

**The Role of Bedouin and Tribes in the Formation of the Modern State in the Arab East:
Historical and Contemporary Perspectives**

**Conference at the German *Orient-Institut Beirut*
Beirut, Lebanon, 10-11 June 2010**

Organisers: Prof. Dr. Stefan Leder (*Orient-Institut Beirut*), Prof. Dr. Massoud Daher (Lebanese University, Beirut), Dr. des. Johann Büssow (University of Halle, Germany)

Bedouin and tribes were instrumental in the transformation processes which affected the social, political, economic, and cultural landscapes of the Arab East during a comparatively short period, from the end of Ottoman rule till the establishment of independent nation states. Manners and significance of mobile pastoralism and tribal organisation experienced profound change during this period, causing upheaval and migration, but also the emergence of new opportunities. The importance of armed camel herders, which once were a major symbol of Bedouin pride, has declined since then. Yet Bedouin and tribal identities continue to play a vital role in the societies of the region. This is manifest on various levels of political and social articulation today, and is also documented by the ever-increasing number of Arabic books, films, and websites on tribal history, traditions, and values, many of which are produced by authors who have a Bedouin background themselves.

The conference aims at discussing the historical trajectories and experiences of different groups in the steppe and to evaluate the role of tribes and the tribal heritage in the societies of the contemporary Arab East. Conference papers address the following topics:

1. Mapping out the steppe as a social space: Patterns of social and economic interaction among the inhabitants of the steppe, models of land use and self-governance.
2. Historical documents and narratives on change in the steppe: The collective memory of different population groups, oral and written historical accounts by authors with Bedouin background, history as a contested site on which varying interpretations compete with each other.
3. Political and social change: Centralisation of state power, sedentarisation policies, the ascendance of the shaykhs into the ranks of the landowning elite, new economic strategies of the Bedouin.
4. Social values and legal norms associated with Bedouin life in societies of the modern Arab East: The role of Bedouin customary law, Bedouin life representing values such as freedom, honour, or Arabness.

The conference languages are Arabic and English.

Orient-Institut Beirut – gegründet von der DMG – in der Stiftung DGIA

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