeton, N.J., 1984, p. 79-127.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. SHAW, *op. cit.*, p. 426.

context of European imperialism. Rather, Ottoman authors selectively and complexly combined Orientalist elements with earlier notions about the empire's borderland peoples. They also had to deal with the issue of how to reconcile their conviction of cultural superiority *vis-à-vis* the indigenous population with the fact that quite unlike other imperial conquerors of the time they and their subjects shared the same religion. The result was a vision of the region's past that albeit recognizably Orientalist in outlook nevertheless reflected the specificities of the Ottoman context.

Thus, the broader purpose of this paper is to argue that members of the Ottoman bureaucratic elite took part in the culture of 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century imperialism and to explore one of the ways in which they did so, namely their use, with reference to Yemen, of historical constructions that from French North Africa to Russian Central Asia proclaimed the legitimacy of imperial domination. In studying the Ottoman Empire as a specific kind of imperialist power I propose an alternative to mainstream interpretations of 19<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman history. These usually portray the Ottoman Empire of this period as the victim of European colonialism and imperialist expansion without investigating whether the Ottoman government might at the same time have pursued imperialist designs and colonial projects of its own. It is my contention that the Ottoman experience in Yemen was about both. Not only did soldiers and administrators conquer and govern the local people in the name of a civilizing mission, they also came to elaborate a form of governance that relied critically on the creation and reproduction of a specifically Ottoman form of colonial difference.

On 20 June 1872, at a time when the Ottoman expeditionary force under Aḥmed Muhtār Paşa was still fighting to control the highlands north of Şan'ā', the journalist, playwright, and official Nāmīk Kemāl wrote in the *İbret* newspaper, commenting on the conquest of Yemen:

[...] the Arabs are—as regards seniority and strength—[...] the leaders of [the world of] Islam in terms of knowledge. Indeed, many of them later got accustomed to indolent indifference in their Bedouin tents to which they had returned. However, as soon as they begin to see the light of the day-break of knowledge there is no doubt that again they will make the places they inhabit the scholarly centers of the world and that again they will make the state to which they belong the power to which all the world bows in deference. [...] The Arab is our teacher whose nerves have been harmed through the disorder and turmoil of ages past. We are the Arab's disciple [sic!] who is capable of enduring any hardship with youthful strength.

Now we are going to assist in rescuing them from the state in which they find themselves<sup>12</sup>.

Summed up in these lines we find some of those themes that Ottoman bureaucrats over the subsequent decades would draw upon to justify the imperial presence in Yemen. Although less explicitly than the Colonel Aḥmed Rāšid a few years later<sup>13</sup>, Nāmıķ Kemāl presented the political unity of the *umma* as the framework for the establishment of Ottoman rule in Yemen. His reference to past and – potentially future – Arab superiority reflected a common theme among urban literati of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and after, like al-Jāhiz. While seeing Turkish-speaking soldiers and administrators as protectors of the state, they had viewed the Arabic-speaking ‘*ulamā*’ as guardians of the law and the sciences<sup>14</sup>. At the same time, however, these lines displayed characteristic elements of the new visions of state and society that members of the Ottoman bureaucratic elite had adopted roughly from the reign of Maḥmūd II (1808-39) as part of a complex reorganization of the empire’s bureaucratic, fiscal, and military structures known as *Tanzīmāt*. Indeed, echoing the perspectives of many of his contemporaries in the Ottoman military and officialdom on the empire’s borderland people, Nāmıķ Kemāl—again very much like Aḥmed Rāšid—represented the attempt to achieve political and economic domination over this part of the Arabian Peninsula as part of a “civilizing mission.”<sup>15</sup> However, since the newly conquered province had been known for its centers of Islamic learning, simply disparaging its population as savages since time immemorial would not do. Rather, the editor of *İbret* implied that their inferior cultural status which entitled their conquerors to rule over them was the outcome of a particular

<sup>12</sup> Quoted after Mustafa Nihat ÖZÖN, ed., *Namık Kemal ve İbret Gazetesi*, İstanbul, 1997, p. 67: “... ebna-yi Arap kıdem ve salabet cihetiyle İslamın... bedreka-i marifetidir. Vakıa birçoğu sonraları avdet ettiği bedeviyet haymelerinde hab-i gaflete meluf olmuş duruyor. Fakat her ne vakit sabah-i marifetin envarını görmeye başlarlar ise gene oturdukları yerleri dārül-fünun-i âlem edeceklerinde, gene tabi oldukları devleti kible-gâh-i cihan eyleyeceklerinde şüphe yoktur... Arap bizim fesad-i ruzigâr ile asabkna haleb gelmiş üstadımızdır. Biz Arabın kuvve-i şebap ile her meşakkatini tahammüle muktedir şakirdiyiz. Biz şimdi onları bulundukları halden kurtarmaya muin olacağız.”

<sup>13</sup> See Werner SCHMUCKER, “Zur Begründung der zweimaligen türkischen Besetzung des Jemen nach Aḥmad Rāšids ‘Geschichte des Jemen und Şan‘ā’s’,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* IX, 1984, p. 203-278, 206, 256-257.

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, Ulrich HAARMANN, “Rather the Injustice of the Turks than the Righteousness of the Arabs—Changing ‘*Ulamā*’ Attitudes Towards Mamluk Rule in the Late Fifteenth Century,” *Studia Islamica* LXVIII, 1988, p. 61-77, 74-75.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Selim DERİNGİL, *The Well-Protected Domains. Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909*, London/New York, 1998, p. 41-42.

historical development: Once culturally the most advanced in the entire Islamic World, the local population had reverted to a state of barbarism which the Bedouin tent was meant to represent<sup>16</sup>. This state of changeless backwardness, so the argument went, could be overcome only through intervention from without, through Ottoman rule. And yet, what clearly distinguished Nāmīk Kemāl's conception of a civilizing mission from those of contemporary European imperialists was his profound respect for the superiority of Arab-Islamic culture. In his view, it was this cultural heritage that would ensure the assimilation of the local population into the structures of the empire. As we shall see, later perspectives on local culture would be markedly different.

A look at Ottoman writings on Yemen that were published during the decades up to World War I suggests that there was, indeed, a more general tendency among authors of memoranda, newspaper articles, geographical dictionaries or state almanacs to support the claim to a mission to "civilize" the local people through historical arguments. While there never existed a single narrative of the region's history, most of these different forms of ordering the past of this part of the Ottoman Empire were informed by a "from golden age to decline" paradigm similar to the one central to Nāmīk Kemāl's article and/or by the concept of despotic rule which was a prominent feature of European discourse on the Middle East and South/East Asia at least from the 17th century. In the early 1870s, Nāmīk Kemāl and Aḥmed Rāşid seem to have located what they saw as the "golden age" of the region during the Islamic period in general and the first period of Ottoman rule in Yemen (1532-1635) in particular. For instance, in his *Tārīh-i Yemen ve Şan'ā'* (*History of Yemen and of Şan'ā'*) Rāşid contrasted the wealth of Yemen under Ottoman rule during the 16th and early 17th centuries with the disintegration and disorder that had ensued during the Qāsimī period<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, he provided a list of "general welfare buildings" (*ebniye-i hayrīye*), such as mosques, *ḥammāms* or public fountains that had been donated by the governors and other high-ranking officials during the first period of Ottoman rule<sup>18</sup>. However, it was the region's pre-Islamic past and, most

<sup>16</sup> This brings to mind a set of conceptions that later on became known as "Ibn Khaldunism," see Christoph K. NEUMANN, *Das indirekte Argument. Ein Plädoyer für die Tanẓīmāt vermittelt der Historie. Die geschichtliche Bedeutung von Aḥmed Cevdet Paşas Ta'riḥ*, Münster/Hamburg, 1994, p. 213-220.

<sup>17</sup> Aḥmed RĀŞID, *Tārīh-i Yemen ve Şan'ā'* [History of Yemen and of Şan'ā'], 2 vols, Istanbul, 1291 h. [1874-75]), 1, p. 257.

<sup>18</sup> RĀŞID, *op. cit.*, 2, p. 336-340.

notably, the cultural achievements of the ancient Sabean and Himyarite Kingdoms—with the Sabean capital Ma'rib and its famous high dam as the most important examples—that from the early 1880s provided many authors with the yardstick against which they measured what they perceived as the decay and backwardness of the recently conquered province.

As we shall see, it was for various reasons that Yemen's ancient history seemed to lend itself particularly well to the self-conceptualization of the Ottoman state of the Hamidian and Second Constitutional Periods and the role it hoped to play in Yemen. This notion is reflected, for instance, in the opening paragraph of an article by 'Abdülganî Senî, which was published in the Istanbul-based *Mülkîye* journal in February 1910. The author, then serving in Yemen as head of the governor-general's chancery (*vilâyet mektûbcusu*), declared:

The land of Yemen, which in ancient times was a place where a great civilization existed! [...] This vast province which today gives you a sense with inscriptions engraved in stone and with the existing remnants of enormous buildings that it has passed a splendid [...] age is today—alas!—covered by the darkness of ignorance and decline and buried in [a] state of decay and backwardness..<sup>19</sup>

Already in 1888-89 the author of the historical section of the province's official almanac (*Yemen Sâlnâmesi*) had expressed similar views:

In short, the people of Ma'rib were a famous people in terms of [their] civilization, knowledge [and] wealth... Now, however, that flourishing Ma'rib has turned into a field of ruins and there is no trace of the world-wide conquests of its vigorous rulers and the civilization and knowledge of its people that were spread all over the world! Silence and calm reigns in place of the rulers' power, pomp and circumstance and savagery and ignorance in place of the inhabitants' civilization and knowledge!!<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> 'Abdülganî SENÎ, "Yemen'in Necât ve Selâmeti. İhyâ-yi Ma'ârif," [Yemen's Salvation and Liberation: Reviving Education] *Mülkîye* 13, 1 Şubât 1325 [14 February 1910], p. 45-52, 45-46: "... Ezmene-i sâlifede... kıca bir medeniyetin incilâgâhı... olan hıttâ-i yemânîye!... El-yevm taşlar üzerinde mahkûk huftûtıyla, mevcûd mebânî-i mu'azzame bakîyesiyle bir devre-i müşa'sa'a... geçirmiş olduğunu ifhâm bu cesîm vilâyet—efsûs ki—bu gün bir zalam-i cehil ve inhiât ile mestûr, hâl-i tedennî ve bedâvetde maţmûr bulunuyor."

<sup>20</sup> *Yemen Sâlnâmesi* 5, 1304 mâl./1306 h. [1888-89], p. 47-48: "El-hâsıl Ma'ribliler medeniyet ma'rifet-ü- servet cihetleriyle meşhûr bir kavim idiler... Şimdi ise o ma'mû[r] Ma'rib bir harâbezâre dönüb ne hükümdârân-i zî-baţşîñ fütühât-i cihângîrânelerinden ve ne de ahâliniñ dünyâya yayılan medeniyet ve ma'rifetlerinden eser vardır! Hükümdârların debdebe ve sulţanlarına [?] bedel şamt ve sükûnet ve ahâliniñ [sic!] medeniyet ve ma'rifetlerine muķâbil vahşet ve cehâlet hüküm süriyor!!!"



While the empire's learned elites already during the early modern period had been aware of the existence of these pre-Islamic civilizations through the Bilkīs legend, the Qur'ān, and the works of the classical Arab historians, it is important to note that it was not only these sources that Ottoman authors of the Hamidian and Second Constitutional Periods drew upon to point to what they regarded as the “grands siècles” of local history. Clearly, for the authors of various *Yemen Sālnāmeleri* as well as for 'Abdūlganī Senīr or Şemsü l-Dīn Sāmī Bey Frāşerī, the author of the *Ḳāmūsü l-A'lām*, the key to the exploration and understanding of these ancient cultures was provided by archaeology and comparative philology, *i.e.*, two disciplines that were part of the corpus of “modern sciences” (*'ulūm-i cedīde*) and greatly influenced the thinking of many Ottoman intellectuals of the time.

This choice was not accidental. Establishing credibility by using such “scientific” methods was—just as the tables, charts, and maps in the state almanacs—part of the effort on the part of the *Tanzīmāt* state and its agents to represent themselves as modern. The conquest of Yemen and its incorporation into the Ottoman Empire were, thus, at one level represented as a scholarly undertaking. The province was to be made known through scientific methods and categories that stood for progress and modernity. On the one hand this served the broader purpose of emphasizing the empire's claim to the status of an equal partner of the European Powers<sup>21</sup>. This was, for instance, reflected in the notice published in *Şan'ā'* in which the newspaper's editor proudly informed his readers that a copy of the first *Yemen Sālnāmesi*, which he had compiled, had found its way into the holdings of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, however, it stressed the superiority of the Ottoman state *vis-à-vis* the indigenous population.

It was in keeping with this notion that the author of the historical chapter of the *Yemen Sālnāmesi* n° 5 in 1888-89 remarked that he had based his account on geographical dictionaries and “modern” historiographical works and not on the *per se* “unreliable” legends in some Arab chronicles<sup>23</sup>. Following this logic, the more scientific the methods and categories with which the local population could be classified and

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed discussion of this idea see DERINGIL, *op. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> Michael URSINUS, “*Şan'ā'*. Eine amtliche osmanische Provinzzeitung im Jemen,” in *Quellen zur Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches und ihre Interpretation*, ed. Michael URSINUS, Istanbul, 1994, p. 165-181, 175.

<sup>23</sup> *Yemen Sālnāmesi* 5, 1304 māl./1306 h.[1888-89], p. 51-52.

represented the more obvious local backwardness would appear and, hence, the more triumphant Ottoman superiority.

In his recent article on the government-sponsored excavations in Baalbek Ussama Makdisi has argued that it was this “European association” alone and not their “historical or archaeological value *per se*” that motivated Ottoman interest in archaeological finds from the pre-Islamic period of the imperial lands<sup>24</sup>. However, while the interest in the empire’s pre-Islamic past was undoubtedly part of the larger endeavor of projecting a particular image of the Ottoman state both to the outside world and to the different peoples living under Ottoman rule, in the case of Ottoman Yemen there is ample evidence that the ordering of its past was, at the same time, driven by genuine scholarly interest. This point is illustrated, for instance, by a request published in *Şan’ā’* on 7 Mayıs 1296/19 May 1880 in which Ḥamīd Vehbī, the newspaper’s editor, asked “the literati of Yemen” (*Yemen udebāsı*) for assistance in collecting source material for a book he intended to write on the pre-Islamic history of Yemen and ‘Asīr<sup>25</sup>. In the same fashion, the author of the historical section of the *Yemen Sālnāmesi* of 1886-87 asked his readers for advice on how Greek coins from the Hellenistic period might have found their way to Yemen<sup>26</sup>.

In their capacity as authors and editors of government-sponsored publications, these officials were at the forefront of what Selim Deringil has called “Ottoman image management.” From these examples we get a sense of how they at the same time self-consciously portrayed themselves as scholars. The same holds true for authors like Colonel Aḥmed Rāşid or the *vilāyet mektūbcusu* ‘Abdülgañi Senī who were primarily soldiers and administrators. While both emphasized the scientific character of their works on Yemen, it was particularly the former who considered himself a member of an international scientific community and posed as explorer of a *terra incognita*<sup>27</sup>. Aḥmed Rāşid, for instance, expressed the hope that the geographical chapter of his *Tārīh-i Yemen ve*

<sup>24</sup> MAKDISI, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>25</sup> See URSINUS, “*Şan’ā’*. Eine amtliche osmanische Provinzzeitung im Jemen,” *op. cit.*, p. 175-176, 176, fn. 48, 182.

<sup>26</sup> *Yemen Sālnāmesi* 3, 1302 māl./1304 h. [1886-87], p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> According to Gilseñan, Rafīq Bey al-Tamīmī and Muḥammad Baghat Bey adopted a similar perspective in their account of the region of Akkar (in the northern part of present-day Lebanon) that was part of their book *Wilāyat Bayrūt*, published in 1916. See Michael GILSEÑAN, *Lords of the Lebanese Marches. Violence and Narrative in an Arab Society*, London, New York, 1996, p. 70-71.

Şan'ā' would advance the knowledge of the geography of Yemen on which, he stressed, even European scholars could not provide much information<sup>28</sup>. In that sense, these Ottoman officials were as much heirs to the Enlightenment as their British colleagues who set out to classify the Indian Subcontinent<sup>29</sup>. What we come across here is, thus, a type of scholar-cum-official very similar to those who played a critical role in the European projects of empire building from the late 18th century.

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EMPIRE AND ARCHAEOLOGY

It is clear from various articles published in the newspaper Şan'ā' in 1880-81 or the first issue of the *Yemen Sālnāmesi* that the authorities from the early 1880s attached particular importance to the ordering of the province's past through the instrument of archaeology. According to the *sālnāme*, published in 1880, the then governor-general, İsmā'īl Hāḳḳī Paşa, initiated the government-sponsored collection of antiquities from Ma'rib, *i.e.*, particularly from the Sabean and Himyarite periods.<sup>30</sup> The fact that the governor-general (*vālī*) used the official provincial newspaper to approach a larger audience in this regard suggests that there was, indeed, a coordinated effort to acquire these "Ma'rib antiquities" (*Ma'rib antīkaları*) for the government.

On 20 October 1880, for instance, Şan'ā' informed its readers that the government was interested in acquiring antiquities from the respective periods, and specifically fragments of inscriptions and sculptures made of stone, iron, or copper<sup>31</sup>. By the end of January 1881 the authorities apparently had bought so many inscriptions that the buying offer was limited to sculptures<sup>32</sup>. Six months later a cargo of these "Ma'rib antiquities" was already on its way to the Ottoman Museum (*'Osmānlı Müzesi*) in Istanbul<sup>33</sup>. In 1907 the Austro-Hungarian Semitist Eduard Glaser was invited to prepare a catalogue of some Sabean artifacts that

<sup>28</sup> RÂŞİD, *op. cit.*, 2, p. 276-277; see also *ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>29</sup> See Thomas R. METCALF, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge, 1994, p. 67.

<sup>30</sup> *Yemen Sālnāmesi* 1, 1298 h. [1880], p. 87.

<sup>31</sup> Şan'ā' 13, 8 Teşrîn-i evvel 1296 [20 October 1880], p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Şan'ā' 20, 14 Kānūn-i sâni 1296 [26 January 1881], p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Şan'ā' 41, 8 Temmüz 1297 [20 July 1881], p. 2. A collection of artifacts from pre-Islamic South Arabia is still on display in the Eski Şark Eserleri Müzesi, a section of Istanbul's Archaeological Museum; see Alpay PASINLI, "Eski Şark Eserleri Müzesi," in *Dünden Bugüne İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 3, p. 205-206.

the museum had recently acquired<sup>34</sup>. Judging from Glaser's diary notes on his stay in Yemen during 1883-84, by that time a lucrative trade in genuine and forged pre-Islamic antiquities had developed due to the government's acquisition policy. There was even a *Şan'ānī* merchant who specialized in dealing with these kinds of artifacts<sup>35</sup>.

As Jens Hanssen and Ussama Makdisi have shown in two recent studies on Ottoman archaeological research in the *Bilād al-Shām* during the Hamidian period, the creation of a Sabean and Himyarite collection at the Archaeological Museum in Istanbul was not an isolated scholarly project. Rather, it has to be seen—at one level—as part of a broader effort on the part of the authorities to use archaeology to underline the government's centralization policy. A key role in shaping this policy to instrumentalize archaeology for the purposes of the state was played by the painter and archaeologist 'Osmān Ḥamdī Bey<sup>36</sup>.

Of particular importance in this connection was the Antiquities Law (*Āsār-i 'Atīka Niẓāmnāmesi*), passed in 1884, in which the new representation of archaeological finds from all over the empire as Ottoman antiquities was made manifest. In laying down the guidelines that were “to ensure that archeological finds throughout the empire were registered, protected and brought to the center in Istanbul”<sup>37</sup> the Antiquities Law was to confirm in a particularly powerful way the sovereignty of the Hamidian regime over the various parts of the Ottoman Empire, including the Province of Yemen. At the same time, the law reflected a tendency towards a vision of history that we have come across in the above-mentioned historical writings on Yemen. According to this perspective, the histories of the empire's regions were to be written as parts of Ottoman history.

Equally important, as Hanssen has put it, “in the Ottoman case... archaeological finds in the Orient helped formulate an antiquity-referential claim to the Ottoman state's modernity, in a way that was common in Europe since the beginning of the nineteenth century.”<sup>38</sup> Thus,

<sup>34</sup> Walter DOSTAL, *Eduard Glaser—Forschungen im Yemen. Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung in ethnologischer Sicht*. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte 545, Veröffentlichungen der Arabischen Kommission 4, Vienna, 1990, p. 30, fn. 41.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70, 116.

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, Mustafa CEZAR, *Sanatta Batı 'ya Açılış ve Osman Hamdi Bey* [Osman Hamdi Bey and the Opening towards the West in the Arts], 2 vols., Istanbul, 1995, 1, p. 282-333.

<sup>37</sup> HANSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

very much as the French colonial rulers of Algeria made use of the local remnants of antique Roman settlements to represent themselves as successors to Rome's imperial presence in North Africa, it served the purpose of the Ottoman state to represent, among others, the pre-Islamic empires of South Arabia as its forerunners. However, what on the level of the empire as a whole may, indeed, have been a "anti-iquity-referential claim to the Ottoman state's modernity" in general was in the specific context of Yemen phrased as a claim to the state's civilizing mission.

An important aspect of this was the idea—echoing a theme of French Orientalist discourse on the Maghreb<sup>39</sup>—to raise the Province of Yemen to the level of prosperity it had supposedly enjoyed under the Himyarite rulers by rebuilding the country's ancient irrigation systems, most notably the Ma'rib High Dam. The earliest example of such a plan to bring about a "revival of Yemen" (*Yemen'in ihyāsi*) that I have come across was presented in an anonymous letter to the editor of *Şan'ā'*, published in the newspaper's issue of 10 February 1881 to which Ursinus refers<sup>40</sup>. It seems that a concrete project to rebuild the Ma'rib High Dam was formulated only several years later as a result of the expedition to Ma'rib that Eduard Glaser undertook in the Spring of 1888. While Glaser in his travel account portrayed himself as the initiator of this plan<sup>41</sup>, the Ottoman authorities in *Şan'ā'* claimed in the 1888-89 edition of the *Yemen Sālnāmesi* that the expedition had been carried out on behalf of the government. Without mentioning Glaser's name they published his respective suggestions complete with several maps<sup>42</sup>. The idea was taken up again and developed further in 1910 by 'Abdūlganī Senī who spoke in favor of rebuilding not only the Ma'rib High Dam but also

<sup>39</sup> Edward W. SAID, *Orientalism*, New York, 1979, p. 154, Patricia M. E. LORCIN, *Imperial Identities. Stereotyping, Prejudice and Race in Colonial Algeria*, London/New York, 1995, p. 21-22. In the context of British rule in India, too, we come across a "...widespread imperialist theory that Hindu India had a golden Aryan past which had declined and had to be rescued through the agency of British colonialism." See Peter VAN DER VEER, *Imperial Encounters. Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*, Princeton, N.J., 2001, p. 144.

<sup>40</sup> URSINUS, "*Şan'ā'*. Eine amtliche osmanische Provinzzeitung im Jemen," *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>41</sup> DOSTAL, *op. cit.*, p. 97. Glaser even noted that the then *Yemen vālisi*, 'Azīz Paşa, while favorably impressed by Glaser's project had considered it impractical; see *ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>42</sup> *Yemen Sālnāmesi* 5, 1304 māl./1306 h. [1888-89], p. 52-53, maps between p. 52 and 53. The maps are reprinted on Plate 32 in DOSTAL, *op. cit.*

some 24 similar structures that were believed to have existed throughout the country during the Sabean and Himyarite periods<sup>43</sup>.

What these authors sought to demonstrate by pointing to archaeological evidence was that the Province of Yemen possessed the potential to prosper enormously under Ottoman rule, the implication being that it took the Ottomans with their scientific knowledge of the country's past and their superior technical skills to accomplish this task. Both the anonymous contributor to *Şan'ā'* and the *vilāyet mektūbcusu* thirty years later were highly optimistic as to the region's potential for future economic development: They showed themselves confident that through the rebuilding of its ancient irrigation systems the province would be turned into a center of agricultural production that was able to compete with Mesopotamia, Egypt, or even India and North America<sup>44</sup>. In referring to Yemen's past to show the direction of future development both authors struck a familiar cord with their readers: as Michael Ursinus has shown, both Aḥmed Midḥat and Mīzāncı Meḥmed Murād had argued along similar lines with reference to the 'Irāqī provinces of the Ottoman Empire<sup>45</sup>.

However, 'Abdülḡanī Senī went even further. He used the reference to the country's pre-Islamic past to illustrate not only the potential of the region's agricultural but also that of its human resources. Turning the familiar Orientalist theme of the "unchanging essence of the East" on its head he argued that the local people had never lost their innate civilizational qualities that had allowed the Himyarite empire to flourish. For him, the sedentary population of the province to whom he referred as the "genuine Yemenis" (*aşıl Yemenliler*), were "the unfortunate heirs to an ancient civilization, the dispersed successors to the ancient Himyarites" (*ḡadīm bir medenīyetiñ vāris-i bī-naşībi, ḡadīm Ḥamīrīleriñ ahlāf-i müteşettitleridir*)<sup>46</sup>. In his view the domestic architecture of

<sup>43</sup> 'Abdülḡanī SENİ, "Yemen'in De'ā'im-i 'Umrānī. Tārīhī Seddler; Bunlarıñ İḡyāsı," [The Basis of Yemen's Prosperity. Re-Building the Historical Dams] *Mülkiye* 12, 1 Kānūn-i sānī 1325 [14 January 1910], p. 16-24; 16-20, 21-22.

<sup>44</sup> URSINUS, "*Şan'ā'*. Eine amtliche osmanische Provinzzeitung im Jemen," *op. cit.*, p. 180, fn. 64; Senī, "Yemen'in De'ā'im-i 'Umrānī. Tārīhī Seddler; Bunlarıñ İḡyāsı," *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>45</sup> See URSINUS, *op. cit.*, p. 180-181, Michael URSINUS, "Midhat Efendi und der alte Orient," in URSINUS, *Quellen zur Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches und ihre Interpretation*, *op. cit.*, p. 157-164, 160-162.

<sup>46</sup> SENİ, "Yemen'in De'ā'im-i 'Umrānī. Tārīhī Seddler; Bunlarıñ İḡyāsı," *op. cit.*, p. 23.

Şan‘ā’ proved this beyond any doubt: seeing these magnificent houses and not feeling like in a civilized, big European city was just impossible (*insān... o... muhteşem haneleri görüb de kendisini medenî bir Avrupa şehr-i cesiminde zann etmemesi kâbil olmaz*)<sup>47</sup>. What was needed, was the determination on the part of the state to develop this untapped and quasi dormant potential :

I have understood from many of their qualities and inclinations that they possess all sorts of civilizational capabilities. If one were to watch closely, one would see that the fire of intelligence is glimmering in the eyes of ninety-five percent of them. A flock without a shepherd, a traveler without a guide, a disciple without a teacher, a jewel without polish is waiting for someone to attend to his education and upbringing!<sup>48</sup>

Presenting the empires of pre-Islamic South Arabia as the forerunners of the Ottomans found also expression in the fact that in some of the writings on the region’s history the Sabean and Himyarite periods received disproportionately more attention than the centuries since the early decades of Islam<sup>49</sup>. Moreover, it is interesting to see that, for instance, in the historical section of the *Yemen Sâlnâmesi* of 1888-89 or in the article on Yemen in volume 6 of Şemsü l-Dîn Sâmi Bey Frâşerî’s *Ķâmüsü l-A’lâm* (published in 1898) the Qâsimî dynasty of Zaydî Imâms who put an end to the first period of Ottoman rule in Yemen in the 1630s were disparaged while the Ottoman defeat and retreat were glossed over. For example, while the *Sâlnâme* referred to the rise of the Qâsimîs, the first period of Ottoman rule—and, consequently, Ottoman defeat—were left completely unmentioned<sup>50</sup>. Şemsü l-Dîn Sâmi, in his turn, did not comment on Zaydism or the Qâsimîs explicitly and referred only to “some *shaykhs*.” At the same time, he left the reader under the impression that the Ottoman government never abandoned the province completely<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23: “Bunların her derlü kâbilîyet-i medenîyeye mâlik olduklarını bir çok ahvâl ve temâyülâtından aňladım. Zâten bir dikkât edilse, yüzde toqşan beşiniň gözlerinde âteş-i zekâ parladıđı görölür: Çobansız bir süri, rehbersiz bir yolcu, mu’allimsiz bir şâkird, perdâhsız bir cevher... terbiye ve tenmiyesine himmet bekliyor!”

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, *Yemen Sâlnâmesi* 3, 1302 mâl./1304 h. [1886-87], *Yemen Sâlnâmesi* 5, 1304 mâl./1306 h. [1888-89], Şemsü l-Dîn Sâmi Bey Frâşerî, “Yemen,” in *Ķâmüsü l-A’lâm. Dictionnaire Universel d’Histoire et de Géographie*, ed. Ş[emsü l-Dîn] Sâmi Bey Frâşerî. 6 vols., Istanbul, 1306-16 [1889-98], 6 [1316/1898], p. 4807-4810.

<sup>50</sup> *Yemen Sâlnâmesi* 5, 1304 mâl./1306 h. [1888-89], p. 48-50.

<sup>51</sup> SÂMÎ, “Yemen,” *op. cit.*, p. 4810.

The silencing of these parts of the region's history may be explained by the political situation in the *Yemen vilāyeti* from the late 1880s which was characterized by the rise of the Zaydī Imāms, with their strongholds in the northern highlands of Yemen, to the most important leaders of anti-Ottoman opposition and armed resistance<sup>52</sup>. In 1875, in the moment of victory so to speak, Aḥmed Rāšid had obviously seen no harm in writing extensively on Zaydism and even on the Ottoman defeat in the 1630s<sup>53</sup>. However, doing so at a time when *imāms* who harked back to the Qāsimī dynasty were increasingly successful in challenging Ottoman rule appears to have been inconceivable to the authors and editors of state-commissioned publications<sup>54</sup>. The new political situation from the 1880s may also explain to some extent the shift in points of reference that we have noted earlier. Whereas for Aḥmed Rāšid it made sense to celebrate the first period of Ottoman rule as Yemen's "golden age" which would be restored by the new rulers under the auspices of the *Tanzīmāt*, fifteen years later it may have appeared safer to portray the Ottomans as successors to the Sabeans and Himyarites.

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EXPLAINING LOCAL "DECLINE"

While referring to a constructed "golden age" in antiquity allowed Ottoman authors to claim that the country had an enormous potential for future development if guided by the Ottoman state, this picture, of necessity, had to be complemented by the construction of an age of decline to stress the need for civilizing Ottoman rule. It is on this point that I disagree with Jens Hanssen who maintains that "[w]hile European biblical, Middle Eastern archaeology tended to be based on Orientalist notions of the "oriental other" or the "rise and decline paradigm," the Ottoman relations to their history was more innately viewed in terms of

<sup>52</sup> For a survey of the political events of this period see, for instance, John BALDRY, "Al-Yaman and the Turkish Occupation, 1849-1914," *Arabica* 23, 1976, p. 156-196, John BALDRY, "Imām Yaḥyā and the Yamanī Uprising of 1904-1907," *Abr-Nahrain* XVIII, 1978-1979, p. 33-73, John BALDRY, "Imām Yaḥyā and the Yamanī Uprising of 1911," *Annali dell' Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli* 42, 1982, p. 425-459, Hans KRUSE, "Takfīr und Ġihād bei den Zaiditen des Jemen," *Die Welt des Islams* XXIII-XXIV, 1984, p. 424-457.

<sup>53</sup> Rāšid, *op. cit.*, 1, p. 253-257, 267-278, 279-281.

<sup>54</sup> While the *Yemen Sālnāmeleri* were published on behalf of the Ottoman authorities in Ṣan'ā', the *Kāmūsü l-A'lām* had been commissioned by the Ministry of Education (*ma'ārif nezāreti*).



historical continuity between the architectural and cultural splendor of the empire's constructed historical forerunners and the empire's late nineteenth-century revival."<sup>55</sup>

To be sure, the writings that we are concerned with here display varying degrees of elaboration in this regard. For instance, the author of the historical section of the *Yemen Sālnāmesi* of 1888-89 stated flatly that “as is recorded in the Qur’anic commentaries [*tafsīrs*] and history books” (*kutub-i tefāsir ve tevārīhde meşūr olduğu üzere*) the people of Ma’rib had fallen victim to a gigantic flood (*nūzūl-i Seyl-i ‘Arım*)<sup>56</sup>. Similarly, an advertisement in the *Servet-i Fünūn* yearbook of 1911-12 that addressed prospective investors for the Ḥudayda-Şan‘ā’ railway scheme represented the period of decline that Yemen had supposedly experienced simply as a “black hole,” declaring :

In this blessed land that for centuries has remained deprived of all means of civilization and progress the first step towards progress is made with the Ḥudayda-Şan‘ā’ railroad and the [setting up of the] harbor of Cebāne<sup>57</sup>.

However, some authors, at least, sought to explain in greater detail the demise of the ancient kingdoms of South Arabia and/or why for such a long period thereafter the region and its population had remained “outside the realm of civilization” (*dā’ire-i medeniyetden hāric*)<sup>58</sup>. According to Şemsü l-Dīn Sāmī, for instance, an already weakened Himyarite kingdom had disintegrated as a result of an Abyssinian invasion at some point during the decades before the Prophet Muḥammad was born<sup>59</sup>. The author of the *Ḳāmūsü l-A‘lām* used race as a category to classify the various peoples of the world—including those living in the Ottoman lands—and adopted in his article on India the “Aryan theory” which played a key role in British attempts to construct a history of the sub-continent<sup>60</sup>. However, it is interesting to note that he did not draw on

<sup>55</sup> HANSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>56</sup> *Yemen Sālnāmesi* 5, 1304 māl./1306 h. [1888-89], p. 47-48.

<sup>57</sup> İsmā‘il Şubḫī, ed., *Sālnāme-i Servet-i Fünūn. Üçüncü Sene. 1 Mart 1327’den 28 Şubāt 1327’ye kadar vaḳāyi’i muḥtevidir*, İstanbul, no date, inside back cover: “‘Aşırlardan beri her dürlü vesā’it-i temdīn ve teraḳḳīden mahḫrūm ḳalmış olan bu mübārek kıt‘ada ilk teraḳḳī ādımı Ḥudeyde-Şan‘ā temiryolu (ve Cebāne limāni) ile atılır.”

<sup>58</sup> Şemsü l-Dīn Sāmī Bey Frāşerī, “Ceziretü l-‘Arab,” in *Idem, Ḳāmūsü l-A‘lām*, 3 [1308/1891], p. 1806-1815, 1814.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1813-1814.

<sup>60</sup> See Sāmī, “Ceziretü l-‘Arab,” *op. cit.*, p. 1810, the section on: “Ahālisi, cinsiyet ve lisān ve mezhepleri.” [Its Population, Racial Affiliation, Language, and Confessional Groups] On the “Aryan theory” see Metcalf, *op. cit.*, p. 83-85. These notions clearly inform Sāmī’s account of the “racial affiliation” (*cinsiyet*) of the peoples of India, see

racial theory to explain cultural decline in the various parts of the Arabian Peninsula. In his view, it was due to political factors that the entire Arabian Peninsula had remained “outside the realm of civilization” even after the advent of Islam. After the death of the Caliph ‘Uthmān the center of the caliphate had been moved first to Kūfā and then to Damascus. Further, as a result of the immense territorial expansion under the early Caliphs, the majority of the local population had left the region, which had thus become “abandoned and neglected” (*metrük ve mehmel*)<sup>61</sup>. However, there is evidence that the author of the *Ḳāmūsü l-A‘lām* did not consider the Islamic period of the Arabian Peninsula in general and of Yemen in particular a period of unqualified decline. In this connection, Şemsü l-Dīn Sāmī pointed to centers of learning, such as Şan‘ā’ and Zabīd and noted in his article on Yemen that the local irrigation system and, hence, agrarian production had declined only after the “Middle Ages” (*ḳurūn-i vusṭā*)<sup>62</sup>.

Thus, while these—otherwise unspecified—Middle Ages for Şemsü l-Dīn Sāmī had at least something of a positive connotation, they represented the absolute low point of local decline for Ḥasan Ḳadrī, a former physician to the VII Imperial Army. Indeed, drawing on the European notion of the “Dark Ages,” he used the term “medieval” to describe what he perceived as the stagnant backwardness of local society. In his book *Yemen ve Ḥayātu* (*The Yemen and Its Life*) which was published in 1911-12, Ḳadrī declared with reference to the local *madrasa* education that “precisely this [form of] intellectual enslavement has left the

Şemsü l-Dīn Sāmī Bey Frāşerī, “Hind,” in *Idem, Ḳāmūsü l-A‘lām*, 6 [1316/1898], p. 4748-4758, 4754. In Ottoman journals from the late 1880s/early 1890s and the Second Constitutional Period (1908-1918) on which I did some preliminary research the term used for race is ‘ırk; what can be found, for instance, in the journals *Ma‘ārif* [Education] and *Donanma* [The Fleet] are articles that discuss various racial theories, e.g. the relation between climate and race, or that employ race as a marker of difference to represent the populations of various parts of the world; see, for instance, Reşīd, “İḳlīmīñ ‘Uruk-i Besere Te’sīr,” [The Influence of Climate on the Human Races] *Ma‘ārif* 111, 26 Ağustos 1309 [8 September 1893], p. 103-105, and *Ma‘ārif* 112, 1 Eylül 1309 [14 September 1893], p. 119-121, Köprülüzāde Mehmed Fu‘ād, “Siyāsetde ‘Irklar,” [Races in Politics] *Donanma* 2.19, Eylül 1327 [August-September 1911], p. 1709-1713, Ḥasan Şabrī, “Kongo,” *Ma‘ārif* 32, 12 Mart 1308 [25 March 1892], p. 87-89; see particularly *ibid.*, p. 89: “On this page we are presenting pictures of the types of the population of the Congo [region]. While some of them physiognomically display the features of members of the Caucasian race, others completely show the characteristics of the Black race.”

<sup>61</sup> Sāmī, “Cezāretü l-‘Arab”, *op. cit.*, p. 1814.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1811; Sāmī, “Yemen”, *op. cit.*, p. 4809.

Yemen remaining in the primitive state of the Middle Ages.”<sup>63</sup>—a view to which most European Orientalists of the time would probably have subscribed. In adrı’s view, therefore, no upward trend had interrupted the decline of culture and society in this part of the Arabian Peninsula, insisting that “bad administration, continuous banditry, and ignorance” had destroyed the energy and spirit that had enabled the local people to build a splendid civilization in antiquity<sup>64</sup>.

Like adrı, ‘Abdlganı Senı, too, drew a picture of uninterrupted decline: local society had steadily descended the civilizational hierarchy towards the state of Bedouin life, which for the *Tanzmat* bureaucrats and intellectuals represented mere barbarism and primitivity<sup>65</sup>. However, in marked contrast to the authors with whom we have dealt so far the *vilyet mektbcusu* in his article “avnn-i Sbite-i ctim’ıye Nokta-i Nazarından Yemenliler Haında Tedkkt” (Studying the Yemenis in the Light of Established Sociological Principles) used racial theory to explain the nature of the decline of local society since antiquity. According to ‘Abdlganı, the demise of the Himyarites was essentially due to racial decline: On the one hand, the “Yemenis” had eventually mixed with the Abyssinian invaders, and through the emergence of a new race they had become incapable of preserving their old social spirit. The strength of the bonds of their civilization had been weakened, and the vigorous spirit of their society had been destroyed<sup>66</sup>. On the other hand, the local people had also been arabicized through mixing with Hijzı Arabs and, in the process, had adopted the “social defects” (*maraz-i ictim’ıye*) of the “Arab race.” Among these, ‘Abdlganı mentioned the lack of “social spirit” (*fikr-i ictim’ı*) and of the “balance of ethnic unity” (*heng-i ittihd-i avm*)<sup>67</sup>. It was as a result of these “defects,” the *vilyet mektbcusu* argued, that throughout the history of the Arab peoples (*avm-i ‘arabye*) there had never existed the possibility of a “stable political life” (*ayt-i sbite-i siysiye*) developing from among them. Instead, their history was characterized by profound fragmentation

<sup>63</sup> Hasan ADRı, *Yemen ve Hayt*, [Yemen and Its Life] Dersa’det, 1328 [1911-12], p. 96-97: “ıte bu esret-i fikrye hayt-i Yemeni krn-i vusadaki reng-i ibtid’ıyesinde muırr ve mstemir biramıřtır. ‘Ulm ve fnnn bulunmadı yerde servet ve sa’det nařil aranır!”

<sup>64</sup> ADRı, *op. cit.*, p. 110-111.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Abdlganı Senı, “avnn-i Sbite-i ctim’ıye Nokta-i Nazarından Yemenliler Haında Tedkkt,” *Mlkiye* 15, 1 Nisn 1326 [14 April 1910], p. 33-56, 41.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42-43.

into tribes and by permanent internal rivalries<sup>68</sup>. As a consequence, the Himyarites and their civilization had disappeared by the time Islam emerged on the Arabian Peninsula. Indeed, ‘Abdūlganī considered the decline of the Himyarites so dramatic that “even the spreading of the light of Islam could not rescue them [*i.e.*, the local population] from that darkness [of ignorance] and restore the old splendor of prosperity, it just saved them from being astray in terms of belief.”<sup>69</sup>

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“ORIENTAL DESPOTISM”

Another theme on which some of our authors drew to explain the “backwardness” of the local population and, hence, the need for Ottoman intervention was clearly derived from the concept of “Oriental despotism” that had been an important element of how European observers since the 17th century represented the political systems of the Middle East, South and East Asia<sup>70</sup>. However, what we come across in some of the texts we are concerned with here brings to mind not so much the concept of despotism as a *system* of rule—popularized particularly by Montesquieu—but rather a notion of despotism that was formulated by Volney, namely a specific *practice* of arbitrary rule that inhibits progress<sup>71</sup>. A case in point is Ḥamīd Vehbī’s remark that it was due to the tyranny of the Zaydī Imāms that for centuries, until the advent of Ottoman rule in the 1870s, the people of Yemen had been confined to a life centered on the world of tribe and village, cut off from any contacts with the outside world<sup>72</sup>. Similarly, in 1901 the then governor-general of the *Yemen vilāyeti*, Hüseyin Hilmī Paşa, insisted that “remaining under the rule and subjugation of the imāms and other tyrants until thirty years ago” had ruined the country morally and materially<sup>73</sup>. Thus, the

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42-43.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39-40: “... o kadar olmuştu ki nūr-i islāmīyeteñ bu noktada intişarı bile bunları o zulmetden kırtarub eski nūrānīyet-i ma’mūrīyeti bahş edemedi; yalnız onları dālalet-i i’tikādīyeden kırtarmış oldu.”

<sup>70</sup> For the genealogy of this concept see Jürgen OSTERHAMMEL, *Die Entzauberung Asiens. Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert*, Munich, 1998, p. 271-309.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305, 307, 308.

<sup>72</sup> URSINUS, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>73</sup> Hüseyin Hilmī Paşa’s *lāyiha* of 17 Rebī’ü l-ewvel 1319/20 Ḥazīrān 1317 [4 July 1901], in ‘Ātif Paşa, *Yemen Tārīhi*, Istanbul, 1326 [1910-11]), p. 211-228; 216-217: “... hıttā-i yemānīye... otuz sene evvele gelinceye kadar e’imme ile diğēr zālemenīñ eyādī-i tağallüb ve қаһrında қаларақ magnen [sic!] ve mādđeten harāb olduğı...” Cf. Aḥmed Rāşid’s remark on Qāsimī rule in Yemen after the Ottoman withdrawal in 1635; Rāşid,

backwardness of the local population was not attributed to some sort of innate, immutable condition but to the specific kind of rule that had prevailed throughout the region<sup>74</sup>.

Not surprisingly, Hüseyin Hilmî represented this “tyranny” as exactly the opposite of his idea of Ottoman rule. The latter was characterized by a just administration (*idāre-i ‘ādile*) which was geared to discipline and progress, and took care to reduce—as far as possible—the “savageness and primitivity of the population” (*ahālîniñ vahşet ve bedevîyeti*) and to put the affairs of the country on a firm and secure track<sup>75</sup>. What is reflected in these lines is the dichotomy of disinterested, bureaucratic government and “the rule of law” as opposed to arbitrary rule which was guided by the personal interests of the ruler alone.

However, it was not only the Zaydî Imāms but also the local “tribal” leaders that were represented along these lines throughout the period under study. In particular, officials who wrote on Yemen during the Second Constitutional Period argued that this tyranny had not ceased with the advent of Ottoman rule but persisted in the way tribal leaders ruled over their people. For Hasan Kadri, for instance, these *shaykhs* were to blame for the destruction of all civilization in Yemen because of personal ambition and greed they were constantly leading their tribes to war against their rivals<sup>76</sup>. Similarly, absolute, unchecked power was the feature that was perhaps most prominent in the way Ottoman authors portrayed these local elite figures. According to Mahmūd Nedîm—who served as district governor (*mutaşarrıf*) of Malatya during the late 1890s—the local people were essentially the slaves of the *shaykhs*, a state that he described as “totally opposed to what is approved of by God and the Pādîşāh.”<sup>77</sup> ‘Abdülganî Senî, in turn, described what he saw as the “despotism” (*istibdād*) of the *shaykhs* as follows:

*op. cit.*, 1, p. 257: “Bundan sonra hükümet-i yemāniye bir takım imāmlarıñ yed-i tagalübüne geçüb bir hāl-i teferruk ve teşettütte bulundu.” Cf. Volney’s remarks on Ottoman rule in the Bilād al-Shām as quoted by OSTERHAMMEL, *op. cit.*, p. 305: “la foule des habitants y est soumise aux volontés d’une faction d’hommes armés, qui disposent de tout selon leur intérêt et leur gré.”

<sup>74</sup> The same topos was used almost four decades later by Tamîmî and Baghat in their book *Wilāyat Bayrūt*; see GILSENAN, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

<sup>75</sup> HILMÎ, *lāyiha* of 17 Rebî’ü l-evvel 1319/20 Hızîrân 1317, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

<sup>76</sup> KADRİ, *op. cit.*, p. 30-31.

<sup>77</sup> Başbakanlık Arşivi-Osmanlı Arşivi [Ottoman Archives section at the Prime Ministry Archives], Istanbul, hereafter cited as BBA-OA]/Yıldız Esas Evrakı [= YEE] 8-26, *lāyiha*, Malatya mutaşarrıfı Mahmūd Nedîm [no date; year given on the seal: 1311], p. 3: “... zavallı ahālî meşāyih elinde esārât-i muṭlaqa hālinde yaşayub bu ise rızâ-yi bâri ve pādîşāhiye kāmilen mugâyirdir...”

... this man passes judgement, he executes his decision without asking for authorization and [without permitting any] appeal, he is not accountable to anyone<sup>78</sup>.

Most of the above-mentioned authors were convinced that the ignorance (*cehālet*) of the local population was one of the factors that kept these local leaders in power<sup>79</sup>. It was in keeping with the credo of progress and modernization, which more often than not shaped the worldview of the representatives of bureaucratic states in general during this period. Following this logic, the local people were little more than naive minors who were manipulated and led astray at will by their *shaykhs* and *imāms*.

Clearly, these representations of “the old order” that the Ottomans hoped to replace in Yemen displayed elements of Volney’s perspective on local rulers in the Ottoman Bilād al-Shām or of the way in which British historians of the late 18th century viewed, for instance, Tipu Sultan of Mysore<sup>80</sup>. However, it is necessary to emphasize that they were, at the same time, informed by earlier Ottoman elite perspectives according to which any local opponents of the imperial government were simply “usurpers” (*mütegalibe*) or “bandits” (*eşkıyā*)<sup>81</sup>.

From the picture of a country torn apart by the rivalries of tribal leaders it was only a small step towards representing the region before the advent of Ottoman rule as being in a state of total anarchy as did the then governor-general Muṣṭafā ‘Āşım Paşa and senior officials of his staff in May 1878. Since the expertise of the legal scholars (*fuqahā*) and tribal arbitration had proven inadequate in dealing with local conflicts, they emphasized in a memorandum for the Council of State (*Şūrā-yi Devlet*), chaos had prevailed and everyone had been constantly at war with his

<sup>78</sup> ‘Abdūlganī SENİ, “Yemen’de Haṭı’āt-i İdāre—İşkālī, Netāyıcı, Taşhīhi —,” [The Forms, Results, and Rectification of Administrative Mistakes in Yemen] *Mülkiye* 9, 1 Teşrîn-i evvel 1325 [14 October 1909], p. 46-58; 53-54: “... bu ādam ḥüküm veriyor, bilā istifzān ve istināf hemān icrā ediyor, kimseye qarşı ḥesāb vermekle mükellef değıl...”

<sup>79</sup> See, for instance, RĀŞİD, *op. cit.*, 2, p. 350, KĀDRİ, *op. cit.*, p. 111-112, SENİ, “Yemen’İN Necāt ve Selāmeti. İḥyā-yi Ma’ārif,” *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>80</sup> OSTERHAMMEL, *op. cit.*, p. 229, 308-309.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Hulusi YAVUZ, *Kābe ve Haremeyn için Yemen’de Osmanlı Hākimiyyeti (1517-1571)* [For the Ka’ba and the Holy Sites: Ottoman Rule in Yemen (1517-1571)], İstanbul, 1984 who quotes Ottoman government correspondence from the 1560s/1570s in which local opponents of the imperial troops are represented as “bandits,” see *ibid.*, p. 93, 102, 103, 110. The 19<sup>th</sup> century jurist and historian Aḥmed Cevdet Paşa would use the same terminology; see NEUMANN, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

neighbors<sup>82</sup>. Thus, the *vālī* and his staff attributed the “chaos” out of which the Ottoman authorities had to bring order, not to the arbitrary rule of local leaders who led their “ignorant” followers astray, but to the fact that people’s custom (*ādet*)—most notably in the form of blood feuds—had triumphed over law.

What the authors of the memorandum had implied was stated explicitly in an article that was published in *Şan’ā*’ on 2 October 1881. The “triumph of custom over law” (*‘ādetiñ kânūna galebesi*), so the author of the article argued, was a feature of some civilizations “that had fallen behind on the path of civilization” (*tarīk-i medenīyetde gerü kalmış*)<sup>83</sup>. Nowhere, he insisted, was this phenomenon more prominent than in Yemen. As one of its manifestations he considered that people took justice directly into their own hands, which he condemned as “part of the primitive manners of the Yemenis” (*Yemenlileriñ eṭvār-i bedāv-etkārāneleri cümlesinden*)<sup>84</sup>. It is important to note that local historians viewed the period of internal conflict following the disintegration of the Qāsīmī state in the mid-nineteenth century in very similar terms, referring to it as the “time of corruption” (*ayyām al-fasād*)<sup>85</sup>. However, as we have seen, Ottoman accounts took these phenomena of factional conflict and political instability out of their specific historical context and represented them as characteristics of local society in general during the entire period prior to the re-establishment of Ottoman rule.

Thus, while these authors provided different explanations for what they regarded as the cultural decline that the local people had experienced at some point in the past, their accounts had essential characteristics in common. For instance, they shared the notion that decline had led to a state of changeless backwardness in which local society had remained fixed for centuries until the advent of Ottoman rule. In other words, very much like European imperialists they showed a strong tendency to de-historicize the past of the conquered<sup>86</sup>. Moreover, they all suggested that as a result of this decline the population of the *Yemen vilāyeti* occupied a culturally inferior position *vis-à-vis*, and were there-

<sup>82</sup> BBA-OA/Şura-yi Devlet Belgeleri [= ŞD] 2254-5, doc. 3, p. 1: “... bu esbābdan nāşī olmak üzere bir kabīle diğēr kabīle bir çariye diğēr çariye ile bir çariye içinde bir hāne halkı koñşusu bulunan diğēr hāne halkı ile çarb-i dā’imī hālindedir bulnır idi...”

<sup>83</sup> *Şan’ā*’ 52 [?], 20 [?] Eylöl 1297 [2 October 1881], p. 1.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> See DRESCH, *op. cit.*, 4.

<sup>86</sup> See, for instance, Gyanendra PANDEY, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Delhi, 1992, p. 24, 45-46.

fore different from, the soldiers and administrators from outside the province.

While our authors drew on various elements of Orientalist discourse to construct this difference, those among them who elaborated further on how the indigenous population was to fit into the social and political structures of the empire do not appear to have adopted the Orientalist notion of permanent difference<sup>87</sup>. Savages though they were in the eyes of these bureaucrats and intellectuals, the local people were not denied the civilizational potential of eventually reaching—with the civilizing mission of the state accomplished—the cultural level possessed by their conquerors. What these officials meant by civilizing was forging a population of loyal Ottoman citizens through the disciplining techniques of the modern state<sup>88</sup>. To be sure, the explanations they provided for local decline were not free from contradictions. For instance, ‘Abdūlganī’s assertion, that in the course of racial decline the local people had completely lost the civilizational qualities of the “ancient Yemenis,” coexisted uneasily with his view that the old spirit of the Himyarites continued to be alive in the province’s sedentary population. Similarly, the *vilāyet mektūbcusu* did not explain why in his view the “social defects” of the local population, although deemed biologically determined, could be overcome through state education *à l’ottomane*<sup>89</sup>.

What we also observe in these writings is a changing attitude towards Islam and Arab-Islamic culture in connection with perspectives on the region’s past. While Nāmıķ Kemāl had seen the prominent place that Arabs had once held in the cultural life of the Islamic world as the precondition for a successful integration of Yemen into the Ottoman Empire, it was from the 1880s that Ottoman authors tended to disparage elements of local Islamic learning as “backward” or “medieval.” Among these authors it was ‘Abdūlganī who was most explicit in considering the Islamic period part of what he perceived as the region’s age

<sup>87</sup> SAID, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

<sup>88</sup> For a detailed analysis of how the meaning of citizenship was defined and contested in the Ottoman context see Ariel SALZMANN, “Citizens in Search of a State: The Limits of Political Participation in the Late Ottoman Empire,” in *Extending Citizenship, Reconfiguring States*, ed. Michael HANAGAN and Charles TILLY, Boulder/New York, 1999, p. 37-66. See also DERİNGİL, *op. cit.*, p. 44-45, 46.

<sup>89</sup> This contradiction brings to mind what Peter van der Veer with regard to the British imperial context has called “... the major moral dilemma of the period, the contradiction between the idea of progressive improvement and the idea of innate, unchangeable mental and physical endowments inherent in race.” See VAN DER VEER, *op. cit.*, p. 147.



of decline. More than any of them he had developed a vision of Yemen's past that acknowledged the common religious bonds between the conquerors and the local population but insisted unambiguously on the cultural inferiority of the latter.

There is evidence that a very similar perspective already informed approaches of the Hamidian regime towards governing Yemen. While towards the local population officials made a consistent effort to represent the Ottoman presence as legitimate Islamic rule that upheld the *sharī'a*<sup>90</sup>, it is clear from government correspondence that they viewed this effort as an attempt to appear legitimate to the "uncivilized."<sup>91</sup> And yet, alongside this perspective we find another one whereby turning the indigenous people into good Muslims was an important part of the government's civilizing mission<sup>92</sup>.

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#### ESTABLISHING COLONIAL RULE ?

It was only at first sight that 'Abdülganī Senī subscribed to the idea of Ottomanization in the same way as, for instance, Nāmīk Kemāl, Aḥmed Rāşid, Ḥamīd Vehbī, or Ḥasan Qadrī. A closer look at some of the articles that he wrote on the *Yemen vilāyeti* for *Mülkiye* reveals that he assumed that the process of "civilizing" the locals would take at least another hundred years<sup>93</sup>. In the meantime, so 'Abdülganī's argument went, the population of the Province of Yemen could not be ruled like the people in the more "developed" parts of the empire due to its inferior cultural status, which he saw as the result of a specific historical development. In support of his argument the *vilāyet mektūbcusu* quoted

<sup>90</sup> See Brinkley MESSICK, *The Calligraphic State. Textual Domination and History in a Muslim Society*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1993, p. 50.

<sup>91</sup> For instance, this is clear from various articles in *Şan'ā'* and government correspondence on the issue why the government in the 1880s scaled down and eventually abolished the *niẓāmīye* courts in Yemen in favor of *sharī'a* courts; see, for instance, "Yemen Qavānīn-i 'Atīka ve Cedīdesi," *Şan'ā'* 40, 1 Temmūz 1297 [13 July 1881], 1-2, 2; İhsan Süreyya SİRMA, *Osmanlı Devletinin Yıkılışında Yemen İsyancıları* [The Uprisings in Yemen within the Context of the Demise of the Ottoman State], Konya, no date, p. 219, quoting BBA-OA/İrade-Dahiliye [= İD] 84941, 23 Mayıs 1304 [4 June 1888].

<sup>92</sup> See, for instance, Rāşid, *op. cit.*, 2, p. 252-256. BBA-OA/YEE 8-20, doc. 2; memorandum drawn up by Divisional General (*ferīk*) Ferīd Paşa [no date, date given on the seal: 1322].

<sup>93</sup> SENİ, "Yemen'de Hatı'at-i İdāre—İşkālī, Netāyıcı, Taşhīhi —," *op. cit.*, 55. See also Klaus KREISER, "Abdülganī Senī—ein aufgeklärter Imperialist im Jemen (1909-1910)," *Jemen-Report* 14.1, 1989, p. 11-15, 12.

a statement by Gustave Le Bon whereby the kind of rule that the King of Dahomey exerted was perfect for his subjects whereas the “most excellent” European constitutional regime would be totally inappropriate<sup>94</sup>. Applying this observation to the case of Ottoman Yemen, ‘Abdülğanî insisted that it would be ridiculous to treat in the same way the people of Rumelia or Anatolia and the Yemeni tribes who had been ruled by their *shaykhs* “for thousands of years” (*biñlerce seneden beri*)<sup>95</sup>. Therefore, he suggested that Ottoman Yemen should not be governed as a province on the same footing as the *vilâyets* of Bursa, Konya, or Syria but rather as a colony (*müstemleke*) like French Algeria or British India<sup>96</sup>.

Thus, in marked contrast to the above-mentioned authors ‘Abdülğanî Senî used the notion of local decline as the basis on which to argue for the creation of a kind of rule in Yemen that would for the foreseeable future be centered on the formalization of perceived difference. In so doing, however, he qualified significantly the notion of the equality of all citizens, which—albeit subject to ongoing debate—began to take shape as one of the central concepts of Ottoman political imagination after the *Tanzîmât*<sup>97</sup>. While the *vilâyet mektûbcusu* claimed this concept of ruling in accordance with the “natural dispositions” or the “racial inclinations” (*temâyülât-i ‘ırķīye*) of the local population to be a major departure from the administrative practices in the *Yemen vilâyeti* under the Hamidian regime<sup>98</sup>, preliminary research on the Ottoman presence in Yemen before 1908 suggests that these assertions should be viewed as questionable. Indeed, an argument very similar to the one formulated by

<sup>94</sup> SENİ, “Yemen’de Haṭı’ât-i İdâre—İşkâli, Netâyici, Taşhîhi —,” *op. cit.*, p. 46-47. On Gustave Le Bon and his writings see also Henri LAURENS, *Le Royaume Impossible. La France et la Genèse du Monde Arabe*, Paris, 1990, p. 162-163; on the considerable influence of Le Bon’s writings on the political thought of the Young Turks see M. Şükrü HANIOĞLU, *The Young Turks in Opposition*, Oxford, 1995, p. 22-23, 205-212, 214.

<sup>95</sup> SENİ, “Yemen’de Haṭı’ât-i İdâre—İşkâli, Netâyici, Taşhîhi —,” *op. cit.*, p. 53-54.

<sup>96</sup> ‘Abdülğanî SENİ, “Her Vâlîniñ Derece-i Şalâhiyeti bir mi Olmalıdır?” [Should Every Governor-General be Invested with the Same Degree of Authority?] *Mülkîye* 12, 1 Kânûn-i sâni 1325 [14 January 1910], p. 34-38, 38; see also KREISER, *op. cit.*, p. 14; however, in an earlier article ‘Abdülğanî had made it clear that he was not speaking in favor of simply copying British and French administrative practices in India and Algeria, see Senî, *Haṭı’ât*, p. 56-57.

<sup>97</sup> See MAKDISI, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>98</sup> SENİ, “Yemen’de Haṭı’ât-i İdâre—İşkâli, Netâyici, Taşhîhi —,” *op. cit.*, p. 46-47; see also ‘Abdülğanî Senî, “Yine Yemen’iñ Huşûşiyât-i Aḥvâlinden,” [Again on the Particular Conditions Prevailing in Yemen] *Mülkîye* 13, 1 Şubât 1325 [14 February 1910], p. 57-64.

'Abdülganî can already be found in a series of articles from *Şan'ā'* and in government correspondence from the early 1880s onward that dealt with the issue of why two key elements of the *Tanzîmât* state, the new judicial system with the secular *nizâmîye* courts and conscription, had to be abolished or could not be introduced in the Province of Yemen<sup>99</sup>.

For example, according to an article that was published in *Şan'ā'* on 1 Temmüz 1297/13 July 1881 efforts to introduce the *nizâmîye* court system had failed because it had turned out to be incompatible with the "local disposition and nature" (*mizâc ve tabî'at-i mahallîye*). As a result, the Ottoman judicial system in Yemen had been modified "according to the dispositions and customs of the population" (*emzice ve 'ādât-i halka taṭbîḳan*). The issue of introducing these legal structures and regulations in their entirety, however, had been postponed until a time when the local people might "genuinely partake of the lights of civilization."<sup>100</sup> Thus, while the author of this article did not speak in favor of ruling the Province of Yemen as a colony, he clearly argued that perceived difference was to be formalized through the creation of administrative structures that deviated from supposedly uniform, empire-wide standards. Although in these documents the supposed inferiority of the local population is not explicitly framed as the outcome of decline, the way in which it is represented is clearly informed by the concepts of a civilizational hierarchy and a changeless society which since "ancient times" is shaped by certain customs and traditions.

There is evidence that Ottoman officials did not hold these views right from the beginning of the Ottoman presence in Yemen but that

<sup>99</sup> See, for instance, SİRMA, *op. cit.*, p. 219, quoting BBA-OA/İD 84941, 23 Mayıs 1304 [4 June 1888]; BBA-OA/Mütenevvî Maruzat Evrakı [= Y.Mtv.] 46-119; memorandum, commission of general military inspection (*teftîş-i 'umûmî-i 'askerî komisyonu*), 19 Teşrîn-i sâni 1306 [1 December 1890], [referring to a *lâyiha* drawn up by the "former governor-general of Yemen, Field-Marshal 'Osmân Paşa," *ibid.*, p. 6] p. 7; BBA-OA/ŞD 2264-32, doc. 10, governor-general of Yemen (*Yemen vâlisî*) and reform committee (*hey'et-i işlâhîye*) to Grand Vizier, 21 Teşrîn-i evvel 1314 [3 November 1898]. For problems concerning the introduction of conscription see, for instance, BBA-OA/Y.Mtv. 17-16, docs. 1 and 2, General Staff to Palace, 21 Rebî'ü l-ahir 1302 [7 February 1885]; BBA-OA/Y.Mtv. 46-119, commission of general military inspection to Palace, 19 Teşrîn-i sâni 1306 [1 November 1890], p. 4; BBA-OA/Y.Mtv. 208-150, doc. 2; Ministry of War to Commander-in-Chief, VII Imperial Army (*Şan'ā'*), 7 Teşrîn-i sâni 1316/27 Receb 1318 [21 November 1900].

<sup>100</sup> "Yemen Kavânîn-i 'Atîka ve Cedîdesi," *Şan'ā'* 40, 1 Temmüz 1297 [13 July 1881], 1-2, 2: "...mahâkim-i nizâmîye teşkilâtına teşebbüs maddesi ilerüde ahâlîniñ refte refte envâr-i medenîyetden lâyiḳi vechile behreyâb olacaḳları zamâna ta'lik olınış..."

these were the product of local opposition. It seems that the administrators who created the Province of Yemen in 1872 assumed that the goal of Ottomanization would be accomplished at a not too distant point in the future. The expectation that perceived difference would soon disappear is reflected by the fact that in the newly conquered *vilāyet* all of those administrative structures and institutions were created that—at least theoretically—were to be found in every other province of the empire. Thus, there was quite obviously no intention to formalize difference through the creation of specific governmental structures. In Jon Mandaville’s words “Yemen was to be as much a part of that state as the provinces of Syria, Bursa, Adrianople or Tuna.”<sup>101</sup> In allowing the province to be represented by two MPs in the Parliament of 1876-78, the Imperial Government signaled once more its intention to treat the population of the new province on the same footing with the other peoples of the Ottoman Empire<sup>102</sup>. Similarly, whereas Aḥmed Rāšid in his *Tārīh-i Yemen ve Şan‘ā* expressed the view that “knowing the natives”—as British colonialist jargon would have had it—was an essential precondition for ruling the new province successfully, he did not speak in favor of adapting administrative structures and practices to local conditions<sup>103</sup>. However, as we have seen, it was from the late 1870s that the new rulers appear to have suffered setbacks in their endeavor to remake local society, and for some post-1908 observers like ‘Abdūlganī Senī the imperial involvement in this part of the Arabian Peninsula during the reign of ‘Abdūlḥamīd II (1876-1909) was an utter failure. These officials clearly wrote under the impact of a series of large-scale uprisings in the northern highlands and in ‘Asīr between 1891 and 1907<sup>104</sup>. Thus, to some extent, at least, the Ottoman experience in Yemen followed a trajectory remarkably similar to the one Frederick Cooper has observed in the case of the British and French dependencies in Africa :

Imperial conquerors began by thinking they could remake African society and rationalize the exploitation of the continent; by World War I, they were largely frustrated in such endeavors and began to make—through

<sup>101</sup> Jon MANDAVILLE, “Memduh Pasha and Aziz Bey: Ottoman Experience in Yemen,” in *Contemporary Yemen: Politics and Historical Background*, ed. B.R. PRIDHAM, London/Sydney, 1984, p. 20-33, 21.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21, 23.

<sup>103</sup> Rāšid, *op. cit.*, 2, p. 350, 354.

<sup>104</sup> The most important of these uprisings were led by he Zaydī Imāms al-Manšūr (d. 1904) and Yaḥyā (d. 1948).

policies of “indirect rule” and “association”—their failures sound like a policy of conserving African society and culture.<sup>105</sup>

And yet, this interpretation still leaves us with the problem of how to explain why those Ottoman administrators during the 1880s/1890s or ‘Abdülganī Senī in 1909-10 regarded the rule of difference they advocated for the *Yemen vilāyeti* as only temporary. A tentative explanation might be that the commitment to Ottomanization and, in this connection, to progress was such a central part of government policy at a time of growing pressure from without and from within that abandoning this idea completely from the point of view of the bureaucratic elite of the time probably would have meant disavowing the empire altogether. Exploring more fully these tensions of empire that were generated by the effort of the Ottoman state to tighten its grip over the imperial borderlands is one of the desiderata of future research on Ottoman Yemen. By 1911, however, some observers of Ottoman rule in Yemen apparently were no longer restrained by these thoughts. For instance, both the former Grand Vizier Sa‘īd Paşa in his memoirs and the *Servet-i Fünūn Sālnāmesi* of 1911-12 suggested that the *Yemen vilāyeti* should be administered along the lines of indirect rule *à l’anglaise* without including the proviso that this arrangement, which was explicitly labeled as colonial, should be of a temporary nature<sup>106</sup>.

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#### CONCLUSION: THE EMERGENCE OF COLONIAL OTTOMANISM

I have demonstrated how for Ottoman bureaucrats and intellectuals of the Hamidian and Second Constitutional Periods history played a critical role within the broader effort to legitimize the imperial presence in the Province of Yemen, which turned out to be the last substantial territorial acquisition in the history of the Ottoman Empire. While Ottoman officials represented the imperial bid for domination over this south-western part of the Arabian Peninsula as a civilizing mission, the guidance they claimed to provide for a population whom they perceived as backward was—in Uday Mehta’s words—“historically sanctioned.”<sup>107</sup> With their commitment to progress and in posing as liberators who would res-

<sup>105</sup> Frederick COOPER, “Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History,” *American Historical Review* 99.5, 1994, p. 1516-1545, 1531.

<sup>106</sup> Sa‘īd Paşa, *Sa‘īd Paşa’nın Hâṭıratı*, [Memoirs of Sa‘īd Paşa] 2 vols., Dersa‘âdet, 1328 [1911-12], 1, p. 369-371; İsmâ‘il Şubhî, *Sālnāme-i Servet-i Fünūn*, p. 415.

<sup>107</sup> MEHTA, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

cue the local people from the shackles of backwardness our authors to a significant degree shared the rhetoric of liberal imperialists like Condorcet, J.S. Mill, or James Mill<sup>108</sup>. Indeed, Mehta's observation concerning the perspective of early nineteenth-century British liberals on India also applies to the context of Ottoman Yemen before World War I. As Mehta writes :

By the nineteenth century every major justification of the raj rests on the dual props of progress for India and a history that makes evident the need for such progress, along with the accompanying claim that such progress can be brought about only through the political interdictions of empire<sup>109</sup>.

However, in marked contrast to what James Mill, for instance, argued with reference to India, the Ottoman authorities that set up the Province of Yemen in the 1870s did not exclude the local people from representative government in the context of the First Constitutional Period even though they considered them backward. It was only from the early 1880s, most probably as a result of mounting opposition to Ottoman rule, that officials adopted an argument of liberals like Mill whereby the "backward" could not be ruled like the "civilized" in other parts of the empire until government-sponsored "reform" had moved them up the civilizational hierarchy<sup>110</sup>. While it was only during the Second Constitutional Period that this argument was phrased as a call for ruling Ottoman Yemen as a colony, there is evidence that the Ottoman authorities in Yemen from the 1880s began to create governmental structures that formalized and reproduced perceived difference<sup>111</sup>.

<sup>108</sup> OSTERHAMMEL, *op. cit.*, p. 400-401, MEHTA, *op. cit.*, p. 77-114.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>111</sup> It is important to note that differentiating politics could be observed throughout the empire. In this connection see particularly Huri İslamoğlu's recent work on the application of the 1858 Land Code which demonstrates this with regard to the empire's Balkan provinces; see Huri İSLAMOĞLU, "Property as Contested Domain: A Reevaluation of the Ottoman Land Code of 1858," in *New Perspectives on Property and Land in the Middle East*, ed. Roger OWEN, Cambridge, Mass., 2000, p. 3-61, particularly p. 35-39. However, I have shown elsewhere that what distinguished the political dynamics of imperial borderlands, such as Yemen from those in areas under tighter government control (for instance, parts of Anatolia and parts of the Bilād al-Shām) was that a much higher degree of deviation from supposedly empire-wide standards coincided with a perspective that represented local society as backward and primitive; see Thomas KÜHN, "Clothing the "Uncivilized": Military Recruitment in Ottoman Yemen and the Quest for "Native" Uniforms, 1880-1914," in *Costume and Identity in the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Suraiya FAROQHI and Christoph K. NEUMANN, Istanbul (forthcoming).

Thus, when faced with a population that seemed to the officials from Istanbul to be resistant to being uplifted to the heights of Ottoman civilization, Ottomanism turned out to be adaptable enough to accommodate forms and elements of colonial rule<sup>112</sup>. Recent works by Alice Conklin and Elizabeth Thompson on French colonial rule in West Africa and in the Bilād al-Shām<sup>113</sup> cautions us against a simple dichotomy of subject versus citizen, drawing our attention to nuances and intermediate categories, such as republican subjects, or colonial citizens. Similarly, Austin Lee Jersild has shown that colonial rule and citizenship were not mutually exclusive concepts in the context of Tsarist rule over the Russian empire's central Asian borderlands<sup>114</sup>. With this in view, the creation of difference as an element of rule over the peoples of the *Yemen vilāyeti* who were at the same time recognized as Ottoman citizens suggests that what we are dealing with is something that I would term "colonial Ottomanism."

It appears, for reasons that require further research, that some Ottoman observers abandoned the objective of Ottomanization on the eve of World War I and spoke in favor of ruling Yemen permanently as a colony. However, we have seen that earlier perspectives on Yemen persisted and that the same historical constructs served to sustain different visions of empire until the very end of the period under study. This suggests that a prominent feature of Ottoman political thought during these decades was indeed "an official nationalism ultimately unsure of its orientation,"<sup>115</sup> oscillating between a conception that pointed towards imagining the empire as a community of citizens and another that could accommodate forms of colonial rule over some of the empire's borderlands.

<sup>112</sup> However, it is important to note that not only local opposition but also the competition with other imperial powers in the Red Sea region, most notably Great Britain and Italy, played an important role in shaping Ottoman perspectives on governing Yemen. While the Ottoman government and its agents found it difficult to establish control over south-west Arabia, the British and Italian colonization of the Sudan, Eritrea and Aden and its hinterland appeared to be successful; see Thomas KÜHN, "Ordering Urban Space in Ottoman Yemen, 1872-1914," in *Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, ed. Jens HANSEN, Thomas PHILIPP, and Stefan WEBER, Würzburg (forthcoming).

<sup>113</sup> See Alice CONKLIN, *A Mission to Civilize. The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930*, Stanford, California, 1997, p. 73-106. Elizabeth THOMPSON, *Colonial Citizens. Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, New York/Chichester, West Sussex, 2000, p. 1-2.

<sup>114</sup> See Austin Lee JERSILD, "From Savagery to Citizenship: Caucasian Mountaineers and Muslims in the Russian Empire," in BROWER and LAZZERINI, *op. cit.*, p. 101-114, 110-111.

<sup>115</sup> MAKDISI, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

Thomas KÜHN, *Ordering the Past of Ottoman Yemen, 1872-1914*

This article explores Ottoman perspectives on the conquest and administration of Yemen between 1872 and 1914 within the larger context of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century imperialism and colonial rule. More specifically, it argues that Ottoman bureaucrats and intellectuals sought to legitimate the subjugation of the local people by employing discursive practices that, albeit very similar to those used by contemporary European and Japanese imperialists, clearly reflected the specificities of the Ottoman context. It was particularly by deploying Orientalist conceptions, such as cultural decline and despotic rule that the Ottomans ordered the past of south west Arabia in a way that was to provide evidence for the need for “civilizing” Ottoman rule and, eventually, for the elaboration of a specifically Ottoman form of colonial difference.

Thomas KÜHN, *Ordonner le passé du Yémen ottoman, 1872-1914*

En analysant comment les bureaucrates et les intellectuels ottomans ont tenté de justifier la conquête et l’occupation des régions d’Arabie du Sud administrées en tant que province du Yémen à partir de 1872, cet article porte sur un aspect-clé de l’histoire socio-culturelle de la présence ottomane dans cette partie du monde arabe. En envisageant le passé de l’Arabie du Sud comme un âge sombre dominé par un profond « déclin culturel », le « despotisme » des leaders locaux ou des guerres civiles quasi permanentes, des fonctionnaires impériaux ont légitimé ce qu’ils percevaient comme la mission « civilisatrice » ottomane au Yémen. Dans le cas du Yémen sous domination ottomane, on observe des perspectives impérialistes ressemblant fortement à celles si courantes dans les contextes impérialistes britannique, français ou japonais aux XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles.