



حبر أبيض
WHITE INK



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“Arab identity in the Ottoman era”

Our Arab region was subject to Ottoman rule since the beginning of the fifteenth century AD, during which it witnessed forms of direct and indirect administration and various types of administrative designations for our Arab regions, according to the prevailing perceptions and ideas issued from Constantinople. This was followed by a lack of clarity and a wide understanding of some terms and designations for the nationalities residing in the region. Linguistically, the Ottomans did not clearly understand the defining characteristics of the Arabs, and the Ottoman officials were not completely sure who the Arabs were in addition to the Bedouins. For example, you find that those who wrote in the Ottoman Turkish language say "Bedouin Arabs" and those who reside in the Arabian Peninsula, and it may also mean to them Africans because of the import of Africans from Cairo markets. The term Arabs for the Ottomans was completely unclear. For example, the Ottoman traveler Olia Chalabi, who visited the Lebanese city of Sidon in the seventeenth century AD, was surprised when he heard the Greek Orthodox "Romans" residing in the port speak Arabic more than their mother tongue. This was strange to him and a sign of his lack of awareness that the Arabic language absorbed many of those who settled in its Arab lands. This is also measured in understanding the geographical terminology of the Arab region. The term "Arabistan" was used by the Ottomans and they meant through it the Arab countries as a geographical description of it. In fact, the content of that term became clear only in the mid-nineteenth century AD, when some specialized Ottoman geographical books were written that dealt with the geography of the empire kingdoms or some political trips that included in their reports a geographical survey of border areas in our Arab region with some precision. This resulted in many geographical maps, which in general aim to serve the authority of the state and consolidate its control over our Arab region.

Our Arab region has suffered greatly in terms of the official language. The Ottoman Turkish language was the official language of communication used in the capital, Anatolia, the Balkans and in their government departments. Whereas in the Arab lands, the main language was the language of the ruler appointed by any nationality, which required the presence of a special translator for him. It was difficult for people to easily communicate with him or deal with government departments. This greatly affected the general conditions of the people and created a wide gap between the ruling authority and the people. There is no doubt that such a language represented something intrusive to the Arab community at the time, and it had an effect on the state of interest and concern for the Arabic language and rejecting that intruder.

On the other hand, the Turks adopted the Ottoman ideology, which the state has adopted since the Tanzimat era in 1839 AD. The empire's ethnic groups have framed it before regardless of identical identity. However, the authoritarian circles did not possess meanings for all the social issues that the citizen was experiencing, and therefore the official ideology of the state did not influence significantly among non-Turkish groups. This is why the Turks were led to highlight their identity by researching Turkish nationalism and trying to convince others of it. This made them confront other nationalities and clash with that trend, including the Arab nation, which announced its rejection. This appeared in several pictures and examples such as writings in various newspapers in Arabic and Turkish languages in the last years of the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid II, and the fight against the dilution of their authentic Arab identity by various possible means, such as lighting the fuse of the Arab awakening. This also appeared through the spread of awareness and Arab culture in the Arab community, such as the establishment of various Arab schools, as happened in the Levant and Egypt, and the emergence of Arab cultural symbols that in turn contributed to reviving and preserving Arab culture, which had an impact in most Arab countries. We can add to that the work on publishing and printing Arabic books and helping them reach the Arab reader. Work was also done to establish Arabic newspapers, which led to the emergence of generations of intellectuals who had the lead in preserving the Arab identity during the Ottoman rule.