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The World the Bedouin Lived in: Climate, Migration and Politics in the Early Modern Arab East

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Abstract

Environmental history provides a perspective from which we can deepen our understanding of the past because it examines the relationships of people with their material surroundings and the effects of those relationships on the individual as well as the societal level. It is a perspective that holds particular promise for the social and political history of arid and marginal zones, as it contributes to our understanding of the reason some groups are more successful than others in coping with the same environmental stresses. Historians working on the early modern Arab East have only recently engaged with the lively field of global environmental history. After presenting a brief overview of some strands of this research, this article illustrates the potential of this approach by looking closely at a series of conflicts involving Bedouin and other power groups in the southern parts of Bilād al-Shām around the middle of the eighteenth century.

Keywords

Ottoman Empire – Bedouin – drylands – climate – migration – environmental history – early modern history

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> *It was not in search of paradise that you migrated, but rather, I think, you were summoned by bread and dates.* (Ḥakīm b. Qabīṣa, *Kitāb al-ḥamāsa*)[1]

> *Ecology is not a* deus ex machina *capable of solving the historian's problems with a dose of scientific rigour. It shows us the topics with which we could be concerned, and more especially the likely kinds of connection between them; it is not yet clear that it can do more.* (Peregrine Horden and Nicolas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*)[2]

Introduction

This article asks to what purpose scholars interested in the role of Bedouin in the early modern history of the Arab East[3] should include environmental perspectives in their inquiries.[4] It is certainly not in order to replicate the crude environmental or ecological determinism of the first decades of the twentieth century, when some prominent scholars held the view that the causes of historical events in pre-Islamic Arabia and the Middle East were long-term processes of desiccation and aridification that led ultimately to the rise of Islam.[5] Even when examining the long term, historians no longer focus on ecological factors alone, and they question the formerly widespread view that the region's landscapes have suffered since Late Antiquity because of the spread

1 The poet, a Companion of the Prophet (*ṣaḥābī*), is supposed to have addressed his son Bishr in this way after the latter had emigrated to Medina: "Qāla Ḥakīm b. Qabīṣa b. Ḍirār li-ibnihi Bishr wa-qad hājara: fa-mā jannat al-firdaws hājarta tabtaghī // wa-lākin daʿāka al-khubzu aḥsabu wa-l-tamar." Abū Tammām Ḥabīb b. Aws al-Ṭaʾī, *Kitāb al-Ḥamāsa*, ed. A. Kabīr al-Dīn and Gh. Rabbānī (Calcutta: Maṭbaʿat Līsī, 1856): 208.

2 P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 46.

3 We follow here the editors' definition of the region as presented in the introduction; see also their remarks on the notions of "Bedouin."

4 For a similar argument, see also E. Burke III, "Pastoralism and the Mediterranean Environment." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010): 663-665, here 663: "The environmental history of the post-1500 Mediterranean (including the Middle East) has the potential to add significantly to our understanding of the history of the region. However, this is only if it is understood as a perspective (and not just as a new specialization) that has the power to transform how we view familiar subjects."

5 The most prominent proponents of this view were Hugo Winckler (1863-1913) and Leone Caetani (1869-1935); see *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle East: History, Policy, Power and Practice*, ed. D. Davis and E. Burke (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011).

of nomadism, especially after the Islamic conquests.[6] Historians and their colleagues in archaeology and anthropology have largely abandoned the idea that the term "Bedouin" can be equated with nomadic camel-herding and that pastoralism is to be viewed solely as an adaptation to an arid environment.[7]

Great environmental uncertainty and marked aridity are significant but are by no means the only features of the world the Bedouin lived in. A full accounting of the factors that conditioned life along the steppe frontier in the early modern period would cover such diverse topics as the relations between tribal elites and Ottoman officialdom; shifting forms of interdependence and conflict between desert and sown, especially in the wake of the intensification of monetary exchanges and new forms of taxing and tax farming; the impact of influxes of silver and New World crops in the aftermath of the "Columbian Exchange";[8] epizootics that sometimes decimated the livestock population; and the recurrent epidemics, environmentally triggered waves of endemic and lethal disease too often grouped together under the generic term "plague."

In this article, we focus above all on climatological factors such as drought and cold. Although climatic variation was probably less pronounced in the early modern period than in earlier times,[9] the Arab East, most of which came under Ottoman rule after 1516, was profoundly transformed between the late sixteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[10] This is true particularly for the desert-side exchange systems that integrated people of various specializations and different degrees of mobility, ranging from a fully sedentary to a fully

6 D.K. Davis, "Power, Knowledge, and Environmental History in the Middle East and North Africa." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010): 657-659; D. Davis, *Resurrecting the Granary of Rome: Environmental History and French Colonial Expansion in North Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007).

7 B. Lucke et al., "Questioning Transjordan's Historical Desertification: A Critical Review of the Paradigm of 'Empty Lands'." *Levant* 44/1 (2012): 101-126. This view continues, however, to influence the outlook of state and developmental agencies and has, in fact, conditioned policies towards the *bādiya* (steppe) from colonial times to the present day.

8 The term was coined in 1972 by A.W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport: Praeger, 2003); for the development of the concept, see, e.g., N. Nunn and N. Qian, "The Columbian Exchange: A History of Disease, Food, and Ideas." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 24/2 (2010): 163-188.

9 See chapters 3 to 10 in A.S. Issar and M. Zohar, *Climate Change: Environment and History of the Near East* (2d ed., Berlin: Springer, 2010), where the centuries after the first millennium CE are treated summarily in one short chapter (221-34) and an epilogue (235-38).

10 A. Hourani, "The Changing Face of the Fertile Crescent in the XVIIIth Century." *Studia Islamica* 8 (1957): 94-96, cf. 102.

nomadic life.[11] We attempt to assess the utility of environmental history in charting these changes by engaging with a celebrated work of the new environmental history of the Middle East, Sam White's study of the role of the "Little Ice Age" in precipitating a "climate of rebellion" in the "lands at the margin" in northern Syria and southern Anatolia.

In a book that deftly combines environmental with social and political history, Sam White emphasizes the transformative role of recurrent drought and abnormally cold winters on the course of Ottoman history.[12] According to him, beginning in the last decade of the sixteenth century a nexus of global climatic phenomena conventionally grouped under the heading "Little Ice Age" affected the Ottoman state and galvanized societal actors in its arid periphery. Similar spells of abnormally cold and dry weather recurred at regular intervals in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Their impact was increased by developments as diverse as the interaction between Ottoman war-making, banditry, and the Celali rebellions of the early 1600s; the localization of provincial power structures in Greater Syria as a result of the transformation of imperial finance and landholding; and a related shift in the agrarian political economy of the Ottoman Empire from subsistence and provisioning to commerce and export.[13] White also documents, as a crucial factor in this unfolding drama, a "nomadic invasion" that resulted from a weakening of imperial power structures along the steppe margins: "The aftermath of the Celali Rebellion witnessed a great nomad invasion into large parts of Anatolia, Syria, and northern Iraq. Tribes once restricted to mountainous or desert land in the eastern provinces poured almost to the western end of Turkey. The movement proved sudden, surprising, and—for over two hundred years—irreversible."[14]

Sam White's monograph is a seminal work, but it is one of broad strokes, which deals in grand narratives about the "Ottoman lands" and that spans the centuries in its scope and ambition. Moreover, he resorts in his analysis to

11 "Desert-side exchange systems" refers to the fluctuating patterns of exchange characteristic for drylands, in contrast to regional settings along a river or the sea, and is a reference to the notion of a desert-side economy as coined in the seminal article by P.E. Lovejoy and S. Baier, "The Desert-Side Economy of the Central Sudan." *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 8/4 (1975): 551-81. For a more comprehensive discussion of "regional connectivities", see Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*: 123-172.

12 S. White, *The Climate of Rebellion in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

13 Ibid.: 104, 276; Celali rebellions refers to a series of rural uprisings, mostly of irregular troops of Turkmen and (semi-)nomadic origin, in Anatolia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, among others the extended unrest between 1595 and 1610, Ibid.: 163-186.

14 Ibid.: 229, cf. 1, 11, 229-243.

generalizations about a singular historical block consisting of "the nomads," one that is portrayed as engaged in an enduring competition with the more settled populations of the sown. Given the problems of such large generalizations, in particular in connection with climate changes for which the evidence is scanty and as yet poorly understood, we attempt to bring greater nuance to White's arguments by focusing on a smaller geographic area and confining ourselves to a shorter period. We hope that this will allow us to throw light on the diversity of actors that played a role in the politics of the steppe frontier and to gain a greater understanding of the complexity of the factors that influenced their actions. It is only on this more limited stage, we argue, that historians will be able to explore the agency of the Bedouin and gain insight into the complexity of the world they lived in, while making use of a framework that combines sociopolitical and environmental history.[15]

To illustrate these points, we will take a closer look at a series of armed conflicts and the parties involved in them on the steppe frontier of the southern parts of Bilād al-Shām—present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel—around the middle of the eighteenth century. These "battles" took place in the context of the appearance of new Bedouin groups on the fringes of the Syrian steppe and were part of the reactions of those who were already there.[16] What may appear at first insignificant skirmishes between marginal groups becomes part of the history of the region as a whole when put in its proper context, the complex and politically charged business of managing the passage of the annual *ḥajj* (pilgrimage) caravan. By exploring such episodes, we attempt to illustrate how environmental history as an interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary endeavor can open new arenas for debate on the agency of Bedouin and other pastoral groups in different time periods and geographical locations.

It is difficult to find in the available historical sources mentions of such groups that go beyond the general stereotypes of the dangerous and rapacious nomad—those "Bedouin devils (*shayāṭīn al-ʿarab*)," as they are called by

15 With respect to the motives for migration, this also means avoiding generalizations such as, "It should be remembered that nomadic shepherds and herdsmen invariably follow the lure of good grazing as far as they are allowed and will not restrain their animals until obliged to do so by force or by agreement," N.N. Lewis, *Nomads and Settlers in Syria and Jordan, 1800-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 8.

16 For the long series of "battles" (sg. *waqʿa, maʿraka*) related to the northward migration of ʿAnaza groups, see M.S. al-Ṭayyib, *Mawsūʿat al-qabāʾil al-ʿarabiyya: Buḥūth maydāniyya wa-taʾrīkhiyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī. 1421/2001): 4: 45-47; 57-63.

Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Miknāsī in his famous travelogue of 1785.[17] It is nearly impossible to uncover, for the period in question, the perspective of Bedouin groups or, even more so, the genuine voice of a Bedouin.[18] A rare exception may be popular, or Nabaṭī, poetry.[19] Yet this poetry is located—with the tribal histories that colonial officials or indigenous historians put into written form generations later—in a discursive milieu of "contentious multivocality" which makes it difficult to fit indigenous tribal histories into standard historical accounts.[20] This means that historians must treat such sources with care and try not only to read the available texts "against the grain" but also to search for alternative venues that allow access to the life-worlds of Bedouin subjects. They should also use the record of material culture unearthed by archaeologists; once this is interpreted by means of "anthropological analogy" with similar evidence drawn from the present day, it can be used to question Sam White's assumption of a hard and fast division between farmer and pastoralist, as well as an essential conflict between the steppe and the sown.

17 Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Miknāsī, *Riḥlat al-Miknāsī. Iḥrāz al-muʿallā wa-l-raqīb fī ḥajj bayt Allāh al-ḥarām wa-ziyārat al-Quds al-sharīf wa-l-Khalīl wa-tabarruk bi-qabr al-ḥabīb 1785*, ed. M. Bū Kabūṭ (Abu Dhabi: Dār al-Suwaydī, 2003): 251. For a recent discussion of the terms used to describe Bedouin, nomads, and nomadic ways of life, see S. Leder, "Nomadische Lebensformen und ihre Wahrnehmung im Spiegel der arabischen Terminologie." *Welt des Orients* 34 (2004): 72-104, and his forthcoming article "Towards a Historical Semantic of the Bedouin, 7th to 15th Centuries: A Survey." *Der Islam* 92/1: (forthcoming).

18 See A. Meier, "Bedouins in the Ottoman Juridical Field. Select Cases from Syrian Court Records, Seventeenth to Nineteenth centuries." *Eurasian Studies* 9/1-2 (2011): 187-211.

19 R. al-ʿUzayzī, *Nimr al-ʿAdwān shāʿir al-ḥubb wa-l-wafāʾ: Ḥayātuhu wa-shiʿruhu* (Amman: al-Rabiʿān, 1997); for some of the poems and translations see H.H. Spoer, "Four Poems by N. Ibn ʿAdwan, as sung by ʿOde Abu Sliman." *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 66 (1912): 189-203; H.H. Spoer and H.E. Nasrallah, "Poems by Nimr Ibn ʿAdwan." *Zeitschrift für Semitistik und verwandte Gebiete* 7 (1929): 29-62; 274-294, 9 (1933-4): 93-133; and "Poems by Nimr Ibn ʿAdwan, XXI to XLIV: Part II." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 66/2 (1946): 161-81. For examples of Nabaṭī poetry, see C. Holes and S.S. Abu Athera, *The Nabaṭī Poetry of the United Arab Emirates: Selected Poems, Annotated and Translated into English* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2011).

20 A. Shryock, *Nationalism and the Genealogical Imagination: Oral History and Textual Authority in Tribal Jordan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

1 Environmental History of the Arab East?

Historians of the Middle East have, until recently, exhibited a well-founded fear of falling into the trap of ecological determinism and considered environmental hazards and stressors only when all other explanations seem inadequate. Such factors influence both the everyday life of various social groups and their economic and political decision-making and do not act upon them only in times of momentous change or crisis. Moreover, climatic and environmental factors do not affect all people and all social groups in the same way. This point is particularly important, as social historians are usually uninterested in environmental data per se and the long-term analyses of archaeologists or paleobiologists that span millennia or at least centuries. What interests them most is the impact of climate and other aspects of the environment on human and/or animal life in a more limited time period.[21]

Nonetheless, combining the lines of inquiry that descend from environmental and social history may still yield useful insights. It might well prove crucial for understanding why some groups are more successful, more "resilient,"[22] in coping with the same environmental stress:

> [...] changes in [the] environment have favoured the rise of certain social groups and limited the actions of others. Despite this, environmental history has remained a blind spot for most social and economic historians. This is to be regretted, as the various and unequal effects of environmental change often explain the strengths and weaknesses of certain social groups, irrespective of their being defined along the lines of class, gender and ethnicity.[23]

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21 Historians of the region remain sceptical about the "neo-deterministic paradigm" as proposed by hydrogeologist Arie S. Issar and archaeologist Mattanyah Zohar in their influential overview of the climate history of the Middle East. More familiar with the long-term and large-scale perspectives developed in paleohistory, Issar and Zohar pay little attention to the smaller scales we are focusing on in this article, see Issar and Zohar, *Climate Change*: xxi-xxvi.

22 Resilience has become a key concept in discussions about groups that live in hazardous environments, discussions that had previously been framed in terms of vulnerability. For an introduction, see F. Miller et al., "Resilience and Vulnerability: Complementary or Conflicting Concepts?" *Ecology and Society* 15/3 (2010): 11. For a case study on contemporary Iran, see A. Tahmasebi, *Pastoral Vulnerability to Social-Political and Climate Stresses. The Shahsevan of North Iran* (Zürich: LIT, 2013).

23 P. Boomgaard and M. 't Hart, "Globalization, Environmental Change, and Social History: An Introduction." In "Globalization, Environmental Change, and Social History."

An environmental perspective might thus help historians to move away from an "ideal type" of the North Arabian Bedouin that is often derived from the representations of such groups in the written record. Too often, this yields a heavily biased image of the Bedouin as militarily dominant, camel-herding nomads separate from, and often fundamentally at odds with, settled society.[24] Instead of the ultimate outsiders who threaten the political, social, and moral order of sedentary societies, Bedouin in Syria can be viewed as a complex rural group, stratified by gender and class, and often pursuing multi-resource strategies in collaboration or conflict with the more sedentary farmers and agro-pastoralists that occupied the same space along the frontiers of settlement. Rather than inveterate enemies of the Ottoman order in Bilād al-Shām, their tribal elites often appear to act as an integral part of the coalitions of merchants and bureaucrats that intermediated imperial rule in such urban centers as Damascus and Hama.[25]

The full development of such a perspective is hindered, however, by the fact that the Arab East does not figure, or has figured only marginally, in recent surveys of the field of environmental history.[26] This is different from the case

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International Review of Social History, special issue 18 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 1.

24 This is one of the main findings of the research conducted in the Collaborative Research Centre "Difference and Integration" (SFB 586), hosted by the Universities of Halle-Wittenberg and Leipzig; see, e.g., the introductory essay by J. Paul, "Nomads in History: A View from the SFB. With Comments by Anatoly M. Khazanow." In *Nomad Aristocrats in a World of Empires*, ed. J. Paul (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2013): 17-22. See S. Binay, *Die Figur des Beduinen in der arabischen Literatur, 9.-12. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2006). This finding does not bring into question the value of state-centered perspectives, e.g., the work of R. Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire: Ottoman Nomads, Migrants, and Refugees* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009).

25 For a general discussion of these topics, see T. Asad, "The Beduin as a Military Force. Notes on Some Aspects of Power Relations between Nomads and Sedentaries in Historical Perspective." In *The Desert and the Sown. Nomads in a Wider Society*, ed. C. Nelson (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of International Studies, 1973): 61-73; and "Equality in Nomadic Social Systems? Notes towards the Dissolution of an Anthropological Category." In *Pastoral Production and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Editions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1979): 419-28; and, more recently, the articles collected in the two special issues entitled "Nomads in the Political Field," ed. J. Büssow, D. Durand-Guédy, and J. Paul, *Eurasian Studies* 11/1-2 (2011) and *Nomadic Peoples* 15/1 (2011).

26 Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*; J. Richards, *The Unending Frontier. An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); W. Beinart and L. Hughes, *Environment and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

for Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, areas which can now look back on some thirty years of debates and discussion, and where environmental questions have long been integrated into the mainstream of historical research.[27]

At first glance, the difficulty of writing an environmental history of the Middle East might be attributed to the diversity of environmental zones and climatic regimes that characterises it.[28] The region referred to here as the "Arab East" is located at the meeting place of two oceanic and atmospheric systems that most influence global weather, the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO), which is responsible for the monsoons in Africa and Asia, and the North Atlantic Oscillation (NAO), which also has impact on the Mediterranean region. The volatile interaction of these climatic systems conditions weather in the Arab East.[29] Environmental variability affects the different parts of the area in different ways, as Issar and Zohar explain:

> In regions having a Mediterranean type climate, warm periods spelled dryness while cold periods were humid. The contrary was the rule in regions with "monsoon" type climates. In regions along the margins of climate belts these changes had a decisive impact on the history of the inhabitants, as the shift of the belts spelled either dryness thus desertification or abundant rains, which spelled lushness. This phenomenon was especially recognizable in the history of the Eastern Mediterranean region.[30]

2007); *The Environment and World History*, ed. E. Burke and K. Pomeranz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

27 See, e.g., A. Meier, *Hunger und Herrschaft: Vorkoloniale und frühe koloniale Hungerkrisen im Nordtschad* (Stuttgart: Schwarz, 1994); J. McCann, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land: An Environmental History of Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

28 See, e.g., P. Sanlaville, "Environment and Development." In *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East*, ed. M. Mundy and B. Musallam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 6-26; J.M. Wagstaff, *The Evolution of Middle East Landscapes: An Outline to AD 1840* (London: Croom Helm, 1985). J. Luterbacher et al., "Mediterranean Climate Variability over the Last Centuries: A Review." In *The Mediterranean Climate: An Overview of the Main Characteristics and Issues*, ed. P. Lionello et al. (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2006): 27-148.

29 Issar and Zohar, *Climate Change*: 11-14; T. Felis et al. "A Coral Oxygen Isotope Record from the Northern Red Sea Documenting NAO, ENSO, and North Pacific Teleconnections on Middle East Climate Variability since the Year 1750," *Paleoceanography* 15 (2000): 679-694.

30 Issar and Zohar, *Climate Change*: xxii; see also illustration in Felis et al., "A Coral Oxygen Isotope Record": 689.

As a result, a volatile weather system looms over the Arab East; furthermore it is one whose effect on the region is not uniform at any given time: "the enormous regional differences in this area cannot be emphasised too strongly."[31]

For historians, the hard scientific data that can be drawn from the climatological record pose a further methodological challenge: how to get from observations of weather phenomena, which are recorded and transmitted in historical writings or oral traditions, to an assessment of the climate of a period or even climate change. Debate continues over whether the climate of the Ottoman lands has been stable for several millennia or has gone through periods of significant warming and cooling that influenced humans, animals, and vegetation.[32] The second possibility, if true, poses the question whether the Arab East exhibits the same climatic periodization posited by environmental historians at a global level. Does the climatological record of the region fit into such epochs as the Medieval Warm Period, also called the Climatic Optimum or Climatic Anomaly (c. 950-1250), or Little Ice Age (c. 1350-1850, or 1550-1850)?[33] The acceptance of this periodization, however, is far from unanimous, and its global applicability has recently come under more sceptical scrutiny:

> Thus current evidence does not support globally synchronous periods of anomalous cold or warmth over this timeframe, and the conventional terms of "Little Ice Age" and "Medieval Warm Period" appear to have limited utility in describing trends in hemispheric or global mean temperature changes in past centuries. With the more widespread proxy data and multi-proxy reconstructions of temperature change now available, the spatial and temporal character of these putative climate epochs can be reassessed.[34]

Recent studies from the eastern Mediterranean have also unearthed evidence that justifies scepticism towards the traditional periodization of global climatic

31 Sanlaville, "Environment and Development": 12.

32 W.-D. Hütteroth, "Ecology of the Ottoman Lands." In *The Cambridge History of Turkey*. Vol. 3, *1603-1839*, ed. S. Faroqhi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 18-32.

33 F. Mauelshagen, *Klimageschichte der Neuzeit, 1500-1900* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2010); *Climate since AD 1500*, ed. R.S. Bradley and P.D. Jones, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 1995).

34 IPCC Third Assessment Report—Climate Change 2001, chap. 2.3.3., online version.

history.[35] This is of particular relevance as the notion of a Little Ice Age, albeit diversely interpreted, looms large in recent discussions of the environmental history of the region in the early modern period.[36] In mainstream climatological and historical research, this episode is marked by a significant drop in temperatures and by increased precipitation, extending from about 1350 or 1550 to the middle of the nineteenth century, depending on the researchers in question. Yet there are strong indications that the climate history of the Arab East does not fit into this periodization. The data underlying these "global" parameters are drawn from observations of climate and environment in northern Europe, North America, and, to a certain extent, China. For these regions, the systematic analysis of proxy data such as ice cores, tree rings, sediments, and pollen has advanced decisively in the last decades. For the Arab East, it is difficult to generate climatic data from the analysis of pollens, lake sediments, hydrological data, or tree rings.[37] Pollen and tree-ring analyses, for example, which have yielded illuminating results elsewhere, are difficult to undertake in the region.[38] With the exception of the Dead Sea, the Syrian interior also lacks bodies of water that can be exploited for sediment analysis. Many researchers rely on data from better documented locations outside of the area. Yet such local studies are also rare for places adjacent to the Arab East, with the possible exception of eastern Anatolia.[39]

35 I.J. Orland, "Climate Deterioration in the Eastern Mediterranean as Revealed by Ion Microprobe Analysis of a Speleothem that Grew from 2.2 to 0.9 ka Soreq Cave, Israel." *Quaternary Research* 71 (2009): 27-35.

36 See, e.g., in F. Tabak, *The Waning of the Mediterranean, 1550-1870* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); A. Mikhail, *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); White, *The Climate of Rebellion*.

37 For an overview of proxy data available for Middle Eastern climate history, see Issar and Zohar, *Climate Change*: 14-38.

38 Notable exceptions are M. Abdulla, "Climatic Fluctuations and Natural Disasters in Arabia between Mid-17th and Early 20th Centuries." *GeoJournal* 37 (1995): 176-80, and R. Touchan and M.K. Hughes, "Dendrochronology in Jordan." *Journal of Arid Environments* 42 (1999): 291-303. See also Issar and Zohar, *Climate Change*: 221-33; P. Lionello, ed. *The Climate of the Mediterranean Region: From the Past to the Future* (London: Elsevier, 2012).

39 I. Heinrich et al., "Winter-to-Spring Temperature Dynamics in Turkey Derived from Tree Rings since AD 1125." *Climate Dynamics* 41 (2013): 1685-1701; D. Kaniewski, E. Van Camp, and H. Weiss, "Drought Is a Recurring Challenge in the Middle East." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 109/10 (2012): 3862-3867; N. Köse et al., "Tree-Ring Reconstructions of May-June Precipitation for Western Anatolia." *Quaternary Research* 75 (2011): 438-450; R. Touchan et al. "May-June Precipitation Reconstruction of Southwestern Anatolia, Turkey during the Last 900 Years from Tree Rings." *Quaternary*

Another source for climate history is the weather observations that have come down to us in written and oral records. These observations are often anecdotal and lack coherence and are therefore open to differing interpretations.[40] The pitfalls in the interpretation of texts are evident in two recent studies of the medieval Muslim World. The historian Richard Bulliet noted recent climatological discussions and introduced the notion of the "Big Chill," a period of pronounced cold between 950 and 1100 that put an end to the medieval Iranian cotton boom.[41] In principle, this would be in marked contrast to European climate history, but the evidence so far seems flimsy, as the climatic information stems mostly from a study of Mongolian tree rings. Bulliet's analysis is now supported by corresponding textual evidence from the Arab East as interpreted by Ronnie Ellenblum.[42] In this work, the regional characteristics of Iran, Baghdad, Anatolia, Jerusalem, and Egypt are highlighted. One can criticise both of these works for their uncritical use of weather-related texts in climate analysis, but they point the way towards a more refined combination of textual interpretation and the analysis of various proxy climatic data.

One can also question Sam White's literal use of texts produced by the Ottoman administrative apparatus. Many of the reports sent to Istanbul were not mere descriptions of a particular situation but instruments of political communication, so one must be particularly cautious of texts warning of Bedouin or nomadic incursions.[43] What is most striking in White's argument, however, is his loose way of describing the spatial dimensions of the climatic

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Research 68 (2007): 196-202; and the studies listed in White, *The Climate of Rebellion*: 135-136, n. 49.

40 H. Grotzfeld, "Klimageschichte des Vorderen Orients 800-1800 AD nach arabischen Quellen." In *Historical Climatology in Different Climatic Zones* (*Historische Klimatologie in verschiedenen Klimazonen*), ed. R. Glaser and R. Walsh (Würzburg: Institut für Geographie der Universität Würzburg, 1991): 21-43. For a first result of the new Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)-funded project entitled "Historische Klimatologie des Vorderen Orients anhand arabischer Quellen seit AD 800" of the University of Freiburg, see S. Vogt et al., "Assessing the Medieval Climate Anomaly in the Middle East. The Potential of Arabic Documentary Sources." *PAGES News* 19/1 (2011): 28-29.

41 R.W. Bulliet, *Cotton, Climate, and Camels in Early Islamic Iran: A Moment in World History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) and "Economy and Society in Early Islamic Iran: A Moment in World History." In *The rise of Islam*, ed. V.S. Curtis and S. Stewart (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 44-60.

42 R. Ellenblum, *The Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean. Climate Change and the Decline of the East, 950-1072* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); cf. S.K. Raphael, *Climate and Political Climate: Environmental Disasters in the Medieval Levant* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

43 See White, *The Climate of Rebellion*: 234-235.

phenomena whose outlines he culls from his various sources. Eastern Anatolia, from which most of his data seem to come, cannot be equated to the "Ottoman lands," a term he uses frequently, as the latter would include the Balkans, the Arab East, and large parts of North Africa. The tendency to unwarranted generalization makes it difficult to follow White's discussion of Faruk Tabak's view of environmental change in the eastern Mediterranean. Tabak regards the impact of the Little Ice Age in terms of land degradation, soil erosion, and the spread of malaria in the coastal plains. Yet according to White, "such an interpretation . . . [wrongly] assumes that Little Ice Age climate in Ottoman lands was wetter, rather than drier." Yet he goes on to argue that "this criticism is by no means fatal to the theory. After all, Near Eastern precipitation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was not significantly lower, only more erratic. . . . The period witnessed a number of years with intense rainfall and flooding, sometimes following serious droughts."[44] In addition to the difficulties of bringing together "Ottoman lands" and "Near Eastern precipitation," the last sentence could be used to describe any other historical period in the eastern Mediterranean, erratic distribution of rainfall being one of the main characteristics of the climate regime. If this is the case, how could we then assess whether the climate during the period in question was wetter or drier, a point on which White seems to differ from Tabak?

Taken with our previous remarks on the limitations of the climatic data, these examples should suffice to warn historians of the dangers of overgeneralizing the effects of climatological or environmental developments in the early modern period, even within the confines of the Arab East. The dangers of extending White's arguments from Anatolia are illustrated further in the case study of the steppe marches of southern Syria that takes up most of the sections that follow.

2 Pilgrims, Sultans, and Tribesmen

Even in a "moveable empire" containing a large and sociopolitically significant nomadic population and with imperial practices "adapted to the long term presence and resilience of nomadism,"[45] the frontier of settlement in Syria occupied a marginal position.[46] Sam White argues that Ottoman practice

44 White, *The Climate of Rebellion*: 287-288.

45 Kasaba, *A Moveable Empire*: 31.

46 For the notion of the "desert line," with related maps, see Lewis, *Nomads and Settlers*: 15-23.

relegated these dusty corners of Bilād al-Shām to the "second periphery" of an imperial ecology geared to provisioning Istanbul and the sultan's army, one of many "arid or mountainous places inhabited largely by pastoral tribes and practically impossible to govern directly."[47] In the Syrian southeast, the Ottomans interest in these rural hinterlands was limited to the "projection of imperial power" along the Sultanic Road (al-Ṭarīq al-Sulṭānī) that connected Istanbul, Aleppo, and Damascus with the Hijaz.[48] Even in the sixteenth century, the system of government they installed was an indirect one, revealing "a priority for assuring the biannual passage of the pilgrimage caravan rather than the year round security of the settled communities."[49]

Ottoman officials appeared on the steppe marches of southeastern Syria in significant numbers only during the time it took the Pilgrimage processions to traverse the distance between Muzayrīb and the borders of the Hijaz.[50] Lacking a permanent presence on the ground, the authorities in Damascus relied upon the manipulation of tribal rivalries, the deterrent effect of the military escort of the *ḥajj* and of the relief troops called in Turkish *cerde* (in Arabic *jarda*) that went to meet the caravan with supplies on its return, and the prompt payment of an annual tribute, the *ṣarr* (Turkish often *ṣürre*), to local sheikhs to ensure the safety of the pilgrims. Such direct imperial influence as existed at other times resulted from the "occasional campaign to intimidate the Bedouin . . . when the prevailing system broke down" or to collect the taxes needed to defray the costs of the military escort or the *cerde*.[51]

47 White, *The Climate of Rebellion*: 21.

48 E. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Ottoman Empire: Trans-Jordan, 1850-1921* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1999): 21; and *Incorporating the Periphery: The Ottoman Extension of Direct Rule over Southeast Syria* (*Trans-Jordan*) *1867-1914* (PhD diss. Harvard University, 1991): 33-5; B.J. Walker, *Jordan in the Late Middle Ages: Transformation of the Mamluk Frontier* (Chicago: Chicago Middle East Documentation Center, 2011): 277-278.

49 Rogan, *Incorporating the Periphery*: 34.

50 Ibid.: 25-6. Muzayrīb, near what is today the border between Syria and Jordan, was the place where the Damascene pilgrimage caravan assembled for the arduous passage to the Hijaz and where, according to contemporary sources, the Bedouin sheikhs who were recruited to guarantee the safe-conduct of the pilgrims received their payments at the outset of the caravan's journey. A distinct group of Damascene traders accompanied the *ḥajj* as well as the relief force sent to meet the caravan with supplies on its return (called in Turkish *cerde*, in Arabic *jarda*), as far as this point, and as a result of their activities Muzayrīb was turned into an important seasonal market place—a buyer's market when the caravan set out, a seller's market when it returned.

51 Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*: 21.

The fact that the *ḥajj* could be managed by a system of indirect rule was not, however, an accurate indication of its importance to the Ottomans. By declaring himself Guardian of the Two Holy Sanctuaries, the Ottoman sultan "had staked no small measure of his legitimacy on the successful conduct of the pilgrimage."[52] The Damascene *ḥajj* was of particular importance, "because high Ottoman officials and members of the sultan's family, in addition to thousands of ordinary pilgrims from Rumelia, Anatolia, Iraq and Persia travelled to Arabia along this route."[53] The safe arrival of the two official *ḥajj* processions—there was one every year from Cairo as well as from Damascus—came to be regarded as important elements of the Ottoman dynasty's claim to legitimacy. According to Suraiya Faroqhi, "the failure of a pilgrimage caravan to reach Mecca and return home safely constituted a severe political liability to the Sultan currently occupying the Ottoman throne."[54]

The Ottomans therefore invested considerable prestige in the post of *amīr al-ḥajj*, the official charged with navigating the safe passage of the pilgrims, and "developed a dual system of coercing and coopting the tribes" along the *ḥajj* route in order to secure the channels of influence that were necessary to his work. In 1708, the Porte began the practice of placing the governor of Wilāyat al-Shām in command of the Pilgrimage, in effect making it the "centerpiece of Ottoman rule" in Damascus during the eighteenth century. This policy was adopted after a period of repeated attacks on the *ḥajj* by various Bedouin groups. Once the governor himself was placed in charge of the Piligrimage, the post of Şām ʿUrbānı Şeyhī (the "Sheikh of the Syrian Bedouin"), funded by the provincial treasury in Damascus, seems to have lost some of its importance.[55] During the seventeenth century, the function was occupied by a "leading Bedouin sheikh" who was paid handsomely for procuring camels for the portage of the pilgrims, supplying intelligence to the governor and the commander

52 Rogan, *Incorporating the Periphery*: 33.

53 K.K. Barbir, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus 1708-1758* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980): 109.

54 S. Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and Sultans: The Hajj under the Ottomans 1517-1683* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994): 7.

55 This contrasts with the view of Barbir, *Ottoman Rule*: 109, who maintains that the process of appointing this sheikh "appears to have been better organized and more extensive in the first half of the 18th century." Cf. Rogan, *Incorporating the Periphery*: 34-6; A.K. Rafeq, "Damascus and the Pilgrim Caravan." In *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean*, ed. L.T. Fawaz and C.A. Bayly. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): 133. The office had medieval antecedents; see M. Hiyari, "The Origins and Development of the Amirate of the Arabs during the Seventh/Thirteenth and Eighth/Fourteenth Centuries." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38 (1975): 523.

of the *cerde*, and smoothing the passage of the *ḥajj* by means of his relations with the key Bedouin sheikhs and tribal groups.[56] It is mentioned less and less in the later sources, no doubt because the governors of the province of Damascus, such as Naṣūkh Pasha who led the *ḥajj* caravan from 1708 to 1714-5 and later a series of governors from the al-ʿAẓm lineage, actually possessed the military power to play one Bedouin group against the other.[57]

Despite this elaborate military-political infrastructure, the logistical problems of ensuring the safe passage of the procession across an arid and sparsely inhabited terrain remained daunting. Matters were made more complicated by the fact that "the hajj was a mercantile exchange as a well as a pilgrimage of devotion,"[58] one that involved tens of thousands of people, the population of a large early modern city. The goods "carried by [the] pilgrims to offset the expenses of the journey" were a tempting target for the Bedouin that lined the pilgrimage route. In order to further reduce the pilgrims' vulnerability to attack, the Ottomans undertook an extensive program of fortress construction that fortified the Pilgrimage road (*darb al-ḥajj*) and pushed it east, to the very limits of the farming frontier.

In the sixteenth century, new forts were built on the route "at Dabbah, Qatranah, al-Hasa and Maʿan (out of sixteen in total in the Syrian southeast)."[59] Existing forts were restored in Buṣra and al-ʿAqaba and "an old hajj fort" at al-Salṭ was refortified, as were the Mamluk citadels in ʿAjlūn, al-Karak, and

56 Rogan, *Incorporating the Periphery*: 34-6; Rafeq, "Damascus and the Pilgrim Caravan": 133.

57 For the confrontations and rivalries in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, see the biographer Muḥibbī, who refers to the Sardiyya Sheikh Ḥamad b. Rashīd as *amīr bādiyat al-Shām* or *amīr bilād Ḥawrān* and his famous attack on the Pilgrimage caravan in the year 1081/1671: Muḥammad Amīn al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-ḥādī ʿashar* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.): 2: 133 (copied verbatim in Muḥammad Khalīl al-Murādī, *Silk al-durar fī aʿyān al-qarn al-thānī ʿashar* [3d ed., Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1988]: 2: 63 (entry of Ḥusayn b. Mūsā Pasha b. Turkumān Ḥasan); cf. M. Freiherr von Oppenheim with E. Bräunlich and W. Caskel, *Die Beduinen* (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1939): 1: 380-381; and A.K. Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus, 1723-1783* (Beirut: Khayats 1966): 55-56. In the first decade of the eighteenth century, two factions appear to have been competing for the function of *shaykh ʿarab bilād al-Shām*, namely Kulayb b. Ḥasan of the Sardiyya, who also held the title *amīr bilād al-Ḥawrāniyya*, and Ḍāhir b. Salāma and his son Qaʿdān of the Ṣaqr Bedouin, according to Murtaḍā b. Muṣṭafā al-Kurdī, *Tahdhīb al-aṭwār fī ajāʾib al-amṣār*, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Manuscript Ahlwart no. 6142 (online), fol. 8v.; for the Ṣaqr, see Oppenheim, *Die Beduinen*: 2: 35-40; for the author of the travelogue, see R. Elger, "Die Reise des Murtaḍā b. Muṣṭafā b. Ḥasan al-Kurdī von Damaskus nach Ägypten im Jahre 1127/1714." In *Beschreibung der Welt: Zur Poetik der Reise- und Länderberichte*, ed. X. von Ertzdorff (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000): 367-87.

58 Rogan, *Incorporating the Periphery*: 33.

59 Ibid.: 33-36.

al-Shawbak.[60] Eight new forts were constructed along the *ḥajj* route during the eighteenth century, three of which (at Ḥasā, Fasūʿa/Ẓahr al-ʿAqaba, and Mudawwara) were in what would become Trans-Jordan.[61] Novel architectural features added to the new buildings are evidence of "the increased number and potency of Bedouin attacks on the Ottoman hajj route,"[62] and of the greater boldness of the assailants. In the sixteenth century, the local Bedouin had been dispersed with a few shots of cannon, and Ottoman edicts from the 1560s had tried to restrict the sale to hostile tribesmen of such "simple weapons as large bows, arrows with flat wide iron heads, and daggers."[63] A flood of contraband firearms into the province of Damascus after the conquest of Cyprus in 1571 "made the Bedouin an increasingly grave security risk," and matters were made worse by the wider diffusion of handguns and muskets among the empire's nomads in the seventeenth century.[64] By the time the new *ḥajj* forts were being built in the eighteenth century, the Bedouin had not only acquired more lethal weapons but were carrying out their assaults during a readjustment of Ottoman authority that at times threatened to reduce direct imperial control in southern Syria to a mere shadow.

3 Climatic Change and Bedouin Movements in the Syrian Steppe

In White's view of the impact of the Little Ice Age on the "lands at the margin" in southern Anatolia, the climate-induced crises of the early 1600s opened the way for greater nomadic encroachment on the settled zone and a decline in

60 A. Petersen "Ottoman Hajj Forts." In *Muslim Military Architecture in Greater Syria: From the Coming of Islam to the Ottoman Period*, ed. H. Kennedy (Leiden: Brill, 2006): 311; Walker, *Jordan in the Late Middle Ages*: 277-278.

61 In many of his articles, Petersen leaves the precise dating of these forts open, e.g., Petersen "Ottoman Hajj Forts": 690-1. In a Saudi Aramco World article, however, he draws on the information to be found in Mehmed Edīb's *Manāsik al-ḥajj*, in which some of the forts are identified as constructions of certain governors: Ḥasā and Mudawwara were built on the orders of Aydınlı ʿAbdallah Pasha between 1730 and 1733, Fasūʿa/Ẓahr al-ʿAqaba is said to have been built by Gürcu Osman Pasha (1760-71) and is dated to the reign of Sultan Mustafa III (1757-74), D.L. Kennedy and A. Petersen, "Guardians of the Pilgrim Wells: Damascus to Aqaba." *Saudi Aramco World* 55/1 (January-February 2004): 12-19; see also Barbir, *Ottoman Rule*: app. VII, 196.

62 A. Petersen, "Ottoman Hajj Forts." In *The Archaeology of Jordan*, ed. B. MacDonald, R. Adams, and P. Bienkowski (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001): 690-691.

63 Rogan, *Incorporating the Periphery*: 34.

64 Ibid.: 34; see also A. Petersen, "The Ottoman Conquest of Arabia and the Syrian Hajj Route." *Proceedings of the British Academy* 156 (2009): 90-93.

the settled population that continued for two centuries or more. In Greater Syria and Iraq, it has long been accepted that the same period witnessed the beginning of tribal movements out of Arabia that lasted until the middle of the nineteenth century. In retrospect, these Bedouin migrations seem to form a series of consecutive waves that continued well into the twentieth century and which are, in certain aspects, still underway today.[65] For tribal chroniclers and for most scholars working on the steppe, the overall result of these processes was to replace the predominance of the Mawālī Bedouin over the Syrian Steppe with that of the ʿAnaza confederation.[66] For more mainstream historians, these processes had their greatest impact on the Ottoman order in the Arab East after the 1750s, when the "rise of the Al-Saud in Najd, and their adoption of the Wahhabi religious cause, had the effect of transforming the confused movement of Bedouin . . . northwards towards Syria and Iraq . . . into an organized religious conquest."[67]

Much more has to be done to determine the exact nature of these Bedouin movements; the forces that triggered them remain largely a matter of conjecture. It is likely, however, that drought, soil erosion by wind and water, and pasture degradation acted as "push" factors in north-central Arabia, while the social and demographic space opened up by disease may well acted as a "pull" factor along the frontiers of settlement in southern Syria.[68] In this view, environmental crises in the Arabian Peninsula drove waves of nomadic camel herders north at a time when there were weak or porous Ottoman barriers in their path. This allowed the Bedouin to penetrate deeper into Syria and graze their flocks in the settled zone for longer periods, until they effectively settled the transitional zone between the steppe and the sown.[69] Even the "acceleration of the northward expansion of the ʿAnaza was [in large part] the result of natural calamities," and the tribal movements out of Arabia that they caused

65 For an example of contemporary return movements, see F. Métral, "Managing Risk: Sheep-Rearing and Agriculture in the Syrian Steppe." In *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East*, ed. M. Mundy and B. Musallam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 123-144.

66 A.K. Rafeq, "Changes in the Relationship between the Ottoman Central Administration and the Syrian Provinces from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries." In *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*, ed. T. Naff and R. Owen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977): 63-72; Lewis, *Nomads and Settlers*: 10-14.

67 K.S. Salibi, "Middle Eastern Parallels: Syria-Iraq-Arabia in Ottoman Times." *Middle Eastern Studies* 15/1 (1979): 70-81.

68 Rogan, *Incorporating the Periphery*: 42; cf. also White, *The Climate of Rebellion*: 269-275.

69 A. McQuitty, "The Ottoman Period." In *The Archaeology of Jordan*, ed. B. MacDonald, R. Adams, and P. Bienkowski (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press: 2001): 564-565; Rogan, *Incorporating the Periphery*: 42.

were, for the most part, piecemeal, occurring after it "became a feasible option to drive the herd [of the north Arabian Bedouin] into Syria at times of dearth."[70]

Whatever the exact causes of the northward movement of the Arabian Bedouin, climatic elements probably acted as stressors, reinforcing other possibly more determinative causes. In any case, the exact nature of these movements cannot be adequately rendered by notions such as "tribal break-out" or "tribal migration."[71] These terms convey the impression that "tribes" and "tribal confederations" were the relevant social units that made the decision to relocate. Yet the exigencies of camel grazing—in particular, the fact that too large a herd would quickly exhaust a pasture—meant that the incoming Arabian Bedouin probably arrived in bands of tens and hundreds rather than as a conquering horde. We might better understand the impact of such movements in the places of origin and in the host regions if we were to think of them as small-scale shifts, drifts, and infiltrations driven by the more mundane requirements of agricultural subsistence and livestock rearing. Consisting of a whole series of short-term decisions often taken at the level of the household or herding group, it is only with hindsight that they can be seen to form long-term processes spanning the centuries and bringing about fundamental change on the regional or global scale. "Bedouin infiltration" appears the most accurate description of the rise of the Bedouin element in the population of Bilād al-Shām, as well for as the greater sociopolitical role of Bedouin lineages that traced their origins to Najd or the Hijaz.

4 Transformation of the Tribal Order in the Syrian Southeast

At the time they began, these Bedouin movements were not necessarily considered permanent and unidirectional.[72] In the long term, however, they

70 D. Douwes, *The Ottomans in Syria: A History of Justice and Oppression* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000): 29.

71 The notion of tribal breakouts is taken from Christopher Bayly's account of the "hollowing out" of the Muslim empires of Western Asia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He believes that this was caused by a complex constellation of factors including a "sclerosis of imperial finances," shifting trade routes, the replacement of tributary/prebendal land-tenure systems by commercial estates, and assaults by "egalitarian" tribal conquest movements that were, in the Ottoman case, exemplified by the rise of Wahhābī power in Arabia. Cf. C.A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London: Longman 1989): 35-43.

72 For insiders' accounts of such movements, see Ṭayyib, *Mawsūʿat al-qabāʾil al-ʿarabiyya*: 4: 45-56; U.M. Al Juhany, *Najd before the Salafi Reform Movement: Social, Political, and Religious Conditions during the Three Centuries Preceding the Rise of the Saudi State*

brought new groups into the Syrian steppe (*bādiya*) and caused a continuous reshuffling of tribal territories (*diyār*, sg. *dīra*) and alliances that profoundly altered existing power-relations. With the arrival in southeastern Syria of groups of Banū Ṣakhr, ʿAnaza, and others—by tribal account at least, usually from the Hijaz and Najd—the migratory cycle of nomadic camel herders was pushed westwards, leading to the steady intrusion of the dialects, habits, and customary law of the central Arabian Bedouin into the Syrian steppe.[73] By 1700, "the province of Damascus was caught in a vice between displaced Arab, Turkoman and Kurdish tribes from the north and the great movement of Arab tribes from the south."[74] Nomadic encroachment threatened cultivation in the plains around Hims and Hama and along the fringes of cultivation south of Damascus. In the desert marches of Trans-Jordan, the network of fortifications built along the *ḥajj* route was left undermanned and in disrepair. Tribal forces banished any authority other than that of the local sheikhs from the Syrian southeast, where the intrigues of sheikhly clans and tribal rivalries now took center stage.[75]

Local histories, whether written down by contemporary chroniclers and tribal historians or recorded by such colonial functionaries as John Bagot Glubb and Frederick Peake in Mandatory times, identify the two centuries after 1600 as a period of flux in the tribal order in the area southeast of Damascus. The Sirḥān, the "principal tribe" in the Hawran around 1600 and the leaders of a tribal confederation known as Ahl al-Shimāl, lost their leading position to the Sardiyya during the seventeenth century (dated conventionally between 1650 and 1700).[76] By the early eighteenth century, the Sirḥān had been driven east into the depression in the Shāmiyya steppe that still bears their name. The Sardiyya gained a predominant position along the steppe frontier, monopolizing the protection of the Pilgrimage from the Hawran into al-Balqāʾ. However, the decisive defeat of the Sardiyya sheikh known as al-Maḥfūẓ al-Suradī by newly arrived ʿAnaza at a battle near Muzayrīb about the middle of the eighteenth century brought another twist to the tribal kaleidoscope.[77] The Ahl

(Reading: Ithaca Press, 2002): 64-65; see also ʿA.Ṣ. al-ʿUthaymīn, "Najd from the Tenth/Sixteenth Century until the Rise of Sheikh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb." In *A History of the Arabian Peninsula*, ed. F. al-Semmari, trans. S.K. Jayyusi (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010): 57-90.

73 Rogan, *Incorporating the Periphery*: 32-27.

74 Barbir, *Ottoman Rule*: 104-105.

75 F.G. Peake, *History and Tribes of Jordan* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1958): 86.

76 When led by the Sirḥān, the Ahl al-Shimāl had consisted of the Sirḥān, the ʿĪsā, and the Fuḥaylī; see J.B. Glubb, "A Note on the Sirhan Tribe." St Antony's College, Private Papers Collection: Glubb Papers, 1933.

77 Ṭayyib, *Mawsūʿat al-qabāʾil al-ʿarabiyya*: 4: 47.

al-Shimāl were driven west into Palestine, and their role in the protection and portage of the *ḥajj* caravan was usurped by groups of Banū Ṣakhr and later ʿAnaza.[78] By the time the Ahl al-Shimāl reappeared in the Syrian southeast in the last decades of the eighteenth century, the Banū Ṣakhr had replaced the Sardiyya as the leaders of the confederation.[79] In 1812 Burckhardt describes the former as ranging across "the plain from the fourth to the eighth station of the Hadj, and thence westward toward the mountain of *Belkaa*"[80] (which would include approximately the stretch from al-Zarqāʾ in the north to ʿUnayza in the south) and being much feared by the troops of the pasha of Damascus.[81]

These upheavals in the tribal politics of southeastern Syria played havoc with the system of coercion and cooptation on which the Ottomans relied to ensure the safe passage of the Pilgrimage. Attempts by the authorities in Damascus to incorporate the newly arrived Bedouin into the networks of patronage associated with the *ḥajj* caravan seem to have led to intensified tribal rivalry as the eighteenth century wore on. In the spring (probably March or April) of 1747,

78 Glubb, "A Note on the Sirhan Tribe": passim; S.T.M. al-Sirḥānī, *Min maʿālim jughrāfiyyat wa-taʾrīkh Shibh al-Jazīra al-ʿArabiyya: Wādī l-Sirḥān* (Doha: Dār al-Thaqāfa 1987): 28-30; A.F. al-Omosh, *From Tent to Town: Social Change in Mughair al-Sirhan, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, (1500-1990)* (PhD diss. New School for Social Research, 1991): 39-42.

79 During the subsequent decades, the membership of the Ahl al-Shimāl shifted. The Sardiyya seem initially to have replaced the Sirḥān, but, after their defeat by the ʿAnaza, a section of the tribe known as the Ṣaqr and the Fuḥaylī settled as farmers in Palestine. By the 1800s, the "members of the reconstituted Ahl al-Shimāl" included the Banū Ṣakhr, the Sirḥān, the ʿĪsā, and the Sardiyya; see Glubb, "A Note on the Sirhan Tribe."

80 J.L. Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahhabys, Collected during His Travels in the East* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830): 1: 13. For the names of the *ḥajj* stations, see Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*: 341. See also Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and Sultans*: 56 for an Ottoman account that the tribe received payments for the protection of the Pilgrimage in 1674/5; the same entry also mentions, however, the Bedouin of Karak (ʿUrbān-i Karak) and the ʿAnaza as well as the Waḥīdāt and the ʿUmr. The next entry refers to the clan of Salāma (of the Ṣaqr).

81 Given the disputes over the exact meaning of the term "Bedouin" and the complexity of migratory movements into the Fertile Crescent, it is worth noting a discrepancy between the oral history of the Banū Ṣakhr and the documentary record, which hints at more fluid identities, a more permeable boundary between farmer and nomad, and even the possibility of a longer presence in southeastern Syrian. Whereas the Banū Ṣakhr were, by their own account, camel herders who originated in al-ʿUlā in the Hijaz and "began to frequent Transjordan from 1700 to 1750 for the summer grazing and to buy grain" (Glubb, "A Note on the Sirhan Tribe": 5), Mamluk encyclopaedists and sixteenth-century Ottoman tax rolls record a group with the same name farming and paying taxes in al-Karak; see M.ʿA. al-Bakhīt, *Mamlakat al-Karak fī l-ʿahd al-Mamlūkī* (Amman: n.p., 1976): 23; M. Bakhit, "Ṣakhr, Banū." in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1995): 8: 882-883.

it was learned in Damascus that, after the safe return of that year's Pilgrimage caravan, two Bedouin groups had clashed violently near the small town of Muzayrīb. According to the chronicler Aḥmad b. Budayr (fl. 1762), known as the Barber (al-Ḥallāq),[82]

> the news spread [in Damascus] that the ʿAnaza Bedouin (ʿArab ʿAnaza) had plundered the Rashā Bedouin.[83] The "Kurds (Akrād)"[84] who were with the ʿAnaza, took all the booty, goods, camels, sheep, and women—sheep so many they could not be counted except by God. The battle was dreadful (*muhawwila*), and on both sides there were many victims.[85]

Some months later, in July, another group of Banū Ṣakhr who inhabited the Ḥawrān region are said to have clashed with ʿAnaza Bedouin over the plundering of sheep herds.[86] The sources do not provide more specific information about the identification of the groups involved, but those on the side of the ʿAnaza probably belonged to the Ḥasana or Wuld ʿAlī, those of the Banū Ṣakhr to the Khuraysha or other Kaʿābina, the section of the confederation that

82 For Ibn Budayr or al-Budayrī, as he is called in most of the later literature, see D. Sajdi, "A Room of His Own. The 'History' of the Barber of Damascus (fl. 1762)." *The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies* 4 (2003): 19-35.

83 Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*: 199. Rafeq understands Rashā as a corruption of the name "Shresha," a subgroup of the Banū Ṣakhr, ibid.: 199, n. 3. His source, U.J. Seetzen, "Mémoire pour servir à la conoissance des tribus arabes en Syrie et dans l'Arabie déserte et pétrée." *Annales des voyages, de la géographie et de l'histoire* (1810): 8: 281-324, here 287, gives the name as "Chrêscha," a reference to the Khuraysha; see F.G. Peake (Fradarīk J. Bīk), *Taʾrīkh sharqī al-Urdunn wa-qabāʾilihā*, trans. B.D. Ṭūqān (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Nahḍa, n.d.): 214-217.

84 It is difficult to identify the referent of "Akrād" in this context, as it could be used for one section of the inhabitants of the city of Salṭ, who, according to Rogan, "were divided into three clans—the Akrad, Qatishat and ʿAwamila," Rogan, *Frontiers of the State*: 27, or, more loosely, for the Kurdish military forces of Damascus who had been involved in the power plays between Bedouin groups and Ottoman authorities in the first half of the eighteenth century; see, e.g., the use of the phrase *ṭāʾifat al-Akrād* (the Kurdish group) in Kurdī, *Tahdhīb al-aṭwār*, fol. 8v.

85 Aḥmad al-Ḥallāq al-Budayrī, *Ḥawādith Dimashq al-yawmiyya, 1154-1175 H., 1741-1762 M.*, ed. A.ʿI. ʿAbd al-Karīm (Cairo: Maṭbūʿāt al-Jamʿiyya al-Miṣriyya lil-Dirāsāt al-Taʾrīkhiyya, 1959): 88; Ibn Budayr does not provide an exact date; cf. Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*: 199; Peake, *Taʾrīkh sharqī al-Urdunn*: 235-256.

86 Budayrī, *Ḥawādith Dimashq al-yawmiyya*: 101.

owed allegiance to the former rather than to the al-Fāyiz of the Tūqa section.[87] The clashes between these rival factions of Bedouin may not have been the first time that members of the Banū Sakhr and the ʿAnaza tribal confederations came to blows. It is accepted that some ʿAnaza groups had extended their seasonal migration north into the Syrian steppe long before the middle of the eighteenth century.[88] The native histories of the Trans-Jordan Bedouin, at least as they survived into Mandatory times, portray the incoming ʿAnaza as the authors of the demise of the leading Sardiyya sheikh al-Maḥfūz al-Suradī around 1750 (according to tribal traditions, the latter is said to have been overthrown and killed by members of the ʿAnaza who had initially placed themselves under his protection).[89]

5 Provincial Politics and Bedouin Rivalries

Whatever their exact history or context, these tribal rivalries in the steppe caught the interest of such Damascene chroniclers as Ibn Budayr (and later others, such as the biographer Muḥammad Khalīl al-Murādī, d. 1791) not simply as clashes between two mutually hostile groups of Bedouin but also as elements in power struggles that involved the governors of Damascus and their rivals for domination of the city and its hinterlands. Both the Banū Ṣakhr and the ʿAnaza, or at least the subsections involved, played a major role in the passage of the Pilgrimage caravan to Mecca and Medina and back.[90] The governor of the province of Damascus, Asʿad Pasha al-ʿAẓm, who then had just established his supremacy in its politics, seems to have favored the newcomers of the ʿAnaza confederation—a group by now well on its way to becoming the dominant power in the Syrian steppe—over its longer-established rivals.[91]

87 Lewis, *Nomads and Settlers*: 9; N.N. Lewis, "The Syrian Steppe during the Last Century of Ottoman Rule: Hawran and the Palmyrena." In *The Transformation of Nomadic Society in the Arab East*, ed. M. Mundy and B. Musallam (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 33-43, here 35. Ṭayyib, *Mawsūʿat al-qabāʾil al-ʿarabiyya*: 4:46. For an overview of the history of the ʿAnaza confederation, see A. Meier and J. Büssow, "ʿAnaza." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3d ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2012): 1: 63-67.

88 Ṭayyib, *Mawsūʿat al-qabāʾil al-ʿarabiyya*: 4: 46-47.

89 Ibid.: 4: 47.

90 Peake, *Taʾrīkh sharqī al-Urdunn*: 216-218.

91 Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*: 169, 198. When in Damascus 1766, Niebuhr was told that ʿAnaza were esteemed as the most powerful tribe in the Syrian steppe. C. Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia and Other Countries in the East*, trans. R. Heron (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son 1792): 2: 179; according to the *Beschreibung von Arabien: Aus eigenen Beobachtungen*

The Banū Ṣakhr, on the other hand, had an ally in Ẓāhir al-ʿUmar al-Zaydānī, one of the leading political figures in southern Syria.[92] By the middle of the eighteenth century, Ẓāhir al-ʿUmar had consolidated a formidable and largely autonomous power base in Acre, to the detriment of the governors of the province of Damascus.[93] The Banū Ṣakhr themselves, by some accounts the group of Sheikh Sulaymān b. Ḥanīf al-Khuraysha, leader of its Kaʿābina subsection, had wrested the prestigious and lucrative charge of supplying and protecting the Pilgrimage from the Sardiyya and had gained the leadership of the Ahl al-Shimāl at some time in the first half of the eighteenth century.[94]

These complicated political manoeuvers not only involved various factions of the Ottoman provincial elite but also threatened the central concern of the imperial authorities in Istanbul, the safety of the *ḥajj* caravan. This became clear in the aftermath of the notorious attack on the caravan in the pilgrimage season of 1757.[95] First, a coalition of Banū Ṣakhr and other Bedouin under the leadership of Qaʿdān b. al-Fāyiz annihilated the *cerde*, the relief troops sent to meet the pilgrimage caravan with supplies on its return, between Qaṭrāna and Maʿān in September, at the end of Dhū l-Ḥijja. Some weeks later, in October, the Pilgrimage caravan itself, led by Asʿad Pasha al-ʿAẓm's unfortunate successor,

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und im Lande selbst gesammleten Nachrichten (Copenhagen: Möller, 1772): 396, ʿAnaza "soll der grösste Stamm in der syrischen Wüste sein." Asʿad Pasha's uncle and predecessor Sulaymān Pasha al-ʿAẓm, governor of Damascus from 1733 to 1738 and from 1741 to 1743, had been allied, at least at times in 1742, with the Ṣakhr and the Ṣaqr against Ẓāhir al-ʿUmar; Budayrī, *Ḥawādith Dimashq al-yawmiyya*: 22; Niebuhr, *Travels through Arabia*: 163. Payments to ʿAnaza are mentioned in the 1674-5 "budget" of the Pilgrimage, quoted by Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and Sultans*: 56; payments for the Wuld ʿAlī section, by Oppenheim, *Die Beduinen*: 1: 95, cf. 98 and here 72: "die Ṣurre, ein Monopol der Wuld Ali" for the second half of the eighteenth century.

92 M.Y. Suwāʿid, *al-Badw fī Filasṭīn fī l-ḥiqba al-ʿuthmāniyya* (*1517-1914*) (Amman: Dār Zahrān, 2008): 61-74.

93 T. Philipp, *Acre: The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian City, 1730-1831* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

94 Peake, *Taʾrīkh sharqī al-Urdunn*: 216-218; Ṭayyib, *Mawsūʿat al-qabāʾil al-ʿarabiyya*: 4: 46-47.

95 Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*: 213-27; with a discussion of the related documentation; Budayrī, *Ḥawādith Dimashq al-yawmiyya*: 203-21; Mīkhāʾīl Burayk (Breik), *Taʾrīkh al-Shām, 1720-1782*, ed. Q. al-Bāshā al-Mukhallisī (Harissa: Imprimerie St. Paul, 1930): 45-7; Haydar Riḍā al-Rukaynī, *Jabal ʿĀmil fī qarn* (*1163-1248 H/1749-1832 M*), ed. A. Ḥuṭayṭ (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī, 1997): 40-1; and ʿUmar b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Wakīl, *Tarwīh al-qalb al-shajī fī maʾāthir ʿAbdallāh Bāshā al-Jata-jī* [=*Çeteci Abdallah Paşa*], ed. N.R. al-Sawāriyya and S.Gh. al-Ṭarāwina (Karak: Dār Rund, 2001). The incident is also mentioned in the list of Ṭayyib, *Mawsūʿat al-qabāʾil al-ʿarabiyya*: 4: 62.

Ḥusayn Pasha b. Makkī, was attacked on its return, near Tabūk.[96] Frederick Peake's account no doubt exaggerates but nonetheless indicates the magnitude of the disaster in popular memory: "60,000 pilgrims are said to have been robbed and dispersed in the desert. . . . [S]ome 20,000 were either killed by the Bedouin or died of hunger, while many of the women were enslaved."[97] In Damascus, it was rumoured that nearly all the goods stolen from the *ḥajj* caravan were sold to Ẓāhir al-ʿUmar.[98]

In the power plays that followed, the Banū Ṣakhr were punished by the Ottoman government,[99] but the Bedouin's struggles over the protection of the *ḥajj* caravan also contributed to the consolidation of the rule of the Banū Sakhr's ally Ẓāhir al-ʿUmar (d. 1775) and Aḥmad al-Jazzār (d. 1804), his successor as ruler of Acre, over large swathes of the southern districts of Bilād al-Shām.[100] Within the Banū Ṣakhr, the booty from the assault on the *ḥajj* may well have facilitated the rise of the Fāyiz to the leadership of the tribe (in addition to the leadership of the Tūqa section to which they belonged), and their establishment of a significant center of tribal power both in al-Balqāʾ and among the Ahl al-Shimāl.[101] These were long-term effects. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, the former governor Asʿad Pasha al-ʿAẓm, who had conducted the Pilgrimage successfully fourteen times without major problems, was accused of treason, as it was rumored that he had pulled strings to discredit his successor. Though these accusations seem unfounded, he was put to death when on his way to Istanbul to negotiate his political future. The news of his execution reached Damascus towards the end of Shaʿbān 1171/May 1758.[102]

The immediate trigger of the attack on the Pilgrimage caravan was the refusal of the Ottoman governor, Ḥusayn Pasha, to make the customary *ṣarr*

96 See also Murādī, *Silk al-durar*: 2: 60-62.

97 Peake, *History and Tribes of Jordan*: 87; that Peake exaggerated is suggested by the fact that, by most estimates, "between the sixteenth and early nineteenth century, about 15,000-20,000 pilgrims assembled in Damascus every year to join the caravan to the Hijaz"; see Rafeq, "Damascus and the Pilgrim Caravan": 133.

98 Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*: 216, drawing on Mīkhāʾīl al-Sabbāgh's *Taʾrīkh Ẓāhir al-ʿUmar al-Zaydānī*.

99 Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*: 229-230.

100 ʿAbbūd al-Ṣabbāgh, *al-Rawḍ al-zāhir fī taʾrīkh Ẓāhir*, ed. M.A.K. Muḥāfaẓa and ʿI.M. Huzāyima (Irbid: Muʾassasa Ḥamāda/Dār al-Kindī, 1999); Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*: 241-309; Philipp, *Acre*.

101 Peake, *Taʾrīkh sharqī al-Urdunn*: 218.

102 For the whole argument, see Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*: 216-22; cf. Budayrī, *Ḥawādith Dimashq al-yawmiyya*: 201-210; Burayk 1930: 59-60.

payment. Rafeq, however, has long since identified more deep-seated factors that are of relevance to environmental historians:

> It is stated that the Ṣakhr were determined to attack in revenge for losing their privileged position as conductors of the Pilgrimage. Apart from the prestige of this function, it was a source of income. When the ʿAnaza advanced into Syria early in the 18th century, they took part in the transport of the Pilgrimage, and thus became rivals to the Ṣakhr.
>
> The Bedouin along the Pilgrimage route had suffered from natural calamities in the year which preceded the attack. The excessive heat towards the end of 1169/August 1756, particularly in the region of Abār al-Ghanam, caused human casualties and a decrease in the number of camels. A severe frost in the winter of 1170/1756-7 affected the flocks and caused deaths among the Beduin.[103]

According to Ibn Budayr there were two consecutive winters with extraordinary cold, snow, and ice.[104] In November 1756, heavy rains were followed by a harsh cold that lasted for about twenty days, so that everything was covered in ice and even the great water wheels (pl. *nawāʿīr*) of Hama stopped turning. Wild and domesticated animals are said to have died in great numbers, and Ibn Budayr names explicitly among the victims of the cold "a great number of Bedouin and their women" (*wa-māta min awlād al-ʿarab wa-nisāʾihim khalq kathīr*).[105]

From these accounts, it seems clear that climatic factors added stress to an already tense situation; the limited resources of a fragile and marginal environment became the object of fierce competition, not only between Bedouin groups but also among successive governors of Damascus seeking to supply their city and conciliate a population (including the all-important military ele-

103 Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus*: 214-215.

104 Budayrī, *Ḥawādith Dimashq al-yawmiyya*: 188, 192. The chronicler states that, on the return from the Hijaz in September or October 1756, more than 1700 people (*nafs*) died in one day in Abār al-Ghanam. However, information of this kind and especially the numbers mentioned should be treated with caution, as Miknāsī, in his travelogue (*Riḥlat al-Miknāsī*: 258), also states that they reached Abār al-Ghanam in September 1787 after the most strenuous leg of the pilgrimage. These hardships were surpassed during one of the following days, when "we came to rest at the fort called Ḥadya, and we had not seen, during what had come before, a harder day in respect to heat, combined with the absence of water and the harshness of the heat and temperature; on that day, 175 people died from thirst and a great number of camels, some of the corpses we saw lying by the road, others we only heard about."

105 Budayrī, *Ḥawādith Dimashq al-yawmiyya*: 193-194.

ments) that showed signs of increasing unrest.[106] The cumulative impact of climatic factors was the underlying condition of a situation that proved a disaster for some but an opportunity to profit for others, not least Ẓāhir al-ʿUmar and the al-Fāyiz sheikhs of the Banū Ṣakhr. These conflicts were not, however, simply the result of a global wave of climatic change: they interacted with more localized factors that had long been at work along the desert's edge in southeastern Syria and occurred within a provincial power structure conditioned by the Ottoman's attempt to manage the passage of the *ḥajj* by means of a system of indirect rule.

Conclusion

Two years of snow and ice, separated by a wave of excessive heat: these are extreme weather conditions, but do these little pieces of text, even when combined with the evidence for prolonged bouts of drought provided by the tree-ring data from southern Trans-Jordan, allow us to speak of environmental impacts on the scale of what climatologists call the Little Ice Age? Can such evidence be combined with the oral traditions of the Bedouin and the contemporary documentary record of conflict along the *ḥajj* route to transfer Sam White's arguments from the Anatolian heartlands of the Ottoman Empire to its southeastern Syrian periphery? The previous pages reveal a complex picture of Bedouin infiltration and shifting alliances aimed at monopolizing the escort of the Damascene *ḥajj* caravan. The convoluted pattern of rivalry and accommodation that resulted not only casts doubt on White's notion of a "Climate of Rebellion" that ended with a nomadic invasion of the sown but also raises doubts about perceptions of the Bedouin as a monolithic block in unremitting conflict with the states and settled populations along the steppe frontier. Environmental factors no doubt played an important role in these conflicts, but it seems more prudent to see them as stressors that reinforced other potentially more determinative factors in these desert-side exchange systems.[107]

Although the emerging field of environmental history may well produce "a plethora of fresh ideas and a reassessment of old assumptions,"[108] scholars focused on the early modern history of the arid lands bordering the Syrian

106 Budayrī, *Ḥawādith Dimashq al-yawmiyya*: 191-220; Burayk 1930: 45-49.

107 S. Sörlin and P. Warde, "The Problem of the Problem of Environmental History: A Re-reading of the Field." *Environmental History* 12 (2007): 107-130.

108 K. Butzer, "Environmental History in the Mediterranean World: Cross-Disciplinary Investigation of Cause-and-Effect for Degradation and Soil Erosion." *Journal of Archaeological Science* 32 (2005): 1773-800, here 1774.

steppe would be wise to adopt a cautious approach when assessing the impact of climatic change. We are still in the early stages of a long conversation about the various factors that combined to bring about a broad shift in the human ecology of the Arab East after the onset of the Little Ice Age in other parts of the globe. The decisions that conditioned the process of Bedouin encroachment on the sown are complex and only partially understood. The same is true for the role of large confederations such as the ʿAnaza and the Shammar in these processes and for the histories of the larger sheikdoms that they established in other parts of the Fertile Crescent. Subsequent research will have to address issues ranging from the search for subsistence to that for spiritual redemption and "paradise," in other words the diverse and complex set of factors apparent to the author of the verse taken from the famous *Kitāb al-Ḥamāsa* (Book of Valour), collected by Abū Tammām (d. 845 AD), that opens this article.

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