

## **Nomads and Colonial Rule**

Workshop of the SFB Work Group 'Power and Domination', 9 March 2012, 10:00-17:00

Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Orientalisches Institut, Mühlweg 15, 06114 Halle (Saale), Seminarraum II

Organisers: Johann Büssow and Astrid Meier

The spread of colonial rule in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a crucial episode in the history of many nomadic groups. The transition to colonial modes of domination and administration changed established patterns of nomadic livelihoods and identities, and it often also altered the relations between nomads and their sedentary neighbours. Many colonial governments continued and intensified the sedentarisation policies of their predecessors, in some cases ending nomadic ways of life altogether. Beyond such general observations, however, many aspects of colonial rule in the steppe and desert lands remain unclear: To what extent did colonial rule make a specific impact on nomads and in how far did it merely react to developments already underway? In how far do the policies implemented on the ground reflect general concepts developed in metropolitan capitals, and in how far were they ad-hoc measures in response to local circumstances? How did nomadic actors view the colonial administration in question? Did nomads use colonial structures for their own ends?

The workshop brings together several historians working on colonial rule over nomads in the Middle East and North Africa. The meeting has two aims: to discuss the specific approach of different colonial powers to ruling nomads in various regional settings and to compare the strategies developed by nomadic groups in dealing with the impacts of colonial rule. In order not to overload the discussion with the question of who we define as 'nomads', we adopt the SFB's working definition of nomadism. In the words of Jürgen Paul 'nomads are groups of people who migrate as groups (not only individuals or parts of groups) over a significant part of the year in order to make a living (mostly: mobile livestock raising), and who interact with sedentary groups (agriculturalists and urbanites) in manifold ways.' Representation and self-representation as 'nomads' can outlast the abandonment of mobile ways of life for generations. This situation is often described by the term 'post-nomadism'.

The meeting is divided in two panels. While presentations in the first panel focus on the state perspective, those in the second panel discuss the same case studies from the perspective of nomadic actors. Presentations should be as concise as possible, in order to leave room for questions and discussion. The use of visual material is encouraged.

In the first panel, speakers will have an additional five minutes in order to explain the setting of their case studies. Questions of interest in this panel are:

- How did colonial officials define their role vis-à-vis nomads?
- How did the colonial power define, perceive and instrumentalise nomads?
- Did the government encourage a hierarchy inside and among nomadic groups?
- Is it possible to characterise the mode of colonial rule for the specific case studied in a few general terms?

In the second panel, it might be opportune to focus on individual trajectories of specific nomadic groups and individuals. Questions of interest in this panel are:

- What effect did the colonial regime have on the livelihood and the organisation of nomads?
- Were nomadic identities weakened or strengthened by colonial rule?
- How did nomads perceive the colonial rulers (perhaps in comparison with previous governments)?
- To what extent did nomads use the structures of colonial rule for their own ends?
- Who were the winners and losers of colonial rule among the nomads?

## Programme:

10:00 Welcome and introduction

### Keynote

10:15 Robert Fletcher (Oxford): Nomadic Societies and Colonial Rule: An Unlikely Collaboration?

10:45 Coffee break

### Panel 1: Nomads as Targets of Colonial Policies

10:55 Yoav Alon (Tel Aviv/Berlin): Transjordan

11:15 Henning Sievert (Bonn): Benghazi

11:35 Astrid Meier (Halle): Chad: "La paix aux moindres frais" – Ordering a 'Turbulent Frontier'

11:50 Johann Büssow (Halle): French Syria: Ethnic Engineering, 'Politics of the Chiefs' and 'Adapted Rule'

12:05 Discussion

12:30 Lunch

### Panel 2: Nomads as Political Actors in Colonial Regimes

14:00 Robert Fletcher: Iraq

14:15 Yoav Alon: Shaykh Mithqal al-Fayiz in Transjordan

14:30 Henning Sievert: Benghazi

14:45 Coffee break

15:00 Astrid Meier: Chad: Awlad Sulayman, the Sanusiyya and Local Rulers up to 1913

15:15 Johann Büssow: 'Anaza Bedouins in French Syria

15:30 Final Discussion