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Class of 2020

Nyhus Large Travel Grant

Morocco during the pre-colonial Alaouite Sultanate is often considered in two parts -- “Bilad al-Makhzen,” the regions under the direct political control of the sultan, and “Bilad al-Siba,” the regions that respected the religious authority of the sultan as a descendant of the prophet Muhammad, but rejected his secular rule. The borders of these zones tend to overlap with Arab-Amazigh divisions, and they have at times been simplified to ethnic tribal boundaries. There is some debate, however, over the extent to which this distinction reflects contemporaneous Moroccan understandings of their state versus a European depiction intended to divide Morocco and cast aspersions on its sovereignty in order to ease colonial penetration. Undeniably, this portrayal of a divided state strongly affected the later implementation of the French protectorate as evidenced by the establishment in 1930 of two legal systems, one for Arabs and one for the Amazigh.

Through the Nyhus Large Travel Grant, I spent two weeks conducting research at the library of The Tangier American Legation Institute for Moroccan Studies. During my time there, I was able to review a number of rare European travelogues from the end of the 1800s as well as the dispatches of the American consul general on the state of affairs in Morocco during the same period. In particular, I focused on descriptions of the military expeditions, or *mahallas*, of Sultan Hassan I to subdue rebellious tribes and collect taxes in the Rif, Sous, and Tafilalt regions during the 1880s and 90s. I plan to compare the Western depictions of these expeditions and tribal relations with the descriptions of the same events in Ahmad ibn Khalid Al-Nasiri’s concomitant Moroccan history *Kitab al-Istiqsa li-Akhbar Duwal al-Maghrib al-Aqsa*. I believe by contrasting these narratives of the *mahallas* I will be able to shed light on the differences in Moroccan and Western perceptions of the sultan’s sovereignty over these regions in the final period before the protectorate. The other incident I concentrated on was the 1897 Tourmaline Expedition, an attempt by British adventurers to open direct trade with the Sous in defiance of the sultan. This case incorporated a number of different perspectives including that of the mostly Amazigh tribesmen living in the region, who repudiated the sultan’s authority over them during contractual negotiations with the leader of the expedition.

The primary source materials I gathered during this trip will form the basis of my honors project looking at origins of the Bilad Al-Makhzen/Bilad Al-Siba divide, which in turn will be a lens into the character of Islamic sovereignty in the Maghrib at the end of the pre-colonial era. Additionally, the chance to apply the research skills I have developed here at Bowdoin in an overseas archive was an incredible opportunity for which I am extremely grateful to the Nyhus Program. I had a terrific experience during my research period and would strongly encourage others to apply for this amazing grant.