

The Application of *Tanzimat* in the Desert: The Bedouins and the Creation of a New Town in Southern Palestine (1860–1914)

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The second half of the nineteenth century was a period when the Ottoman government's centralization efforts gained momentum. In Southern Palestine, this entailed a struggle for the central government to gain the upper hand over the Bedouin tribes. In the 1860s, the Ottoman government was still using military power to end the internal strife between the Bedouin tribes. However, from the 1890s on, the government began to use sophisticated means and tactics in order to secure control and encourage the integration of the Bedouin element in the empire. The creation of a new town, namely Beersheba, the changing apparatus of administration, the construction of public buildings in the desert, all meant that the government attempted to penetrate the nomad's way of life. In this study the main emphasis will be given to describing the role of the state in forming and changing the tribal institutions.

In the field of provincial administration, the very concept of *Tanzimat* reforms, generally speaking, meant the restructuring of a central state. Among the aims of reform were the consolidation of governmental institutions, an increase in their effectiveness, the coordination of their methods, and the enforcement of central authority over all sections of the population. Moreover, for the attainment of these goals, the development of public works, communications, schools and other public services were also necessary.¹ On the other hand, in times of reform, the imperial government of a vast region had to take into consideration the social, political and economic conditions at the local level. In fact, while the *Tanzimat* reforms were designed to reach a principal goal, namely the modernization and centralization of the administration, outcomes differed depending on the region-specific characteristics and political, social and economic structures. The main reason for this was the combination of centralized administrative practices with decentralized practices such as incorporating intermediate groups, namely urban notables, into the provincial administration.² In other words, it is the permanent interaction occurring between existing practices at the local level and the central state policies which forms or reforms the state institutions. Thus, in order to understand the mechanism of *Tanzimat* centralization, it is necessary to examine state–society relations at the local level.

This study deals with the Bedouin tribes in Southern Palestine, one of the peripheral areas of the Ottoman Empire, during the closing phase of *Tanzimat* and the Hamidian period. I intend to approach tribe and state in terms of power relations. By examining the strategies of the central government vis-à-vis the Bedouins, the main emphasis is given to the role of the state in reforming or changing tribal institutions, which generally constituted the local power structure in the desert. In this context, another underlying subject of the study is the creation of the town of Beersheba as a centre of the new sub-district (*kaza*) in the province of Jerusalem (*mutasarrıflık*). In fact, the foundation of a town in the desert on state initiative constitutes a very interesting and unusual case of Ottoman urbanization and settlement. By analyzing the administrative apparatus in Beersheba, I try to examine the close relation of *Tanzimat* centralization with the function of the city, because I also claim that the *Tanzimat* reforms differentiated the function of any city by giving it a more significant role as the centre of power and legitimacy or the transmitter of imperial ideas. The main source of the study is the central state archives in İstanbul, but in order to avoid the possibility of one-sidedness I also applied to a more general source, the British consular correspondence.

From the fifteenth century, the Ottoman government as a rule supported the peasantry against nomadic tribes, because the nomads were seen as an active threat to the imperial economic welfare that depended mainly on agricultural production. However it does not mean there has always been a protracted struggle between the state and its nomadic subjects. The Ottoman government did not try to turn all nomads into settled peasants. On the contrary, the nomads were protected by specific laws and regulations designed to regulate their migratory routes and guarantee their livelihood and safety.³ Besides that, just like the sedentary population, they were liable to pay taxes registered in the provincial *kanunnames*, thus they were an integrated part of the Ottoman state. Although there were efforts or rather projects to settle and control nomadic groups starting from the seventeenth century,⁴ it was only in the second half of nineteenth century that the Ottoman government developed a deliberate policy of massive settlement for nomads, and tried to change the nature of the nomads. After that, due to many political, administrative and economic reasons, insisting on a settled and sedentarized society and an effective central administration became a strict norm for the Ottoman government.⁵

In Southern Palestine, one of the most peripheral areas of the Empire, the implementation of the new concepts of a modern state, such as a uniform provincial administration and an effective control of territories, meant a struggle for central government to dominate the Bedouin tribes. By that time it was clear that the Bedouin tribes, like other nomadic groups in the empire, were regarded as representing an active threat to economic welfare. The main reason was that in order to escape governmental control and avoid paying taxes, they refused to have their lands systematically registered. The Bedouins of Southern Palestine were also unusual in that they were living in the periphery, where the control of the central government had always been weak. Thus they posed a potential threat to its authority in both political and military terms. Moreover, the Bedouin community, as a social and political organization, had all the attributes which the state claimed for

itself, namely 'loyalties and allegiances, a code of conduct, a system of arbitration and justice'.⁶ Therefore the Bedouins obviated any effective government. It is evident that, as early as the beginning of the *Tanzimat* period, the government came to regard the Bedouin sheikhs in the Jerusalem district as obstacles to the consolidation of state power.

The difficulties of the Ottoman government in controlling the Bedouins are described in detail in innumerable archival documents dating back to the 1840s. For instance, in 1845, the governor of Jerusalem listed in detail all the abuses of the Bedouin community, especially their sheikhs:

Traditionally, the district sheikhs were entrusted with some governmental duties such as collecting government taxes, administering justice on the basis of customary local norms, guarding a certain highway or contributing to the protection of pilgrimage caravans, but on many occasions they abused the trust that the state placed in them. They stole state money, and they unlawfully seized public property, thus they enriched themselves at the expense of the peasantry and the state. The bloody skirmishes between the different clans caused a state of desperate poverty and disorder in the region, and a dramatic decrease in the government's revenue. Moreover, the worst was the alliance between the sheikhs and the urban notables of Jerusalem and Gaza because the urban notables leaked the coming operations of the government to the local sheikhs and they endeavoured to influence the governors for the benefit of their respective partners, thus the necessary precautions planned to end their abuses could not be realized.⁷

The governor of Jerusalem recommended that central government break the socio-political power of the sheikhs either by liquidating the insubordinate ones or by forcing them along with their allies to go to exile in Rumelia. Accordingly, the Ottoman government began to make strenuous efforts to reduce the power of local sheikhs in the district of Jerusalem. During the years between 1845 and 1865 the Ottoman government used military power to end the turbulence caused by the quarrels between different tribes or the two factions of a certain clan. In that period, it appears that the government was more occupied with the local sheikhs that controlled the highlands of Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus and Gaza than those on the southern border in Beersheba. In these centres of violence, the strong families, such as Abdurrahman Amir in the mountains of Hebron, the Abu Gush and Lehhem families in the vicinity of Jerusalem, and the Abdul Hadi and Tukan families in Nablus, competed with each other, or against the Ottoman government, to gain regional control. Moreover, it was common practice for the local sheikhs of the mountainous areas to ally themselves with the Bedouins nearby who served them in the battlefield as auxiliaries, or by giving shelter to the fugitive sheikhs in their desert.⁸ Starting from 1850, the Ottoman government tried to recruit soldiers from the Bedouin tribes by using military force. Thus, forcible military recruitment together with the effort to establish strict control over agricultural production and taxation may be mentioned as the main reasons for Bedouin rejection of Ottoman authority.⁹ It is clear that by the second half of the nineteenth century the priorities of the Ottoman state began to clash more obviously and consistently with the interests of Bedouins.

Only after the 1860s did the government finally have some success in gaining control over the turbulent local sheikhs. There were, as usual, other violent clashes,¹⁰ but these were not of the same nature as the conflicts among the local sheikhs for control of the countryside during the 1840s and 1850s. Although some of the insubordinate sheikhs were arrested, sent into exile or put to death by the authorities, many others retained their influence. The majority of the local sheikhs, even some of the Bedouin leaders, managed to integrate themselves into the administrative structures and perform important functions as members of the new boards, such as the administrative council and the municipal council. After that the policy of the Ottoman state in dealing with local powers and the nomads entered a new phase. The main motive in this new phase was to create a population that would be closely tied to the government.

Some remarks on the terminology used by the Ottoman central government in dealing with the Bedouins and the other nomadic tribes are useful in explaining the changing strategies during the period under consideration. Until the mid-1860s, the term generally used by the Ottoman government in relation to the traditionally unruly tribes was *te'dib*, which means 'bringing the insubordinate under the firm control of the government through harsh measures of suppression', but from then on the central government preferred to use the term *istimalet*, which expresses a policy of currying favour or gaining the good will of the protected. The government was obviously seeking conciliation with the tribes, attempting to strengthen their loyalty. For this purpose, it applied more tactful and bureaucratic means. An example was the well-known *Aşiret Mektebi* (School for Tribes) established by Abdulhamid II in Istanbul to educate the sons of tribal chiefs. It was essentially 'an experiment in social engineering which sought to foster an allegiance to the Ottoman state'.¹¹

Particularly after the Provincial Laws issued in 1864 and 1871, many nomadic groups came to be the objects of resettlement policies pursued energetically by the Ottoman government. That policy of creating a settled society gained momentum under Abdulhamid II; during his reign most of the Arab provinces began to be regarded as first-rank provinces. His aim was to strengthen the Islamic foundation of the empire as a strong basis for social and political solidarity, and also to increase the wealth of Arab provinces as a compensation for recent territorial losses in Rumelia.¹² In Southern Palestine, the creation of a new town, Beersheba, can be mentioned as a part of this broader policy. This town was not a natural development activated by existing economic or social or strategic conditions, rather it was an intentionally designed response to the political and economic needs of the Ottoman state in Southern Palestine; it can also be identified as a project to foster the allegiance of the Bedouin element for the Empire.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, Beersheba had been paid barely any attention, and due to ongoing feuds, tribal rivalry and outbursts of intertribal wars, there was no evidence of effective administrative activity.¹³ The site, which was noted by European pilgrims as being in ruins, was just a watering hole, a camping ground and a meeting point for the nomadic Bedouin tribes who periodically crossed the region.¹⁴ The decision to build a planned urban centre in Beersheba was reached in Istanbul. Following the initial proposal drafted by the local council in Jerusalem, the

imperial edict (*irade-i seniyye*) ordering the creation of Beersheba as an administrative centre for the Bedouin tribes of the Negev was issued in June 1899.¹⁵ The implementation of this edict was entrusted to a special bureau in the Ministry of the Interior, the Commission of Reform and Accelerated Transactions (*Tesri-i Muamelat ve Islahat Komisyonu*), and it was to make almost every decision relevant to the new town project.

There were a number of political, administrative and economic reasons for the decision to build a town in the Negev. The chief concern of the Ottoman state was to consolidate the security of the southern border of Jerusalem *mutasarrıflık* (the district of Jerusalem). The British presence in Egypt after 1882 not only led to a problem of the exact border between Egypt and the Ottoman Empire, but also made Southern Palestine one of the areas crucial to the security of Ottoman domains. For the Ottomans, the creation of Beersheba as a sub-district meant a considerable tightening of their hold over the whole region.¹⁶ In fact, the establishment of Beersheba was also related to efforts to raise more revenue from the provinces. The lands around Beersheba were relatively fertile; the location of the new town was favourable to the encouragement of trade and the Bedouins nearby were inclined to live a sedentary life.¹⁷ Therefore there were many reasons to expect that the sedentarization of the Bedouins would increase the revenue transferred from the Jerusalem district to the centre. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the principal taxes, especially the tithe (*öşr* or the principal land tax) and the sheep tax (*ağnam*) were occasionally farmed out by the powerful Bedouin sheikhs. The governor consulted them to decide on the amount of tax that each individual should pay, and they were also responsible for the effective collection of taxes from the tribes under their control.¹⁸ Obviously, this system by its nature was vulnerable to abuse, and reduced the revenue coming from the region. After the creation of the town of Beersheba, that situation changed to a considerable extent. The Bedouins of Beersheba were made to pay their taxes regularly. For instance, in 1906, they paid a lump sum of 23 000 TL for the tithes, sheep, tax and other direct imports;¹⁹ this was a good share of the total income from the Jerusalem district, which amounted to 233.207 TL.²⁰

Another reason for the construction of a town in the desert was the distance of the vast area in the south from the nearest administrative centre, that is to say the city of Gaza. The dependency of the Southern Negev on the Gaza sub-district brought no benefit to the state, but rather it served only to intensify the land disputes among the Bedouins. They were often subjected to the corrupt practices of the urban notables who dominated the administrative council and courts in Gaza.²¹ The very establishment of an administrative centre in Beersheba meant the separation of the Negev with its Bedouin population from the sub-district of Gaza, and the inclusion of the area within the direct administration of the governor of Jerusalem responsible directly to Istanbul. In fact, this project pertained to the *Tanzimat* policy that pursued the aim of more centralization and better control in the provincial administration.

The Southern part of the Jerusalem district (the Israeli Negev today) was frequented by five Bedouin tribes, namely the Tayaha, the Tarabeen, the Azazme, the Jarrar and the Hanajreh, the total population being estimated at about 70–80,000.²² In that vast region, in order to secure governmental control the first step had to be to stop violent and bloody feuds among the Bedouin tribes, and for this

purpose the most common practice was to use military force, to arrest rebellious sheikhs, send them into exile,²³ and to station regular troops in the region.²⁴ However, late into the nineteenth century, this practice seemed to have almost disappeared. In 1888, for instance, when the land conflict between the tribes of Azazmeh and Tayaha was already 40 or 50 years old, a delegation composed of high officials of Jerusalem province and local notables of Gaza went to Beersheba to mediate between them.²⁵ However, they could not settle the conflict because the problem on the agenda was the long-running issue of land registration.²⁶

In 1907, another bitter conflict took place between the tribe of Zulam and the Hebron village of Yata, adjacent to the desert. This was an age-old violent feud over the cultivation rights of a piece of land called Masfara. It was finally settled only through active intervention and mediation. As the Jerusalem council did not manage to provide a peaceful solution, the central government appointed an investigating committee composed of neutral experts, local officials and notables from Beersheba and Hebron.²⁷ The decision of the committee was accompanied by a cadastral map of the land drawn up by engineers and approved by the Jerusalem Council. The last decision was to add the disputed land to the State Lands (the *emlak-ı hümayun*), which meant that the land of Masfara, from then on, was to be farmed out to any individual under the control of local government.²⁸ The report of the Jerusalem governor states that this step had been met by both sides with satisfaction and gratitude. The Bedouin sheikhs also signed a contract as proof that they would not break the agreement. However in 1913 the land of Masfara was still causing conflict between the villagers of Yata and the Bedouins nearby.²⁹

The continuing interest of the Ottoman state in its Bedouin subjects was also noticeable by the time and attention given to them by the governors of Jerusalem. They frequently visited the region and sent their reports and recommendations directly to the bureaus of the central government. Foremost among them were Tevfik Bey (1897–1901) and Ali Ekrem Bey (1906–08). Ali Ekrem Bey, during his tenure, made several visits to Beersheba. For instance, the reason for his visit in 1907 was to confirm and strengthen the friendship of the frontier tribes of Beersheba. To achieve the desired result, decorations, titles, robes of honour and some impressive gifts (such as copies of the Koran and silver watches) were given to the Bedouin sheikhs,³⁰ and the circumcision of many Bedouin children was carried out with due ceremony.³¹ Therefore it is clear that the government no longer preferred a harsh policy of authoritarianism; rather it attempted by gentle persuasion to promote tribal loyalty to the Ottoman state.

The foundation of the town of Beersheba constitutes an interesting and unusual case of Ottoman urbanization and settlement, because there are not many examples on record where the Ottoman government intentionally established a planned urban centre, and not surprisingly these are mostly products of the *Tanzimat* period.³² The motive behind the reforms launched to reorganise the urban governmental apparatus was to strengthen the central power and the imperial bearing on the provinces. In the period of reform, the city was functionally differentiated, with various institutional offices and new formal procedures. In other words, the newly established administrative bodies gave the city a more

significant role as a centre of power and legitimacy or as the transmitter of imperial ideas.

After the imperial edict was issued by the Sultan authorizing the erection of the new sub-district, the first step to establish the administrative apparatus was taken in May 1900. Ismail Kemal Bey, who had served as the *kaymakam* of Mecitözü, a sub-district in the *Vilayet* of Sivas, was nominated as the first governor of Beersheba. He was a bureaucrat in a carefully graded hierarchy, completely subservient to the governor of Jerusalem. Kemal Bey was chosen because he had proved to be a successful governor in Mecitözü; in cooperation with the inhabitants he managed to erect many public buildings, such as primary schools, a town hall and a clock tower.³³ However during his short term of office in Beersheba, apart from the building of a *hükümet konağı* (government house), not much was achieved in connection with the new town project. In 1901 he was replaced by Muhammed Carullah Efendi, the ex-clerk of the administrative council of Jerusalem. The central government appointed him because he was particularly experienced in administrative procedures and especially in Bedouin affairs which needed to be handled delicately.³⁴ During his term of office, he made efforts to accustom the Bedouins to governmental procedures and regulations and consolidated Ottoman rule in the new town with a police force, the gendarmerie and a *kadı*, important agencies of a central government.³⁵ In 1903 he was succeeded by Hamdi Bey, the ex-governor of Hebron, another region inhabited mostly by the Bedouins.³⁶ The next governor of Beersheba, Mehmet Tevfik Efendi, was, from the beginning of his term, specifically instructed to extend the power of the Ottoman government, to improve law and order in the region, and to augment the revenues of the treasury by increasing production.³⁷ However, due to the inclination of Ottoman government to reshuffle local officials frequently (the length of the term of *kaymakam* was usually two or three years), none of them served there long enough to accomplish these tasks.

As is clear from the imperial edicts sanctioning the appointments, the governors nominated to Beersheba were selected according to some standards; most of them were graduates of the *Mülkiye* (Higher School of Administration in Istanbul), had a good knowledge of Arabic and previous experience in provincial administration. However, more importantly, the candidate had to be aware of the customs and the patterns of Bedouin behaviour. In 1908, a substantial change occurred in the status of the *kaymakam* of Beersheba: he was appointed as 'adjoint' (*mutasarrıf muavin*) to the *mutasarrıf* of Jerusalem, which meant he was elevated above the other *kaymakams*, another sign of the special attention given to Beersheba by the Ottoman state.³⁸

In the whole administrative apparatus of provinces, the most important innovation of *Tanzimat* reforms was undoubtedly the administrative council (*meclis-i idare*). Although the power of the council, as 'a deliberating and deciding body',³⁹ was clearly very limited, it provided an important mechanism for the incorporation of local intermediaries into the new system. The Provincial Laws determined the scope of its authority and the range of its activity; it was authorized to deliberate and decide on many regional affairs such as public works, finance, tax collection, land registry and public security. On the other hand, in Beersheba the administrative council, from its inception in 1901, proved to be an exception compared to other councils.

The administrative councils, as semi-bureaucratic structures, had *ex officio* (the governor or his deputy, the judge, a secretary and the leaders of non-Muslims) and 'elected' members. Despite a complicated system, election was introduced in theory; the 'elected' members were usually urban notables nominated by the local governor. In Beersheba the 'elected' membership of the *meclis* (council) became the prerogative of the Bedouin sheikhs. As prescribed by the Provincial Law of 1871, the elected members numbered four in the other towns, but the Beersheba council was composed of five representatives chosen from the heads of each tribe. When the composition of Beersheba council was discussed in *şura-yı devlet* (the Council of State), it was stated that 'although the Hanajre, one of the Bedouin tribes in Beersheba, was a small one in population and also a part of the Tarabeen, it was not expedient to eliminate their sheikhs from the council'.⁴⁰ In order to prevent tribal rivalry and the outburst of intertribal wars, and to create a wider representation in the council, the Ottoman government decided to tolerate this simple distortion of the Provincial Law. Furthermore, despite the fact that the membership of the administrative council, as of other local governmental institutions, was unremunerated, the members of Beersheba council were paid a fixed salary. This was in return for their endeavours and efforts to adjust their people to the imperial government, and to cover expenses arising from their compulsory residence in the town.⁴¹

Another exception occurs in the scope of the council's authority. After the provincial regular (*nizami*) courts were set up and their authority augmented in the 1870s, the administrative councils in general held no judicial powers in matters of civil law and land holding, but the case in Beersheba was different again. Until a *nizami* court was established, wider judicial authority was invested in the Beersheba council. An imperial edict, issued in 1903, directed that the Beersheba *meclis* should also sit as a Court of the First Instance (*bidayet mahkemesi*) in cases related to land-holding.⁴²

Needless to say, it was expected that the administrative council would eventually be used as an instrument by the Bedouin sheikhs to consolidate their political power and regional influence. However, at a time when the Ottoman government tried to transform the nature of Bedouin living, the government could not afford to exclude them from the new town project. It should be kept in mind that the principal goal of *Tanzimat* centralization was to merge the local centres of power into new administrative structures. The mediation of Bedouin leaders was applied in every phase of setting up a rational administrative organization. Alongside the administrative council there came into being a municipal governmental body, a garrison of soldiers and gendarmes. These were only managed with the collaboration of Bedouin sheikhs. The mayor was usually a Bedouin sheikh,⁴³ likewise the gendarmes mounted on dromedaries, the only force of this kind existing in the Jerusalem district, were usually drawn from among the Bedouins.⁴⁴

The site of the town of Beersheba was suitably chosen. It was planned to be at a point which was a regional meeting place and a seasonal market for the surrounding tribes. Evidently, the position was also considered favourable for the encouragement of trade among the Bedouins who at certain times of the year came together to pasture and water their flocks. More importantly, there was an abundant supply of water drawn mainly from seven wells, and the surrounding country had already been

Figure 1. Aerial photo of Beersheba in 1916. *Source: PRO, AIR 20/612, 1916.*

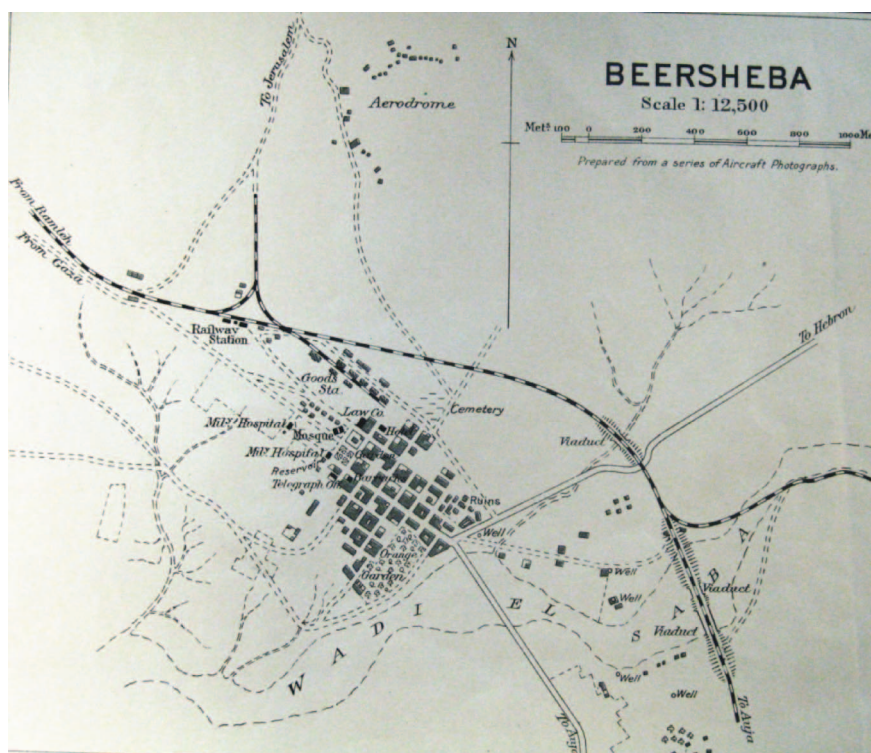


under cultivation. A grid-pattern town plan with straight streets crossing each other was devised (Figure 1); it was unusual in that part of the world and for the local inhabitants who were semi-nomadic Bedouins.

In order to encourage the pioneers of a settled population in Beersheba, the Ottoman government purchased 2,000 *dönüms* from the sheikh of Azazmeh tribe for 2,000 *mecidiye* and bestowed that land on the newly established municipality.⁴⁵ The area was divided into lots to be given for free to each individual who promised to build a house and live in the city (Figure 2). From 1902 to 1911, the population of Beersheba increased from 300 to over 800,⁴⁶ and by 1914 it reached about 1,000 with 200 houses and 50 shops. Thus the city became more than a small thriving town having a high potential for being the administrative and economic centre of a large area.⁴⁷

The ambition to strengthen central control by improving the administrative apparatus in the provinces brought about the construction of many public buildings, such as governmental buildings (*konak*), civil and military hospitals, military barracks, postal buildings, imperial schools. Many of these buildings, as constructions serving the new formal procedures of modern government, were unprecedented in the provincial towns. Although the provincial towns were separated from each other by hundreds of miles, there was a striking similarity in their architectural outlines.⁴⁸ The most important public building of Beersheba was the governmental *konak* constructed in 1901. It included the governor's office, the administrative and municipal councils, the police station, and the tribal court (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Layout of Beersheba and its environs. *Source: PRO, War Office, 303/496, 8 Nov. 1917.*

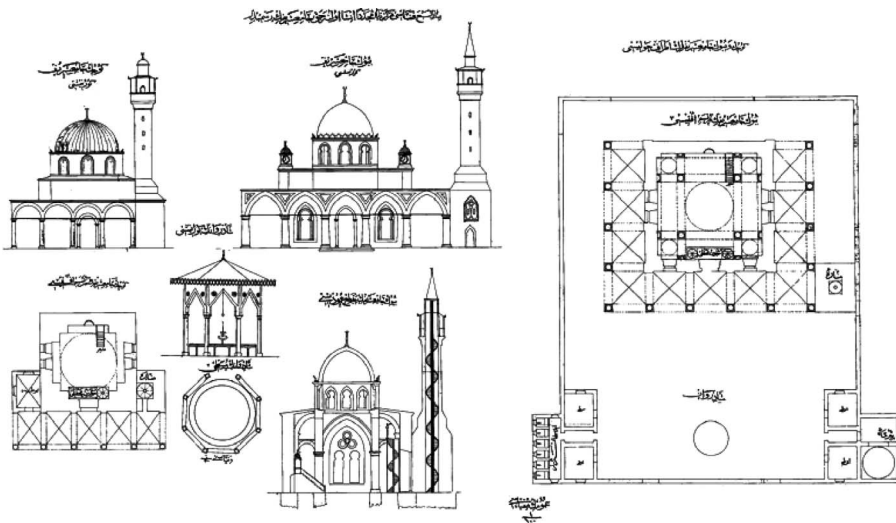


This impressive and aesthetic building, located at the highest point of the town, dominated the landscape of the new town. Thus, its erection clearly reflected the penetration of the Ottoman state into local life, and served as the most significant symbol of Ottoman government in Beersheba. Another impressive two-storey building, the governor's house was built opposite to the *konak*; its plan and external appearance conforms to the traditional architectural style of dwellings seen in Lebanon and Palestine in the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ The construction of a monumental mosque was another sign of Ottoman intrusion into nomadic life. However, it should be noted that it was not usual to find monumental mosques in towns built or reshaped during the *Tanzimat* period. Two different plans for the Beersheba mosque were drawn up; the first, a relatively small mosque, was to provide a space for 200 people while the larger one was to house 400 people (Figure 4). As this mosque was to symbolize the Sultan's interest in his Bedouin subjects and emphasize the Islamic foundation of the empire, the larger one was adopted, and it was built with the cooperation of the Bedouin sheikhs of each tribe, who were awarded high-level imperial decorations in return.⁵⁰ The government school constructed in the same fashion as the government *konak*, the boarding school planned in 1914 (Figure 5), the military barracks, the police station, the post office and the telegraph station⁵¹ were the other functional constructions that represented the enhanced control of central government in the town.

Figure 3. The governmental *konak* of Beersheba. *Source:* PRO, Foreign Office, 195/2106, No. 54, J. Dickson–N. O'Connor, 14 Oct. 1901.

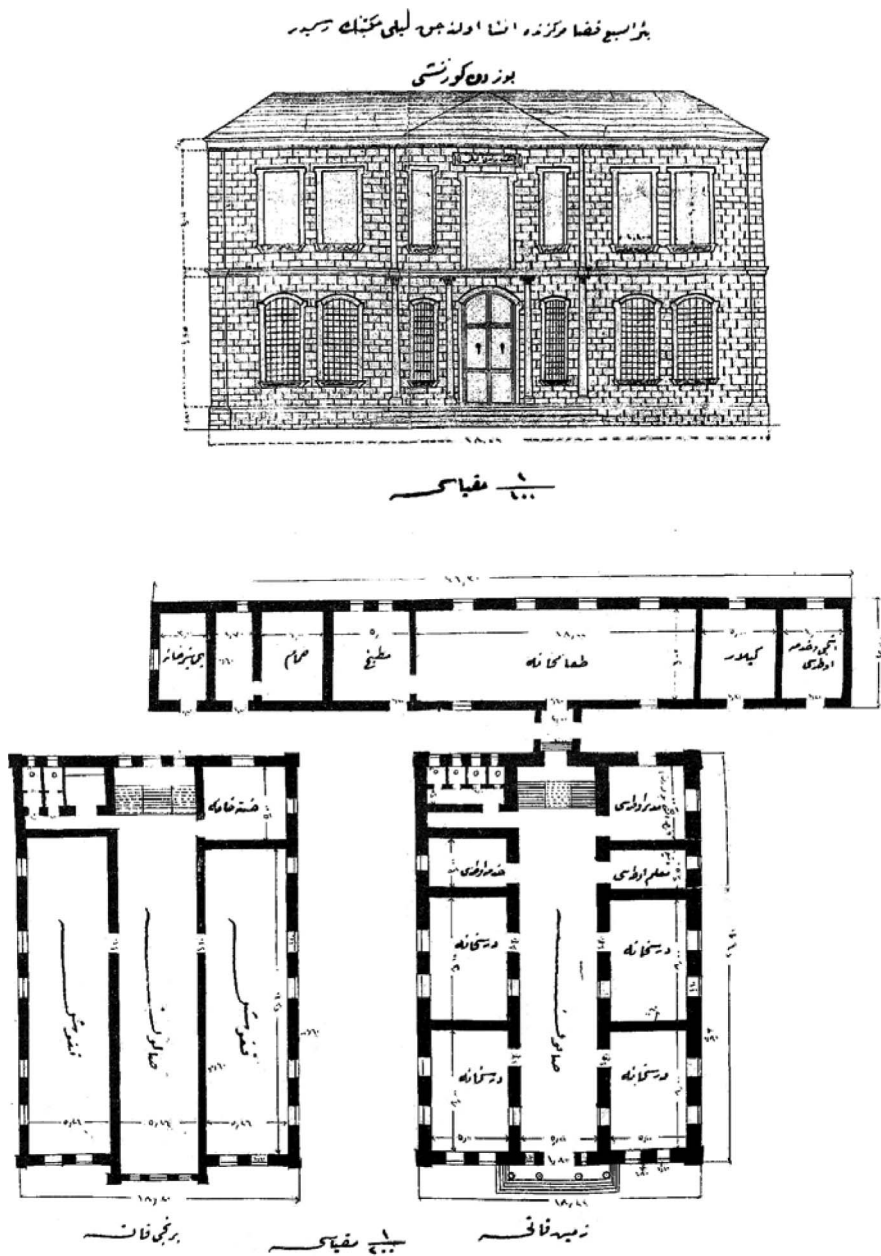


Figure 4. Two different plans for the Beersheba mosque. *Source:* BOA, Yıldız Mütenevvi Maruzat Evrakı, 204/50, 9 Rebiülevvel 1318/6 July 1900.



The *konak* along with the other public buildings, which were constructed adjacent to each other at the highest point of the town, formed the nucleus of the future development in Beersheba. It is noteworthy that these buildings together also

Figure 5. The boarding school planned in 1914. *Source: BOA, Dahiliye Nezareti İdare Kataloğu, 59/72, 24 Cemaziyelahir 1332/20 May 1914.*



constituted a place of common assembly (*meydan*), in other words, the main square of the town. This was demonstrated on several occasions: when the governor of Jerusalem province visited the area large gatherings were organized for the occasion.

The *mutasarrif* gave speeches, made various promises of economic aid, and distributed presents to the Bedouin sheikhs in order to strengthen their loyalty to the central government.⁵²

The Ottoman interest in Beersheba reached its peak during the First World War, because the town was used as a main base in attacking the Suez Canal. An impressive park was built, water mains were laid, and a bridge over Wadi Saba, a macadamized road between Beersheba and Hebron (55 kilometres) were constructed.⁵³ Most important of all, a narrow-gauge railway line connecting Beersheba with the Jaffa–Jerusalem line was constructed in 1915.⁵⁴ The railway station, very close to the main square, was the last building constructed by the Ottomans in Beersheba, as the town was surrendered to the British army towards the end of the war.

Even a glance at the archival documents makes it possible to demarcate the periods of different strategies used by the Ottoman government in dealing with the Bedouins. The first phase, between 1845 and 1865, may be identified as a time of continuing struggle for local control between the sheikhs and the Ottoman government. However, after the 1860s, especially following the implementation of the Provincial laws of 1864 and 1871, for better control of the provinces, the issue was to restructure the administrative apparatus. From then on, the government tried to penetrate local life, make a consensus with the local powers, and for this purpose it was to use the new administrative bodies located in the cities.

The creation of Beersheba, as a town in the Negev desert, solely the result of governmental initiative. As a regional centre and capital, the town served to increase the presence of central government in the area. The introduction of the basic structures of a central state and modern bureaucracy meant that completely different interaction patterns emerged between the state and the nomads. The intention of the Ottoman government was to lure the Bedouins into settling in the region and to make them loyal and faithful subjects worthy of the sultan's grace and benevolence, but for the Bedouin tribes of Beersheba, the newly established administrative apparatus and the town itself was a decisive and far-reaching change in their lives. For the first time in their history, they had to adjust themselves to a bureaucratic procedure in their relationship with the state. In the course of this, the function of the site of Beersheba for the local population was also transformed. Beersheba assumed the role of an administrative town, a military post and a market town, instead of being an oasis for the nomads.

Notes

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3. H. İnalcık and D. Quataert (eds.), *Social and Economic History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.37.
4. The first serious settlement programme was carried out for the Central and Eastern Anatolian nomads between the years 1691 and 1696. See C. Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Aşiretlerin İskanı* (İstanbul: Eren Yayıncılık, 1987), pp.39–98.
5. R. Kasaba, 'Do States Always Favor Stasis? The Changing Status of Tribes in the Ottoman Empire', in J. Migdal (ed.), *Boundaries and Belonging* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.28.
6. E.L. Rogan, 'Aşiret Mektebi: Abdulhamid II's School for Tribes (1892–1907)', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.28 (1996), p.84.
7. *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (hereafter *BOA*), Sadaret Mektubi Muhimme Kalemî, 1/89, 28 Zilkade 1261/28 Nov. 1845.
8. For more information see, A. Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation 1856–1882: Studies in Social, Economic and Political Development* (translated by W.C. Young and M.C. Gerrity) (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993), pp.209–38.
9. *BOA*, Sadaret Mektubi Muhimme Kalemî, 337/73, 19 Safer 1272/31 Oct. 1855.
10. For instance in 1864, the governor of Jerusalem, Hurşid Paşa, had to take troops into the highlands of Hebron to suppress a land feud between the sheikh of the village of Yata and the Bedouin tribe, the *Jahalin*. *BOA*, Sadaret Mektubi Muhimme Kalemî, 296/67, 29 Şevval 1280/7 April 1864.
11. Rogan, 'Aşiret Mektebi: Abdulhamid II's School for Tribes (1892–1907)', p.83.
12. For a detailed analysis of that policy see, E.D. Akarlı, 'Abdulhamid II's Attempt to Integrate Arabs into the Ottoman Empire', in D. Kushner (ed.), *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Times, Political, Social, and Economic Transformation* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1986), pp.74–89.
13. C. Bailey 'The Ottomans and the Bedouin Tribes of the Negev', in G.G. Gilbar (ed.), *Ottoman Palestine 1800–1914* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), pp.321–32.
14. From the second century BC until the seventeenth century AD, the Negev was occupied by the Nabataeans, Romans and Byzantines, and the town of Beersheba functioned as a commercial and administrative centre for these different peoples. However from the time of the Moslem conquest until the nineteenth century, no evidence of sedentary occupancies was discovered at Beersheba or anywhere in the surrounding area. See M. Berman, 'The Evolution of Beersheba as an Urban Centre', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol.55, No.2 (June 1965), pp.310–15.
15. *BOA*, Dahiliye Nezareti Tasnifi, Tesri-i Muamelat ve Islahat Komisyonu, 28/69, 20 Şaban 1317/23 Dec. 1899.
16. See D. Kushner, 'The One Hundredth Anniversary of Beersheba – the Establishment of an Ottoman Town', in *Ciepo: Osmanlı Öncesi ve Osmanlı Araştırmaları Uluslararası Komitesi XIV. Sempozyumu Bildirileri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2004), pp.439–46.
17. *Public Record Office* (hereafter *PRO*), Foreign Office, 195/2062, No.43, John Dickson–N. O'Connor, 30 Nov. 1899.
18. Bailey, 'The Ottomans and the Bedouin Tribes of the Negev', p.331.
19. *Israeli State Archives* (Hereafter *ISA*) Ali Ekrem Bey Collection, 83/10, no date.
20. Y. Avcı, *Değişim Sürecinde Bir Osmanlı Kenti: Kudüs (1890–1914)* (Ankara: Phoenix Yayınları, 2004), p.120.
21. *BOA*, İrade Dahiliye, 5, 11 Zilkade 1317/12 March 1900.
22. *BOA*, Dahiliye Nezareti Tasnifi, Tesri-i Muamelat ve Islahat Komisyonu, 25/62, 13 Safer 1317/21 June 1899.
23. *BOA*, İrade Şura-yı Devlet, 41/2144, 2 Şevval 1278/28 Sept. 1878.
24. *BOA*, Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemî, 1499/48, 24 Receb 1305/4 April 1888; 1534/29, 8 Zilhicce 1305/16 Aug. 1888.
25. Among them were Alemizade Ahmed Efendi as the mayor of Gaza and Hacı Osman Galayeti as the member of the Court of First Instance. *BOA*, Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemî, 1567/71, 18 Rebiülevvel, 22 Nov. 1888.
26. H. Gerber, *Ottoman Rule in Jerusalem 1890–1914* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1985), p.24.
27. *BOA*, Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemî, 1138/28, 20 Zilkade 1324/5 Jan. 1907; Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemî, 1192/70, 16 Receb 1325/25 Aug. 1907.
28. *ISA*, Ali Ekrem Bey Collection, 83/63, 25 Temmuz 1323/7 Aug. 1907.
29. *BOA*, Dahiliye Nezareti İdare Katoloğu, 160–2/15, 24 Cemaziyelahir 1331/31 May 1913. *PRO*, Foreign Office, 195/2452, No.20, Sir G. Lowther–P.J.C. McGuges, 14 March 1913.

30. *BOA*, Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi, 1208/34, 22 Ramazan 1325/29 Oct. 1907, *PRO*, Foreign Office, 195/2255, No.19, E.C. Blech–N. O’Conor, 19 June 1907.
31. *PRO*, Foreign Office, 195/2287, No.30, E.C. Blech–H. Barclay, 20 May 1908; *ISA*, Ali Ekrem Bey Collection, 83/22, no date.
32. Another unusual case is the establishment of the town of Mecidiye (1856) in central Dobruca with the aim of accommodating refugees from the Crimea. See K.H. Karpat, ‘Ottoman Urbanism: The Crimean Emigration to Dobruca and The Founding of Mecidiye, 1856–1878’, *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, Vol.3, No.1 (1981), pp.1–25. Other examples are the towns in South-eastern Anatolia, such as Hassa, Islahiye, Osmaniye, Reyhanlı, Kadirli, all of which emerged in the second half of nineteenth century as the products of settlement policies. See Orhonlu, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda Aşiretlerin İskanı*, pp.115–17.
33. *BOA*, İrade Dahiliye, 2996/14, 8 Muharrem 1318/7 May 1900.
34. *BOA*, İrade Dahiliye, 150/40, 7 Safer 1319/25 May 1901; *PRO*, Foreign Office, 195/2106, No.41, J. Dickson–N. O’Conor, 19 July 1901.
35. *BOA*, Dahiliye Nezareti Tasnifi, Tesri-i Muamelat ve Islahat Komisyonu, 34/89, 12 Rebiülahir 1319/29 July 1901; Yıldız Parekende Evrakı, Askeri Maruzat, 175/127, 29 Cemaziyelahir 1319/13 Sept. 1901.
36. *BOA*, İrade Dahiliye, 472/26, 08 Rebiülevvel 1321/4 June 1903.
37. *BOA*, İrade Dahiliye, 1581/1, 1 Şevval 1322/10 Oct. 1904.
38. *PRO*, Foreign Office, 195/2287, No.14, E.C. Blech–N. O’Conor, 11 March 1908.
39. For details see Gerber, *Ottoman Rule in Jerusalem 1890–1914*, pp.122–36.
40. *BOA*, İrade Dahiliye, 535/33, 14 Rebiülevvel 1319/1 July 1901; Dahiliye Nezareti Tasnifi, Tesri-i Muamelat ve Islahat Komisyonu, 34/85, 5 Rebiülahir 1319/1 Aug. 1901.
41. *BOA*, Dahiliye Nezareti Tasnifi, Tesri-i Muamelat ve Islahat Komisyonu, 39/11, 15 Rebiülahir 1320/21 July 1902.
42. *BOA*, Dahiliye Nezareti Tasnifi, Tesri-i Muamelat ve Islahat Komisyonu, 65/72, 22 Şevval 1324/9 Dec. 1906.
43. For instance in 1913, the sheikh Hamad Sufi was the mayor of Beersheba. *PRO*, Foreign Office, 195/2452, No.14, E.J. Mc Gregor–G. Lowther, 24 Feb. 1913.
44. *PRO*, Foreign Office, 195/2106, No.54, J. Dickson–N. O’Conor, 23 Sept. 1901.
45. *BOA*, İrade Dahiliye, 18, 10 Ramazan 1318/1 Jan. 1901.
46. Berman, ‘The Evolution of Beersheba as an Urban Centre’, p.316.
47. *BOA*, Dahiliye Nezareti İdare Kataloğu, 59/72, 24 Cemaziyelahir 1332/20 May 1914.
48. W. Lemke, ‘Ottoman Photography: Recording and Contributing to Modernity’, in J. Hanssen, T. Philipp and S. Weber (eds.), *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Beyrouth: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2002), p.242.
49. F. Yenişehirlioğlu, ‘Bir Çöl Kenti: Be’er-sheva’, *Ortadoğu’da Osmanlı Dönemi Kültür İzleri Uluslararası Bilgi Şöleni Bildirileri*, Vol.II (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, 2001), p.629.
50. *BOA*, Yıldız Mütenevvi Maruzat Evrakı, 204/50, 9 Rebiülevvel 1318/6 July 1900.
51. The telegraph line between Gaza and Beersheba was constructed with the contributions of local Bedouins in 1907. *BOA*, Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi, 937/63, 5 Muharrem/18 Feb. 1907.
52. *PRO*, Foreign Office, 195/2255, No.19, E.C. Blech–N. O’Conor, 19 June 1907.
53. C. Paşa, *Hatırat* (İstanbul: Arma Yayınları, 1996), pp.326–31.
54. W.P. Pick, ‘Meissner Pasha and the Construction of Railways in Palestine and Neighbouring Countries’, in G.G. Gilbar (ed.), *Ottoman Palestine 1800–1914: Studies in Economic and Social History* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990), p.208.