Nabil Al-Tikriti

Ottoman Iraq

When the Ottomans first entered Iraq with their conquest of Mosul in 1515, the sultans of Constantinople faced security problems comparable to those faced by the Roman emperor. The Ottoman imperial government, known to Europeans as the "Sublime Porte," had to control Northern Iraq in order to protect Eastern Anatolia, with its nomadic Turcoman tribes.[1] In contrast to the Roman emperor, the Porte did not value Mosul and its surrounding district more than the other Mesopotamian areas. As for Baghdad, one of the wealthiest cities of the medieval world, it had sunk to the level of a provincial town. Still, as the former capital of the Abbasid Caliphate (751–1258), it commanded religious and cultural prestige throughout the Muslim world. The Porte valued the southern district of Basra as a potential entrépot for Indian Ocean trade and a base for imperial expansion southward into the Gulf region.

The Ottoman sultans also ruled as caliphs, successors to the Prophet Mohammed, and thus the self-styled spiritual and political leaders of the entire Islamic community, or *umma*. The Persian Shahs, who championed Shi'ite Islam, refused to accept these claims of the Ottomans and were intent on recovering the four major Shi'ite shrines located in the Baghdad district: Najaf, Karbala, Samarra, and Kadhimayn. They also viewed Iraq as part of their rightful heritage. The Ottomans and Persians clashed over the entire region of Iraq rather than just over the North. Each side had to control the religious centers in the middle and southern regions, and each side needed to control the strategic routes over Northern Iraq that have linked

the Mediterranean lands to the heartlands of the Middle East since the third millennium B.C.

Ottoman expansion into Iraq did not happen all at once, but rather occurred in stages. The Ottomans' crack Janissary forces first conquered Mosul in 1515. In 1534, Süleyman the Magnificent (1520–1566) extended imperial control south to Baghdad; Ottoman forces also temporarily occupied such Iranian cities as Tabriz, Urumiya, and Sultaniya. Following this campaign, the Porte created an additional fourth district named "Shahrizor," comprising Kurdish and Assyrian Christian populations on both sides of today's Iran–Iraq border. Ottoman forces operating out of Baghdad captured Basra from the Persians in 1546, and within a decade the Ottomans continued their expansion south to al-Hasa in the Arabian Peninsula.[2]

Ottoman control was not at all certain for the first two centuries, as the Persians continued to threaten Iraq and periodically reconquered parts of it until the middle of the eighteenth century. Although in 1555 the Ottomans and Persians agreed to stop fighting and to accept each other's legitimacy under the Treaty of Amasya, border wars continued. Several more wars occurred along the Iraqi frontier prior to the Treaty of Zuhab (or Qasr-i Shirin) in 1639.[3]

The frontier drawn up by this treaty came to define the border between Iran and Iraq—as it does today—but the people of the region were unable to enjoy enduring political stability. In a new initiative to wrest Iraq from the Ottomans, Nadir Shah invaded the region four times between 1732 and 1743.[4] He sought to appeal to Sunni Muslims to accept Shi'ite Muslims as a "fifth *madhhab*," or legal school of thought.[5] Although this proposal of Nadir Shah's sought to end the religious basis for the warfare between the Sunni Ottomans and Shi'ite Iran, his invasions of Iraq marked a simultaneous, scarcely consistent attempt to seize the mantle of legitimacy from the Ottoman Porte. Only with Nadir Shah's assassination in 1747 did there emerge a lasting peace on the Iranian–Ottoman Iraq frontier. Aside from a short-lived Iranian occupation of Basra in the late eighteenth century,[6] the peace on Iran's western border which followed Nadir Shah's death endured until 1980, when renewed Shi'ite militancy led to a rejection of a status quo that had lasted over two hundred years.

Ottomans

From the mid-eighteenth century on, the Ottomans focused on administering the now secure districts of Arab Iraq, which represented a remote frontier region whose yield in revenue often did not meet imperial administrative costs. Baghdad had suffered a long decline since the Abbasid civil wars of the ninth century, and the sacks by the Mongols in 1258 and by Timur-i Lenk (Tamerlaine) in 1401 had finished the city as a major center of Islam. The canals and irrigation systems had long since deteriorated, so the region was nothing like the granary that it had been in antiquity. Once the eastern frontier had settled down, the sultan would seldom need to campaign in such distant lands, and had no other reason to visit them. The Ottoman Empire remained, like imperial Rome, a Mediterranean power. Its military heartlands lay in the Balkans and Anatolia; its capital overlooked the Bosporus; and its wealthiest province was Egypt.[7] For the sultan, campaigning against Budapest or Vienna was far more urgent than campaigning against Tabriz or Hamadan in Northern Iran. In Iraq, then, Ottoman commanders since the sixteenth century made whatever arrangements they could to hold the borderlands in the face of Iranian hostility.

During the four centuries of Ottoman rule, Baghdad was preeminent among the region's districts. Mosul was the most independent district, the one most integrated into the Ottoman Empire, and oriented as much toward Diyarbakir in Southeastern Anatolia and Aleppo in Northern Syria as it was to Baghdad. Basra, meanwhile, was tied to Iran, the Gulf, and eventually British interests.[8]

In addition to Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul, two other districts can be considered part of the Ottoman East later reengineered by the British into the state of Iraq. The first of these was Shahrizor, brought under Ottoman control during the "two Iraqs" campaign in 1534.[9] Populated by Kurds and Assyrian Christians, this province had first Kirkuk and then Sulaymaniyah for its capital.[10] The Porte co-opted several semi-independent Kurdish principalities—which had long provided light cavalry to patrol the borders in this rugged region—into the more ethnically mixed and cosmopolitan Mosul province. Some Kurdish nationalists today might argue that the areas of the old Shahrizor district retained by Iran should be rejoined with the areas now in Iraq,[11] while Iraqi nationalists might argue that

these same areas belong to a historical "Greater Iraq." Yet the geography of the territory carries its own logic: the mountain ranges that descend to fertile plains just west of this border have long provided a natural frontier demarcation between historical Iran and Iraq.

Another border district, al-Hasa, corresponded roughly to today's al-Hasa province in Eastern Saudi Arabia.[12] The Porte governed this province as a frontier extension of Basra as it came under their control in the mid-sixteenth century, and continued to govern it thus well into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—when British mercantile encroachment in the Gulf began to have an effect.[13] The province's tax receipts usually paid for its own administration, but whenever problems arose provincial officials turned to Basra for assistance.[14]

Located as it was in distant Constantinople, the Porte had to follow the Roman model of indirect rule through local notables. Who were these notables? In Mosul, the Jalili family dominated the scene from 1726 until imperial interests pushed them out of power in 1834.[15] In Suleymaniyah, the Baban family held out as Shahrizur power brokers until 1850. Not surprisingly, the most powerful local rulers were in Baghdad, governed by a succession of Georgian "Mamluks" (military slaves) beginning with the eighteenth-century father and son team of Hasan Pasha (1704–1724) and Ahmed Pasha (1724–1747), continuing through the reign of Büyük "the Great" Süleyman (1780–1802), and ending with the rule of Da'ud Pasha in 1831. This self-perpetuating class of military strongmen had originated from Ottoman slave converts from the Caucasus. Raised in the *köle* slave ranks of Ottoman martial tradition, these Georgians were at times so powerful that they controlled affairs from Basra and al-Hasa on the Gulf to Mardin and Urfa in Eastern Anatolia.[16] In Basra, the notables were the Afrasiyabs, a family that originated with a mysterious military figure who "purchased" the Basra governorate in 1612. When this family lost its grip on the governorate in 1688, power devolved to rural clan confederations such as the Muntafiq and Hawiza. Then came short-lived Iranian occupations in the eighteenth century and British economic penetration in the nineteenth century.[17]

The imperial center was obliged to negotiate repeatedly with these semi-independent rulers. At times the center prevailed, at times the district—but

neither was sufficiently powerful to dominate the other.[18] The case of the Jalili family of Mosul is instructive. Following the Treaty of Carlowitz in 1699, the Porte was able to turn its attention toward its eastern provinces while reorganizing its fiscal administration. In the course of this new policy, certain local figures who had accumulated excess capital were able to renegotiate their relationship with the center. Among these figures was the head of the Jalili family, Isma'il Pasha, and then his son Hussein Pasha. Sensing an opportunity in this time of flux, Isma'il Pasha offered his services to the Porte as a local contractor for imperial interests. As proof of his good services, Isma'il Pasha marshaled sufficient resources to defend Mosul from Iranian sieges with minimal cost to Constantinople when the Safavids and then Nadir Shah invaded Iraq in the eighteenth century. Following this success, Isma'il Pasha persuaded the Porte to sell his family several rural tax farms in the Mosul hinterland.

For nearly 150 years, the Jalili family dominated Mosul while operating as an imperial subcontractor. Isma'il's son, Hussein Pasha, expanded the family fortune and engaged in several charitable activities, demonstrating the wealth and power of the Jalilis in the Mosul district. By the time the empire began to reevaluate its relationship with provincial notables in the 1830s, the Jalili family had managed to secure a succession of governorships that allowed the financing of several significant urban structures and an impressive dynastic villa. In 1834 the family's dominant position came to a violent end in the course of the Porte's reassertion of central authority. Despite its inauspicious end, the story of the Jalili family demonstrates the role of local notables in Ottoman administration.[19] Nor were they alone. The Georgian Mamluks of Baghdad were still more powerful. Through them, the British first secured economic access in the early nineteenth century.

From the end of the eighteenth century onward, traditional Ottoman rule in Iraq met with two challenges. First, the Porte had to increase revenues and modernize its army in the face of European challenges to its place in the concert of powers. Second, the Porte faced a local challenge from the Arab Wahhabi reform movement within Islam, one that rejected the legitimacy of the sultan-caliph of Constantinople.

In response to European rivals, the Porte strove to integrate the sundry provincial populations into stronger imperial structures. This Ottoman assertion of centralized imperial power effectively required a virtual reconquest in the early nineteenth century. Once this was accomplished in Baghdad with the expulsion of Da'ud Pasha in 1831, the imperial center stamped its presence over local governance, reestablishing central power one town at a time in Mosul, Karbala, Najaf, Basra, and Suleymaniyah. This process was not unique to this region, as it reflected a broader trend of reform, modernization, and centralization commonly referred to as the Tanzimat "reorderings."[20] The Porte instituted such reforms throughout the empire starting in the 1830s, following the first imperial defeat by nationalist forces during the Greek War of Independence (1821–1829).

The Tanzimat reforms, which followed major policy pronouncements in 1839 and 1856, aimed for a restructuring of imperial administration. Tax farming was abolished, property registered, conscription imposed, and citizenship granted.[21] Instituted only in fits and starts, these reforms depended on local conditions. The Ottoman East often received the least and tardiest attention, and even this encountered some indifference from the notables.

As to the Tanzimat in Iraq, the major figure was Midhat Pasha (1869–1872), an architect of several of the reforms, former governor of the Danube (Tuna) district, and modernizer par excellence. Although Midhat governed Baghdad for only three years, he shook up the region like none before him. A dynamic, ambitious, and reputedly honest governor, in his short reign Midhat established the region's first tramway, public park, modern hospital, technical school, government newspaper, and several other urban projects. He also mapped out detailed provincial borders in line with the 1864 Vilayet Law. Most importantly, Midhat Pasha implemented the Ottoman Property Law of 1858, which mandated registration of all landed properties.[22] Since cultivators had learned from prior experience that property registration inevitably led to increased taxation and conscription, and since tribal peasants had long worked under communal property arrangements, such registration tended to be carried out by tribal shaykhs and urban speculators. In the long term, this initiative strengthened rural shaykhs and urban notables who had

seen the potential advantage in regulated land speculation according to the new rules.

Meanwhile, a revivalist movement founded by Muhammad ibn ʻAbd al-Wahhab (d. 1792) began to spread in central Arabia and soon challenged Ottoman rule and modernization in Iraq—especially in the South.[23] Striving to model religious devotion on what was considered the practice of the Prophet Muhammad (d. 632), the Wahhabis rejected not only Ottoman rule, but also Sufi practice and Shiʻite devotion as deviations from "pure" Islam. Once this movement joined forces with the clan of Âl-Saʻud, who dominated the Najd and Central Arabia, it did not take long for this new alliance to attack the Shiʻite shrines of Southern Iraq. When Wahhabi tribal forces sacked Karbala in 1801, both the Porte and Shiʻite clerics in the shrine cities of Karbala, Najaf, Samarra, and Kadhimayn were forced to take notice.

The Porte reacted to this challenge by constructing the 1803 Hindiyya canal, which led to the revival of Karbala and the Euphrates-irrigated agricultural region in its environs.[24] With this canal the Porte hoped to turn the nomadic populations of the area into settled cultivators, and thus gain the loyalty of a more prosperous—and controllable—social group. By the end of the nineteenth century they had largely succeeded.

The Shiʻite clerics reacted to the 1801 sack of Karbala by launching a campaign to convert the area's tribal population to Shiʻite Islam in order to increase their political leverage. This campaign succeeded, and as a result Southern Iraq, historically Sunni, turned overwhelmingly Shiʻite by the middle of the nineteenth century.[25] In combination with contemporaneous state efforts to promote the settling of nomadic populations, this campaign resulted in a Shiʻite tribal society practicing animal husbandry and cultivating irrigated fields when the British arrived during World War I.

Apprehensive about Shiʻite success in proselytizing the south, in 1831 the Porte asserted control with a military operation to rein in what imperial officials considered renegade local power centers around Najaf and Karbala. In the wake of this Ottoman reconquista, Sunni clerics received support in bringing certain populations into the politically expedient Sunni fold, and secular state schools were established to counter Shiʻite educational initiatives.[26]

Traditional portrayals of Ottoman history suggest that the Ottomans exercised strong central control at the height of their power from the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries; lost strength through corruption, inertia, and other factors during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; and then spent most of the nineteenth century attempting to recover before collapsing in the face of Western attack in World War I. While partly accurate, this view does not do justice to Ottoman rule in the districts that later came to comprise Iraq.

Arab, Kurdish, Turcoman, Sunni, Shi'ite, Jewish, Assyrian, and Sabaean populations all lived peacefully under Ottoman rule in one proto-Iraqi district or another from 1515 to 1918. By means of the Ottoman *millet* system of communal self-rule, denominations were allowed to manage their own affairs with minimal interference.[27] The Porte thus was able to rule through local elites of different, and frequently hostile, communities. In addition, as this form of limited self-rule was organized communally rather than geographically, it tended to limit territorially defined ethnic nationalism. While this approach proved somewhat ineffective at cementing a common imperial identity throughout the population, it did maintain domestic tranquility, if only through communal separation. By the same token, the Ottoman government asked little of its subjects, and so it left individuals content, if not enthusiastic, in their relationship with the state. Finally, the identification of the Ottoman ruler as both "caliph" and "sultan" secured the loyalty of the largest segment of the population, Muslims.

By the eve of the Great War, the imperial modernization project—and the parallel project of Ottomanization—had scored several successes. In terms of social and political modernization, regional conscripts had been reorganized into the Ottoman Sixth Army; standardized imperial *mekteb* secondary schools were established throughout the provinces in each sizeable town; hundreds of primarily Sunni Arab officers had been educated at the empire's military college in Constantinople; an entire *effendi* class of multi-lingual elites staffed state positions throughout the area; the various national segments of the Berlin to Baghdad railway project were nearly complete; and telegraphs routinely conveyed imperial orders in real time.[28]

How successful were Ottoman efforts to integrate these Iraqi regions into the greater empire? Several of those Sunni Arab officers who had trained in Constantinople switched sides during the war and joined the Sharif Hussein of Mecca's anti-Ottoman forces during the war, and later became prominent officials in the new state of Iraq established by the British. At the same time, however, soldiers from Mosul and Baghdad fought and died at Gallipoli, as evidenced by their inclusion among the Ottoman dead at the Gallipoli war cemetery.[29] The regionally based Ottoman Sixth Army at first defeated the Anglo-Indian Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force, which surrendered in Kut in 1915. Following the British counterstroke in 1917, when Baghdad fell to General Maud, proclamations urging the people of the city to join with British forces for liberation from the "tyranny of strangers" met with a decided lack of enthusiasm. Within months of completing their conquest of Iraq, British forces faced a revolt on a scale not seen by the Porte since the sixteenth century. While the Iraqi rebels were not necessarily fighting to restore Ottoman rule, they clearly had no intention of accepting British rule. As late as 1922, some Iraqi notables appealed to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk—the Ottoman officer then in the process of forging an explicitly Turkish Republic out of the fallen empire—for liberation from the British.[30]

The Ottomans deserve credit for shaping the districts out of which the British built the Iraqi state following the Great War. To be sure, the Porte linked these regions around Baghdad, and then initiated modernization for the sake of its own security. In the process, they turned Arab Iraq into more than a geographic expression, even as it remained less than a state. What methods accounted for Ottoman success? They imitated the pagan, Roman policy of emphasizing the strategic north more than the south. However, they departed from the Romans in stressing the center. For this shift they had religious reasons. Finally, they maintained loose control over the south, whereas the Romans took no interest in this region. In the main, the Ottoman sultans, just like their Eastern Roman (or Byzantine) predecessors, ruled Iraq according to the dictates of their position as rulers of a distant Mediterranean power. The Porte had prestige; it sometimes had money; but it seldom could spare men from more pressing frontiers in Europe. It needed to respect topographical realities and co-opt local elites.

In the late nineteenth century, most proto-Iraqis felt themselves to be participants in a Muslim Ottoman venture stretching from Basra to Bosnia and from Kars to Cairo. It is doubtful whether any modern ruler of Iraq ever matched the level of cohesion achieved by the Ottomans, who for nearly four centuries ruled the whole of the country. No other power had done so well for so long—not the Babylonians, not the Assyrians, not the Persians, not the Romans, not the Parthians, not the Sassanids, not the Umayyads, not even the Abbasids. It is fitting that the Ottoman use of the Arabic term "Iraq" came to designate first a conquered territory, then an administrative amalgam, and finally a future state. It was only the step to a sovereign, national Iraq that the Prophet's last successors, the Ottomans, did not achieve.

NOTES

1. For a study of the hostility of nomadic Shi'ite Turcoman populations to Ottoman interests, as well as of the political developments surrounding the Ottoman expansion into Mosul, see Adel Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict, 1500–1555* (Berlin, 1983). Today, the descendants of those same Turcoman populations within Iraq see the Ottoman successor state of Turkey as their primary protector. Q1
2. For studies of the major Ottoman–Safavid campaigns, see Allouche, *The Origins and Development of the Ottoman-Safavid Conflict, 1500–1555*; Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont, *Les Ottomans, les Safavides et leurs voisins* (Istanbul, 1987); and Michel Mazzoaui, *The Origins of the Safawids, Shi'ism, Sufism and the Gulat* (Wiesbaden, 1972).
3. Thabit A.J. Abdullah, *A Short History of Iraq* (London, 2003), 71–75.
4. Michael Axworthy, *The Sword of Persia: Nadir Shah, from Tribal Warrior to Conquering Tyrant* (London, 2006), 99–174, 211–274; Ernest S. Tucker, *Nadir Shah's Quest for Legitimacy in Post-Safavid Iran* (Gainesville, FL, 2006).
5. For a translation of Nadir Shah's correspondence outlining this proposal, see "Letters from Nader Shah to the Ottoman Court, 1736," translated by Ernest Tucker in Cameron Michael Amin, Benjamin C. Fortna, and Elizabeth Frierson, eds., *The Modern Middle East: A Sourcebook for History* (Oxford, 2006), 388–394.
6. Abdullah, *A Short History of Iraq*, 88–89. Q2
7. Halil Inalcik, Suraiya Faroqhi, Bruce McGowan, Şevket Pamuk, Donald Quataert, eds., *An Economic and Social History of Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge, 1994).
8. The Basra *vilayet* governed by the Ottomans from the sixteenth century onward included the entire modern state of Kuwait.
9. This expedition passed through Tabriz, Urumiye, Sultaniye, Baghdad, and several other towns on both sides of today's Iran–Iraq border. H.G. Yurdaydın, ed., Matrakçi Nasuh, *Beyan-i menazil-i sefer-i Irakayn-i Shah Süleyman Han* [*Illumination of the Stages of Shah Süleyman Khan's Two Iraqs Campaign*], (Ankara, 1976).
10. Abdullah, *A Short History of Iraq*, 69. Q3
11. Those areas formerly part of the Ottoman *vilayet* of Shahrizor have the highest concentration of Kurds in Iran today.
12. This region is also known as "al-Ahsa," and in Turkish it is usually rendered as "Lahsa."
13. Salih Özbaran, "The Ottoman Turks and the Portuguese in the Persian Gulf, 1534–1581," *Journal of Asian History* 6 (1972): 45–87. The original justification for taking over this thinly populated desert region was the Ottoman–Portuguese rivalry over Indian Ocean trade routes.

Al-Hasa did not require a major investment to be defended from the Portuguese, although it did require resources to protect it from the hostility of local nomadic populations.

14. For an examination of Ottoman rule in this area, see Jon E. Mandaville, "The Ottoman Province of al-Hasa in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90:3 (1970): 486–513.
15. Dina Risk Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540–1834* (Cambridge, 1997).
16. Abdullah, *A Short History of Iraq*, 85–87, 90–93; Tom Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society in Early Modern Iraq: Mamluk Pashas, Tribal Shaykhs, and Local Rule Between 1802 and 1831* (The Hague, 1981).
17. Thabit A.J. Abdullah, *Merchants, Mamluks, and Murder: The Political Economy of Trade in Eighteenth-Century Basra* (Albany, 2000).
18. Halil Inalcik, "Centralization and Decentralization in the Ottoman Administration," in Thomas Naff and Roger Owen, eds., *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History* (Carbondale, IL, 1977), 27–52.
19. Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540–1834.* Q4
20. Albert Hourani, "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables," in Albert Hourani, Philip S. Khoury, and Mary C. Wilson, eds., *The Modern Middle East* (Berkeley,1993), 83–110.
21. Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Third edition (Oxford, 2001).
22. Ali Haydar Midhat, *The Life of Midhat Pasha* (London, 1903); Albertine Jwaideh, "Midhat Pasha and the Land System of Lower Iraq," *St. Antony's Papers* 16 (Oxford, 1963).
23. Natana J. DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford, 2004).
24. Yitzak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton, 1994), 30–32.
25. Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 25–48.
26. Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq,* 41–43, 52–57; Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (London, 1997).
27. Roderic H. Davison, "Turkish Attitudes Concerning Christian-Muslim Equality in the Nineteenth Century," *American Historical Review* 59 (1953–54): 844–864.
28. Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains;* Benjamin C. Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State, and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford, 2002); Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley, 1997).
29. Soldiers listed as coming from Mosul and Baghdad number approximately 5%–10% of the total at the Ottoman military cemetery at Gallipoli, based on a site visit by this author.
30. For Iraqi views in the immediate aftermath of the Great War, see Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York, 2003); Reeva Spector Simon and Eleanor H. Tejirian, eds., *The Creation of Iraq*: *1914–1921* (New York, 2004).

QUERIES

Q1 Author: Please provide publisher name for all the books that have been cited.

Q2 Author: Please provide publisher name and location.

Q3 Author: Please provide publisher name and location.

Q4 Author: Please provide publisher name and location for reference "Khoury 1834."