

Mikkel Bille. *Being Bedouin Around Petra: Life at a World Heritage Site in the Twenty-First Century*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2019.

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Alexandre Kedar, Ahmed Amara and Oren Yiftachel. *Emptied Lands: A Legal Geography of Bedouin Rights in the Negev*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018.

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The distance from Petra to the heart of the Negev (Beersheva) is 75 miles. However, the complexity of the colonial history of British Mandated Palestine, which originally also covered the Emirate of Eastern Arabia (later to be known as the Kingdom of Jordan), is such that travel between these two centres of Bedouin social and cultural life can take more than ten hours using a combination of car, aeroplane and bus. These complexities also play out in the way that the rights of Bedouin to the land they have occupied for centuries as sheep, camel, and goat herders are denied, dismissed, disparaged, and also celebrated. Mikkel Bille's study of the Bedouin of Petra recognises that they have been displaced, if not dispossessed, and are no longer permitted to reside in Petra itself, since 1985 when the location became a UNESCO World Heritage Site. In effect, the Bedouin who had inhabited this landscape for centuries were forced to resettle by a combination of international heritage protection policies and a national (if not regional) government policy of settling Bedouin and turning them into more reliable farmers. Two villages were built outside the Petra heritage area for the two major tribes that inhabited Petra: the Bdoul and Ammarin tribes. Twenty years later, their association with Petra was celebrated in landmark recognition – again by UNESCO – of their intangible Bedouin heritage, of tents, camels, poetry and desert knowledge. In the Negev, on the other hand, a century-old struggle that mirrors that which emerged from the Balfour Declaration continues. The Bedouin leaders of the tribes of the Negev in Palestine sent a deputation to the first High Commissioner of Palestine (Samuel Herbert) and to the Secretary of State for the Colonies (Winston Churchill) to express their loyalty to His majesty's government. Winston Churchill reaffirmed the assurances already given by the High Commissioner to Bedouin leaders that the special rights and customs of the Bedouin Tribes of Beersheva would not be interfered with. This official report of 29 March 1921 becomes in many ways symbolic and symptomatic of the ensuing legal struggle to

persuade the Israeli judiciary that the Bedouin of the Negev had rights and were granted autonomy in the early years of the British Mandate.

Mikkel Billie's *Being Bedouin Around Petra*, is a fascinating look at the 'forced settlement' of Bedouin to preserve our world heritage, much like the French mandate authority's removal of the Bedouin whom they found sheltering in the ruins of Palmyra in the 1920s. Building a model village to the side of the ruins was found to be the most expedient way of preserving, restoring and in some cases reconstructing parts of the Graeco-Roman and Aramean archaeological site. It was another sixty years before, in Jordan, a similar move got underway. In 1985, Petra became a UNESCO World Heritage site and the Bedouin who had inhabited the landscape for centuries, living in tents, caves and vernacular houses and rearing livestock – mainly sheep and goat, were far removed from any 'nostalgic image of camel-herding, tent-dwelling nomadic Bedouin'. The effects of UNESCO heritage regulations and mass tourism were largely the cause. In an ironic turn of events in 2005, one of the two tribes, the Ammarin Bedouin, and a few neighbouring tribes, became part of UNESCO's newly established intangible cultural list – 'Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity'. Here, on the one hand, was international recognition of the Bedouin oral tradition and skills of nomadic desert survival that Bedouin across the Middle East had developed over millennia. On the other hand, these particular Bedouin had for decades been economically depending on tourism to Petra but had been removed from the site and relocated from the area by the government as a response to UNESCO tangible heritage. The spatial and social change from living in tents and caves in the 1980s to living in concrete buildings detached from the landscape which so intimately related to their oral traditions and skills inevitably created some dissonance. And it is this undermining of practices, especially 'saint intercession' that is the surprising core of this book. The central question addressed throughout is how, and why, do Islamic pasts and Bedouin heritage shape identities in Jordan? Bille presents an ethnographic exploration of aspects of Bedouin life around Petra and the process of heritage preservation and contestation, which simultaneously seeks to understand the role of material culture in people's lives more generally. Conducting anthropological fieldwork between 2005 and 2011, Bille attempts a two-pronged approach, giving a micro-scale perspective on how a group of Bedouin perceive their past and revitalise a Bedouin heritage in a new sedentary context, while at the same time interweaving the workings, practices and representations of the heritage industry regionally, nationally and internationally. The book deliberately shifts between perspectives, sometimes addressing

international institutions' efforts to preserve heritage; at other times discussing everyday living with particular objects among the Bedouin.

The first part of Bille's book specifically explores how cultural practices among a Bedouin tribe in Southern Jordan rose to national prominence through tapping into different claims to universality. In the second half of the book, material objects, or their absences, are the focal points in heritage debates over what it means to be Bedouin, to be Muslim and to be Jordanian. By following the role of 'things' in the everyday life of a Bedouin tribe, the book explores the overlaps and gaps between the everyday life of the Ammarin Bedouin around Petra and the production of UNESCO tangible and intangible heritage, the shaping of Jordanian identity, and – most surprising of all – the disappearance of folk Islamic practices and the rise of a new Islamic awareness among the Bedouin. The book chapters tell this story concisely: Preserving Heritage – Marketing Bedouinity; Taming Heritage; The Shameful Shaman; Dealing with Dead Saints; The Allure of Things; and finally the Ambiguous Materialities. In the end, Bille shows us that the process of modernising Jordanian citizens, materialised in the settlement of the Bedouin is also a political project of destabilising tribal power structures. Heritage, aside from cherishing and protecting cultural diversity, is also a vehicle for identity development and state formation.

State formation, and the de-Arabization of the Negev, is the focus of *Empty Lands*. Alexandre Kedar, Ahmad Amara and Oren Yiftachel, between them, have spent decades researching and advocating for the rights of the Bedouin of the Negev to be recognised by the state of Israel. The parallels with the Balfour Declaration which stated that 'nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine' and the official response of Winston Churchill that the special rights and customs of the Bedouin of the Negev should not be denied underly this carefully researched and detailed defence of the rights of the Bedouin in the Negev. The three authors set out meticulous detail – the appendices and footnotes account for nearly one third of the book – in challenging the Israeli state's denial of their rights to live on the land they have inhabited for centuries. Using the judicial system all the way to the Israeli Supreme Court, the authors detail the court cases, the commissions, the official reports which have set out to prove that the Negev was 'terra nullius' – an empty land for Jewish settlement. Despite credible documentation – in my view – of both Ottoman and British land registry records as well as documents of sale of land between tribal members and Jewish purchasers, the Israeli Supreme court has insisted that there is not sufficient evidence to show that Bedouin autonomy existed during the middle of

the nineteenth century (when Ottoman Land Codes were set in place); and, with regard to Winston Churchill's assurances in 1921, it was felt that this statement was not sufficiently clear to the Supreme Court and could not serve as evidence of granting autonomy to the Bedouin. The burden of proof, the Court felt, rested with the Bedouin, and was unlikely to be lifted because of the scarcity of evidence. Even expert witness by historians, geographers and anthropologists received similar treatment, with preferential treatment given to those who followed the state's position (eg. Ruth Kark and her students). The book is at times heavy reading as there is some repetition between the three authors, and as the conclusion is already known. To the Israeli Court, and the Israeli state, Bedouin in the Negev are neither indigenous nor legal occupants of the lands they have lived on for centuries. But the telling of this sad tale through the journey of the Nur al-Uqbi Supreme Court Appeal challenge in 2012 is fascinating. Despite the assembled evidence, expert opinion and legal, geographic and historical data that was presented to the court to seriously challenge the Dead Negev Doctrine (the Israeli variant of *terra nullius*), the case was lost and cannot be challenged again. Yet the hope these author put forward is that more Bedouin will take their claims to court and that, in time, the tide may reverse and the Israeli court will become more acutely aware of international legal measures – especially in Canada, Australia and New Zealand – which recognise the rights of such social groups to hold land in common and to remain the users of such territory even though occupancy is not full-time.

Empty Lands is divided into five parts: Legal and Geographic Foundations of the Negev; Critical Legal History of the Dead Negev Doctrine; Re-examination of the Legal Geography of the Negev; Bedouin Indigeneity; International, Comparative, and Israeli Perspectives; and Contested Futures. The three authors have done a great service to those who wish to critically appraise the Israeli court position with regard to Bedouin in the Negev, their indigeneity and their claims to autonomy. Knowing the argument put forward to deny their indigeneity, or their rights to the lands of their forefathers, is powerful ammunition for future legal cases, as well as in continuing resistance to being ignored in 'unrecognised villages', or forcibly resettled.

The two books tell similar stories of displacement, dispossession and accommodation among Bedouin responding to the different international and national pressures they face. In the Jordanian case, tourism, and the commercialisation of Bedouin culture, has, in some ways, helped to perpetuate and rediscover an intangible heritage. In the Israeli case, the Bedouin of the Negev have found powerful supporters in academe, but their future rests with their

continuing resistance to dispossession and displacement, and their own efforts to rigorously produce the data, the evidence and the expert witnesses that can argue their rights in Israeli courts of law.

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