

## THE EDITOR'S DESK

One of the most persistent and characteristic forms of social organization in the Middle East, from ancient times to the present, has been the division of its various ethnic, social, and religious groups into communities, largely autonomous and self-contained, which have managed to preserve their own traditions, laws, and practices over the centuries with little interference from those who controlled the states, kingdoms or empires which exercised political power over them. Most Middle Eastern rulers, from the Achamenids to the Ottomans, found it far more beneficial to accept this diversity of Middle Eastern society, than to attempt to enforce a melting pot to level all to a common denominator. So it was that the Ottoman *millet* system was no more than a codification and institutionalization of practices which had become a basic part of the makeup of Middle Eastern society long before Islam, the Caliphs, and even the Ottomans came upon the scene. The most characteristic feature of the *millet* system in Ottoman times was its tendency to preserve order in society by isolating the different elements from one another, and limiting contact as much as possible. Every individual and every *millet* had a place, contact and conflict were avoided, and social peace was maintained. Insofar as the Ottoman Empire was concerned, all those who were not members of the Ruling Class were subjects, Muslim, Christian and Jew alike, all the protected flock (*re'âyâ*) of the Sultan, with each individual having status in society through his membership in one or another of the *millets*.

Of course this social peace was achieved at a price. There were problems at times, the greatest of which was mutual scorn. Isolation bred contempt, a feeling of both religious and social superiority of one's own group over all others in the same society. At the same time, for those *millets* which were not of the faith of the Ruling Class, a tendency also developed to identify with those nations of Europe who shared the same religion and which, in the age of Ottoman decline, had achieved political, military and financial power. Those nations, in turn, as part of their efforts to take advantage of the declining Ottoman state to develop their own political and economic influence in the Middle East, starting early in the nineteenth century, encouraged this identification as much as possible, championing the causes of particular minorities with the Ottoman government in return for the support of the minorities. So it was that the representatives of Great Britain, Russia, France, Austria, and others encouraged the native Ottoman Jews, Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox to identify themselves with their foreign protectors and to scorn the native Muslims, whether members of the ruling class or subject class, as being ignorant and beneath contempt. As the nations of Europe began to take over rule of one part of the Middle East after

another, members of these native non-Muslim *millet*s became the principal local agents of the conquerors, identifying themselves even more with the latter at the expense of the scorned Muslims, who now were at the bottom of the ladder of the nations they had once ruled. The scorn and hatred which resulted led to massacre and counter massacre in the decades between 1890 and 1920, to a large extent the direct result of the intrusion of European imperialist ambitions and ideologies.

So it was in the incidents related in the article by Nicholas Z. Ajay Jr., 'Political Intrigue and Suppression in Lebanon during World War I'. Dr Ajay relates how France and Britain in particular encouraged the Lebanese to believe that the autonomy allowed by the *millet* system was in fact no more than 'poor Turkish political, economic, and social leadership [which] forced the non-Turkish elements to rely on themselves'. He then goes on to relate how the allies managed to convince the native Christians of the Lebanon in particular how it would be to their benefit to end Ottoman rule, and how native priests and others engaged in active espionage against their government which, when it in turn led to execution of the guilty and attacks on one another by members of the different *millet*s, led to new cries of 'massacre' against an Ottoman government which was doing no more than any other state in attempting to maintain itself against a powerful foreign attack. While he does not make use of the rich Ottoman archives on the subject found in both Istanbul and Ankara, he does draw on the memoirs of the Ottoman governor of Syria at the time, Jemal Pasha, to present some elements of the Ottoman point of view. The greatest tragedy came, of course, when the native Christian elements who had cooperated with the foreign occupier found themselves alone in new nationalist independent states, ruled by the Muslim majorities. All the hatred and mutual scorn which had been built up now led to discrimination by the new governments against their non-Muslim majorities. So it was with the Copts of Egypt following World War II and, much earlier, with the Assyrians of Iraq, in an affair related by Professor Khaldun S. Husry, of the American University of Beirut, in this issue and the next.

Of course the other side of the coin was the achievement of full national independence on the part of the different Muslim peoples who had been occupied in full or part by various foreign imperialists. In our feature article this quarter Dr Rouhollah K. Ramazani discusses the 'White Revolution' in Iran, pointing out how Reza Shah Pahlevi first had to achieve complete national independence as well as power for the central government within the entirety of Persian society before he could embark on his more recent efforts to achieve social and economic modernization. Dr Ramazani describes how achievement of the latter has begun to lead to the introduction of more democratic participation of the mass of the people in the process of rule, but concludes that the latter is lagging and will continue to lag behind the former because of a 'shallow depth of constructing viable political infrastructures'. Donald M. Reid, of Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, discusses the role of those Syrian Christians who accepted the

new order in their homeland, identified themselves with the aspirations for independence on the part of their Muslim brothers, and instead of attempting to join the imperialists attempted to apply what was best in European ideologies of the time to the particular situation and problems of the Arab world. In particular, Dr Reid discusses some of the early Syrian Christian socialists, Ya'qûb Şarrûf, Faraḥ Anṭûn, Şhibli Şhumayyil, Niqûlâ Ḥaddâd, and the great Salâmah Mûsâ.

Finally, turning to economic and social problems which faced Middle Eastern society in centuries past, Norman A. Stillman, of New York University, discusses a 'Case of Labor Problems in Medieval Egypt', while Arieḥ Loya, of the University of Texas, discusses the process by which the gradual substitution of a settled agricultural and urban population for the original tribal elements in the early centuries of Islam was accompanied by 'The Detribalization of Arabic Poetry'.

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