OTTOMAN RULE IN THE PROVINCE OF DAMASCUS
1860-1909

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A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Georgetown University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

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ABSTRACT

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Although the movement of reform in the Ottoman Empire commonly known as the Tanzimat was inaugurated in 1826, it was not until 1860, in the wake of the famous Damascus massacre, that the new, western-inspired laws and policies which defined the movement began to be implemented rigorously and with a reasonable degree of effectiveness in Syria. The progress of the Ottoman government in carrying out this task after 1860 constitutes the principal theme of the study which is carried down to 1909.

The central thesis of the study is that decisive progress in implementing the reforms in Syria occurred in two periods: 1860-1871, the period when the Ottoman government was dominated by ministers of the reform party; and 1880-1909, the era of Sultan Abd al-Hamid. The intervening period--1871-1880--was a time of political confusion and administrative chaos in the Ottoman Empire in which reformers and conservatives competed for political ascendancy. Sultan Abd al-Hamid brought this period of chaos to an end by developing a system of autocratic rule which combined the two conflicting political trends in the empire. Overtly conservative, he continued to develop the institutions of the Tanzimat, at least in Syria, so that by the time of the Young Turk revolution in 1908, they were more
effectively established than ever before.

During the first of these periods, the successful implementation of military conscription constituted the key development which made other changes possible. The creation of a provincial gendarmerie also strengthened the hand of the provincial government. With the improved conditions of public security provided by these forces, it was possible to enforce other reforms. The towns of Syria were linked to Istanbul by telegraph, and other public works projects were undertaken. The Ottoman Land Law of 1858 which required all land to be registered in the name of a responsible owner began to be applied, and new, direct methods of taxation were established. A new state-supported system of secular schools began to be created, and emphasis began to be placed on enforcing the new secular criminal, commercial and civil legal codes which had been the primary innovation of the Tanzimat reformers. Finally, the Ottoman Provincial Law of 1864 which united all the reforms of the Tanzimat in one piece of legislation was applied in Damascus in 1865.

Under Ėl-Bīd al-Ḥamīd, the emphasis was more on material developments. The system of secular, state-supported schools envisioned by the Tanzimat reformers was brought into being in Syria during his administration. Furthermore, emphasis was placed on building new government buildings, strengthening the government bureaucracy, and public works, especially roads and railways, the construction of which made great progress under his rule. Meanwhile, although the Sultan appeared to champion the cause of Islamic conservatism, the secular institutions created in the 1860s began to work with increased effectiveness.

Economic hardships, it is argued, especially in the government bureau-
cracy, was the chief cause of the Young Turk revolution of 1908. The ideological discontent of both conservatives and partisans of the reform movement with the ambivalent policy of the Sultan strengthened the mood of revolution, however, ultimately making it impossible for Câdî al-ınad to restore the balance. The Young Turk regime placed renewed emphasis on secular reform, thus ensuring that the institutions of the Tanzimat, a system of government based on secular principles, would constitute the dominant legacy left by the Turks in Syria.