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“Statisquo”

British Use of Statistics in
the Iraqi Kurdish Question
(1919–1932)

Fuat Dundar

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Figure 1. Mosul and Its Districts in the 1930s



Source: This map is drawn based on the ethnographic map, which was most likely prepared in 1931. See Records of Iraq, V.7, pp. 596–97.

Introduction

IN POST-2003 IRAQ, THE KURDS HAVE CONTINUOUSLY APPEALED FOR TERRITORIAL RIGHTS IN THE REGIONS WHERE THEY CLAIM TO BE THE MAJORITY AND HAVE DEMANDED A QUOTA IN THE IRAQI STATE APPARATUS.¹ THEY HAVE ALSO PASSIONATELY DEMANDED A NEW CENSUS, WHICH WOULD INCLUDE QUESTIONS INTENDED TO ASSESS INHABITANTS' ETHNICITY AND DEFINE THEIR MOTHER TONGUE AND NATIONALITY. The Kurds believe that determining the exact size of the Kurdish population would have repercussions for issues such as defining the exact borders of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), ascertaining the proper portion to be allotted to them from the national budget, and maybe even establishing the proper quota of Kurds in a future Baghdad government, to ensure that they would not once again be underrepresented in a future Parliament.²

To substantiate their political claims, the Kurds have attempted to carry out a plebiscite and census, two of the three steps designated by the Transitional Administrative Law (TAL, Article 58, in March 2004) and the Iraqi Permanent Constitution (Article 140). Based on the results of the requested new plebiscite and census, the Kurds want to determine the final status of the disputed regions, including Khanikin, Sinjar, and Kirkuk, and annex them to the KRG. Although various organizations and neighborhood governments—and, especially, the Arabs and Turkomans living in these disputed territories—oppose the Kurdish call for a plebiscite and ethnic census, the Kurds still insist on one, causing this to become a *casus belli* in Iraq today.³

While awaiting a plebiscite and census, which have been postponed several times, the Kurds have used historical data to calculate the exact size and percentage of the Kurdish population in order to support their nationalist claims. Aside from demanding a greater proportion of the national budget, the KRG, which has claimed that Kurds are underrepresented as civil servants, has also called for equitable representation in the civil services, especially in the oil-rich city of Kirkuk.⁴ Until the final status of the disputed territories, especially that of Kirkuk, is determined by a census or plebiscite, the Kurds, like other Iraqi communities, will continue to claim that they are statistically dominant in their own regions. And to substantiate their claims, all sides will continue to rely on their own preferred data.⁵

Since statistical data occupy a very important place in the political discourse of Kurdish as well as other Iraqi politicians, and the ethnic census threatens Iraqi unity and potentially invites ethnic conflict, it is necessary to focus on the historical data, which were produced during the creation of Iraq.

Problems and Aims

This Paper considers the statistical data produced during the British period in Iraq (1919-32) and analyzes its role in the political context of its time. It examines how political actors, especially the British Empire, used these data as a “scientific” tool. It gives attention to the importance attached to numbers during the creation of Iraq and, most importantly, during the creation of the Kurdish autonomous districts. And it demonstrates that statistics and the census are the most important battlefields in Iraq’s contemporary politics—the result of the British manner of exploiting statistical data during the British mandate period in Iraq.

The Paper will examine the sets of British, Turkish, Iraqi, and League of Nations data, collected between 1919 and 1932, that represent the most important statistical data in Iraqi history, other than the “mother tongue data” from the 1957 census. In particular, I will discuss how the population data on Kurds collected by the British Empire were used to protect the political and military interests of the British as well as to maintain the status quo. In this way, statistics, ordinarily considered to be a scientific and

objective tool, become a subjective tool in the service of political disputes. Moreover, statistics, which are supposed to be stable and static in character, in fact, become *unstable* and changeable. The Paper will demonstrate that population statistics are inseparable from their political context, and from the political aims of whoever produced them. The British/Iraqi statistical data were produced to solve a particular political dispute (namely, to determine the political boundaries of Mosul and the fate of its people). When the political context changed, the statistical data were likewise, and simultaneously, transformed.

The census/statistics literature generally well demonstrates arbitrary changes of ethnic categorization by the political power conducting the census and producing the statistics. This Paper will explore as well equally arbitrary changes in the political meaning assigned *to* these ethnic categorizations, and to their numerical size. Obviously, behind these arbitrary changes, both numerical and classificatory, is a common goal, which is to produce hegemony and maintain the status quo. The major aim of this Paper is to demonstrate how the British used statistical data to support an undemocratic military occupation in Iraq.

While several international, bilateral, and domestic negotiations on the Iraqi and Kurdish issues were taking place, statistical data were used not only to demonstrate ethnic and political “facts” but also for purposes of “statistical reasoning.”⁶ The Paper shows how the Kurdish actors⁷ were systematically excluded, especially by the British/Iraqi powers, during the entire process of preparing and interpreting population statistics. This exclusion, I think, would become one of the main historical causes for Kurdish nationalism’s reactionary and emotional character in the post-1958 period in Iraq—and, ultimately, for the Kurds’ insistence on conducting an ethnic census in Iraq.

Statistics and numbers became part of the language of political debate with respect to Iraq beginning with the peace treaties of 1919 and continuing with the Language Law of 1932. This Paper will demonstrate the change in this language and in the statistical data through four chronological periods, which correspond to the thematic and practical evolution of the use of statistics and statistical reasoning between 1919 and 1932.⁸ The first chapter of the Paper examines Kurdish nationalism and the

British plebiscites in Mosul during the post–World War I period, when the principle of self-determination dominated international politics. The Kurdish problem emerged for the first time in the international arena during the peace conferences. It was considered to be essentially a population problem: The Kurds were recognized as a numerous population (that is, to constitute a majority in a given region), but were seen as “uncivilized” and incapable of self-government. The main purpose of this chapter is to examine the 1919 and 1921 British plebiscites in Iraq, and to show how the British authorities interpreted the results to suit their own purposes.

The second chapter of the Paper explores how statistics became the key diplomatic issue for both Turkey and Great Britain during the Lausanne Conference. Following the 1921 British plebiscites, the Turks rejected the annexation of Mosul to Iraq and instead called for a “true” plebiscite based on the principle of self-determination. This chapter focuses on Britain and Turkey’s use of statistical data relating to Mosul’s population in the absence of a “true” plebiscite to determine the wishes of Mosul’s population between 1922 and 1924. It argues that measuring identity was actually a way of measuring loyalty—specifically, the political attitude of Mosul’s population in Iraq toward Turkey and the British. Consequently, although both the British and the Turks recognized that the Kurds constituted a majority in Mosul, they interpreted the magnitude and proportion of the Kurdish population differently, so as to advance their distinct—and contradictory—political interests.

The third chapter examines the decision of the Frontier Commission of the League of Nations, which was created to find a “scientific” solution to the dispute between the British and Turkish powers over Mosul. The League of Nations examined the Mosul question in three stages. First, it established a commission to investigate the facts of the disputed area. Second, it appointed a Council committee to attempt mediation. Finally, when that didn’t succeed, it fixed a provisional frontier line slightly south of the northern boundary of Mosul, defining the military status quo. This chapter focuses on the commission’s inquiry and examines its interpretation of ethnographic and population-statistics data, in the process pointing up how the political character of the commission and the personal background of the commissioners affected the character of the inquiry and the commission’s ensuing decisions.

The fourth and final chapter examines the Languages Law that was created to find a solution to the Kurdish claim in Iraq. The chapter shows how the Iraqi-British officers used another set of population data regarding the Kurds to determine in which districts Kurdish would be designated the official language—and how, at the League of Nations, the British applied “scientific reasoning” to their statistical data in order to dismiss Kurdish complaints of underrepresentation in the civil services—and, more generally, to preserve the status quo in Iraq.

There is substantial relevant literature on the question of Mosul. While researchers recognize the underlying important interrelationship between demography and the Kurdish problem, none of them, with the sole exception of Shields,⁹ has analyzed the statistical data and explicated its central role. This Paper seeks to do so. It utilizes primarily British and also Turkish archival sources that focus on the statistical data produced during the creation of Iraq, as well as documents that deal with the genesis of the Kurdish problem. But because Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs documents are not available to researchers, Turkish official documents are accorded a minor place. The examined documents are mainly from Ottoman (1914), British (1919, 1921, 1930, 1931, 1947), and British-supported Iraqi state sources (1922–24, 1930, 1931). These data—all originally tabulated for political purposes—not only played an important historical role, but Iraqi communities to this today use them to support their political claims.

British and Ottoman Statistics and the Categorization of Identities

An important part of the literature on nationalism has focused on the interrelationship between nationalist ideology and the use of censuses and statistics. Most academics agree that the advent of modernity has radically altered the conditions of identity formation, and that censuses and statistics have played an important role in this process. The impact of censuses and statistics in state-building and identity formation has been considered crucial, especially in the field of colonial studies. To this end, the role of statistics in establishing and maintaining colonial power has been the subject of academic studies, most of which have concentrated on the British experience in India.¹⁰

The British Indian literature on censuses and statistics in the colonies underlines how the British brought the intellectual baggage of eighteenth-century Europe, notably its interest in “political arithmetic and statistics,” and applied it as an instrument of governance in their colonies.¹¹ As Levitan describes, this “political arithmetic” had been associated with the British government until the mid-eighteenth century.¹² Eighteenth-century Britain and Europe generally enthusiastically employed statistics, mainly owing to their pure scientific character and their capacity to be used to control society. The rise of population sciences in Europe in this period brought together ideas about population, the development of quantitative techniques, and the use of demographic data by the state. European states, including Britain, embraced the idea that a growing population was proof positive of the prospects of a given state. Subsequently, the state, utilizing statisticians, developed more sophisticated quantitative techniques to improve their knowledge of population size and trends. “As part of its duties, the state assumed the responsibility to measure and quantify the ‘social body’—part of a larger reimagining and reshaping of government in the new era of liberal and democratic politics.”¹³

It would thus have been tempting for British bureaucrats to imagine that sound numerical data would make it easier to embark on projects of social control or reform in the colonies. According to Arjun Appadurai, however, there were important differences between the census conducted in the British metropolis and that in its colonies. The rationale for the British census at home was “overwhelmingly territorial and occupational, rather than ethnic or racial.” Meanwhile, in India, “the encounter with a highly differentiated, religiously ‘other’ set of groups must have been built on the metropolitan concern with occupation, class, and religion, all of which were a prominent part of the British census.” In the colonies, the census took on a different role because “the *entire* population was seen as ‘different’ in problematic ways.”¹⁴

Both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the census as a colonial undertaking have been discussed in the academic literature; but according to many scholars, the *qualification* of identities by the British colonial statisticians had a more important impact than their quantification. As Eileen Janes Yeo argues, the British census in India asked for caste affiliation “despite the difficulties of standardizing a classification across

India, and ranked the castes in order of ‘social precedence.’” Nationalists complained that this actually intensified the rivalry between castes and constituted a clear attempt to divide and rule.¹⁵ Bernard Cohn suggests that the British colonial census played an important part in South Asian identity formation—a hypothesis strengthened by the fact that it was an institution that every adult male had to encounter during his lifetime.¹⁶ As Benedict Anderson points out, Europeans constructed the categories used on their census forms from their own frames of reference and their own experiences—and in colonial societies, these categories often did not consider or reflect those used by the colonized themselves.¹⁷ But in contrast to Yeo and others, Anderson argues that the “real innovation of the census-takers” was not “the construction of ethnic-racial *classifications*, but rather . . . their systematic *quantification*.”¹⁸

In comparison with the British-Indian case, one can ask: Was Iraq a special case with regard to the role of British colonial statistics? I would argue, no, but yes: No in the *classificatory* sense, but yes in the *numerical* sense. No, because “Iraq” was not an unknown territory for the British: They possessed considerable knowledge about the Iraqi population before their occupation and based their classification of the Iraqi people mainly on an existing Ottoman taxonomy. Yes, because contrary to the situation in India, the quantification of British statistics concerning Iraq was much more important than their classification.

The Ottoman censuses, held four times (in 1831, 1844, 1881–93, and 1906–7), were the most important tools of the empire’s modernizing and centralizing efforts. Throughout this period, population data became the main instrument of governmental policy. However, a census such as those conducted in nineteenth-century Europe was never conducted in the Ottoman Empire. None of the Ottoman censuses were conducted during a short period of time, nor were they conducted in all areas of the country. Some censuses took more than ten years to complete; and the populations of some areas were never counted. In addition, census takers never counted all members of households. Instead, in most cases, the leaders—which usually included *mullahs*, priests, and *muhtars*—of the smallest administrative units, were summoned, and the local population was determined on the basis of the information they provided (In the last days of the Empire, representatives of neighborhoods and villages were

also included). The 1881–93 census, during which women were counted for the first time, using the same survey method used throughout the Empire, can be considered the first modern Ottoman census. During this census, identity papers were distributed to subjects as required by the 1881 establishment of the Population Registry Administration.¹⁹

Aside from the obvious military and tax purposes, territorial reasons motivated the Ottoman censuses. The censuses were conducted during a period when the Ottoman Empire was losing territory as a result of its wars with the Great Powers (especially with the Russian Empire) and also because of nationalist uprisings. Diplomatic negotiations following the wars provoked discussions about the ethnic and religious statistical composition of the disputed territories. The national movements—especially those of the non-Muslim communities, such as the Serbs, Greeks, and Armenians—submitted population data supporting their claims. None of these movements found the Ottoman censuses credible, insisting instead that they did not represent their community's true size or proportion. And there was immense pressure from the Great Powers calling for equitable participation by previously excluded non-Muslim communities in the Ottoman state apparatus.

This territorial factor was evident in the development of the Ottoman census. The first Ottoman census, in 1831, classified the Ottoman population according to religious affiliation and only differentiated Muslims from non-Muslims (*Reaya*). In contrast, by the last Ottoman census (1906–7), the number of Christian categories had increased to thirteen, whereas Muslims were never classified along sectarian (i.e., Shiite, Sunni) or ethnic (Kurd, Arab) lines.²⁰ This increasingly popular classification was not, as some nationalists took it to be, a divide-and-rule Ottoman power policy, but rather reflected the Great Powers' political struggles regarding control over each group of Christians within the Ottoman Empire. Every new Christian denomination meant official recognition by the Ottoman power of that community as a *millet* (religious community).²¹ The four Ottoman censuses reflected a process of growing domination by the European statistical methodology and mentality.

As we will see in Chapter Two, while the ethnic and religious taxonomies of the British, Ottoman, and, later Turkish census statistics were identical,

the numerical aspects of the statistical tabulations presented during the Mosul disputes differed greatly. In turn, an analysis of the British statistics requires an investigation of the earlier Ottoman classification system.²² While examining that system, one can ask, how did the Turkish state distinguish between Kurds and Turks, as the Ottoman government did not consider ethnicity a separate category for Muslims? One might speculate that either the Ottoman Empire secretly registered Muslims' ethnicity or the Turkish state may have invented this data. I have argued in my previous works that the Ottoman government registered the Muslim population according to its own ethnic and sectarian identities: Kurds, Shiites, and so on.²³ Though this data was registered, however, it was never published. Rather, in the printed Ottoman official data, Muslims were classified as a single group. The first Ottoman/Turkish statistical data, which classified Muslims as Kurds, Turks, or Arabs, were included in the Turkish statistical table presented to the Lausanne Conference.²⁴

British Plebiscites in Iraq (1919–21)

Following World War I, and especially between 1919 and 1921, the Wilsonian principle of self-determination played a central role on the international political scene.²⁵ It was not until 1922, however—when the Turkish Republic, the new power that emerged from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, demanded self-determination for Mosul—that Great Britain presented itself as a defender of this principle.²⁶ Until that time, London's position had been that “the frontiers of the future . . . State should, as far as possible, be racial [in today's terminology, ethnic] rather than economic or geographical.”²⁷

While this political climate sparked a great interest in statistics among the Allied powers, it triggered an even stronger interest among nationalist groups, who wanted to utilize statistical data to claim political rights for their historical lands and delineate state boundaries.²⁸ Reflecting this global political context, the British Empire conducted two plebiscites in the three Ottoman provinces it occupied, in order to create a single new country, Iraq. The statistical results of these plebiscites were never revealed, however, nor were their conclusions pertaining to ethnic distribution, making their results questionable, both then and now.

The Allied powers used the self-determination principle to shorten the war, especially after the Bolsheviks took power.²⁹ In particular, they aimed to utilize the principle to fan the dissatisfaction of minorities within the enemy Habsburg and Ottoman Empires and incite them to rebel.³⁰ The declaration of President Wilson was thus a turning point in the evolution of the international political system as well as in the development of nationalist movements. The principle, which was reconfirmed by the Anglo-French Declaration, to “encourage and assist the establishment of indigenous Governments,”³¹ was the key determinant during the Peace Conferences of Versailles, Neuilly, Saint Germain-en-Laye, Trianon, and Sevres.³² Stateless peoples from all over the world had high hopes for these conferences, which “appeared to present unprecedented opportunities to pursue the goal of self-determination.” They took their struggle to the international stage as their representatives set out for the conferences, whether invited or not, in order to stake their claims in the new world

order. They composed and circulated a flood of declarations, petitions, and memoranda directed at the world leaders assembled for the conferences in an attempt to shape public opinion throughout the world. Many of the petitioners drew on Wilson's rhetoric of self-determination and the equality of nations to formulate their demands and justify their aspirations.³³

The fate of the Ottoman minorities was discussed at the Sevres Conference. During the conference, almost all the Ottoman minorities, inspired mainly by the twelfth of Wilson's so-called Fourteen Points, demanded self-determination.³⁴ The new world order called for negotiations of national boundaries grounded in civil and scientific discussions based on population data provided by the involved parties. In their memoranda, the nationalist groups presented statistical tables covering not only their own ethnic group but also other Ottoman ethnic groups. As one might anticipate, however, each minority submitted data according to which it was always the largest ethnic group in a given area.

In spite of the conferences, however, none of the minorities' nationalist claims were realized: Most of the minorities' data were exaggerated, and none of their claims could be implemented owing to the overlap among them. More importantly, with the exception of the United States, the Great Powers were focused on securing their own interests, rather than implementing the self-determination principle. As a result, none of the Ottoman minorities were satisfied with the Sevres Treaty—one that had tragic consequences for some minorities, including the Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks.

The spirit of self-determination also impacted the Kurds. Throughout this period, the Kurds repeatedly petitioned the British-French Commissioners, and during the Sevres Conference they presented their wishes for an independent Kurdistan. Several different Kurdish organizations, in the memoranda they presented at the conference, called for a unified and a bigger Kurdistan, which would include Kirkuk. Underlying the presence of a Kurdish voice at Sevres was their unequivocal opposition to the possibility of their inclusion in a sovereign Armenian state. The Kurds rejected the Armenian claim that Armenians were the majority in the contested areas.³⁵

While presenting their case at Sevrès, the Kurds distributed memoranda and maps.³⁶ Although the maps showed the geographical distribution of the Kurdish population, none of them included a detailed statistical table documenting the number of Kurds and their proportion in relation to other ethnic groups. Sureyya Bedirkhan, in the name of the “*Comité de l’Indépendance Kurde*,” established in Cairo, presented the only Kurdish estimate of the Kurdish population: In a telegram protesting the Armenian claim, Bedirkhan reported that there were five million Kurds in the Ottoman Empire. This number was exaggerated, however, even if it had included the Iranian Kurds. Bedirkhan’s number was based not on his own inquiry, but rather on the estimate of the pro-Kurdish British Inspector Edward Noel, known as the Kurdish (T. E.) Lawrence.³⁷ Meanwhile, others, including Great Britain, France, and the Armenians, provided more specific documentation regarding the size and geographical distribution of the Kurdish population. The Armenian statistics minimized the Kurdish population numbers and in addition divided the Kurdish population along sectarian lines (Alevi-sunni, Kurds-Zaza, nomads-sedentary, etc.).

From 1918, the British prepared several statistical tables and maps highlighting the numbers and geographical distribution of the Kurds. Their main expert was Edward Noel, who was a proponent of a bigger Kurdistan. He was asked to determine the exact number of the Kurdish population who lived outside of the occupied territories and particularly outside of Mosul; their proportion vis-à-vis other groups, including the Armenians, Turks, and Arabs; and their geographical distribution.³⁸

The British collected their own population data on the Kurds, since they wanted to specify the ethnographic borders of the Kurdish population. Still, there was no unified British stance on the matter, as different British actors held different positions on the Kurds. Noel, using a map that is now a logo-map of Kurdish nationalists, proposed a Greater Kurdistan, which would include five million Kurds living in the Ottoman and Persian Empires.³⁹ Arnold J. Toynbee, on the other hand, considered a “united Kurdistan” an impossibility, not for demographic reasons but rather since “it would have included non-Kurdish populations of superior civilizations [Armenians],” and who are not “capable of running such a state themselves[the Kurds].”⁴⁰

The Sevres Treaty gave preference to provisions regarding the borders of a Christian Armenia, thereby creating a larger Armenian state that was, ironically, predominantly Muslim and Kurdish. According to the treaty, the remaining “Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates” and “north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia” could then become an independent Kurdistan, if they met two stipulations: 1) The majority of the population “desires independence”; and 2) The Council of the League of Nations “considers that these peoples are capable of such independence.” Furthermore, Article 64 provided that the Kurds of Mosul Province could join this Kurdish state should they wish to do so.⁴¹ The Ankara government led by Mustafa Kemal, which claimed to reflect Kurdish wishes, rejected the Sevres Treaty, however, and so none of these proposals came to pass. The fate of Mosul’s Kurds was thus left to subsequent discussions between the British and the Turks.

On October 30, 1918, one week after the Mudros Armistice, the British army occupied the Ottoman province of Mosul. This marked the British administration’s first direct contact with the Kurds.⁴² During the first year of their occupation, the British had an unclear policy regarding the fate of Mosul and the Kurds.⁴³ While they wanted to retain Mosul in order both to safeguard the way to India and to keep its oil resources under their control, the British were also under pressure to support Wilson’s new international system of “self-determination.”

To complicate matters, differences of opinion existed between the British experts in the Foreign Office and those in the India Office. These differing opinions crystallized at the Cairo conference held on March 12–30, 1921, where the British policy in the Middle East was debated. Prior to the conference, Colonel Arnold Wilson, the Acting Civil Commissioner for Mesopotamia, had strongly emphasized the strategic importance of Mosul for the British Empire, and had recommended attaching Mosul to Baghdad.⁴⁴ During the conference, Hubert Young called for the establishment of “a separate state [Kurdistan] . . . to function as a strategic buffer against any future Kemalist threat to Iraq.” Opposing this, the British High Commissioner for Mesopotamia, Percy Cox, also called for the annexation of Mosul to Baghdad.⁴⁵

Each camp defended its policy on the basis of the strategic, economic, and political aspects of the Mosul question. The central issue was the ethnographic character of Mosul. The interesting point here is that while the different sides used the same British state data, each evaluated the data differently. Percy Cox argued that because of the character of its ethnic distribution, Mosul should not be separated from Baghdad. Winston Churchill, with the help of Edward Noel, pointed out that there was no serious difficulty in drawing the boundary between Southern Kurdistan and Arab Mesopotamia—that is, between Baghdad and Basra. Churchill, believing that the creation of a separate Kurdish entity was the best way of defending against the “Kemalist threat,” included all the areas Cox claimed to be non-Kurdish—such as Kirkuk, Kifri, and Arbil—in his Kurdish buffer scheme. Cox argued in opposition that an independent Kurdistan would leave Arab Mesopotamia with strategically indefensible frontiers.⁴⁶

The internal British discussions ended at the Cairo Conference, where it was decided that political conditions necessitated that a Sharifian ruler be selected to govern Iraq and that the most suitable candidate would be Emir Faisal. Because of the climate of self-determination, however, the British government fully realized that it “could not nominate Feisal, but that he must be chosen by the people of Mesopotamia.”⁴⁷ Against this backdrop, the two plebiscites organized in Mesopotamia/Iraq during 1919 and 1921 were used to legitimize British imperial dominance in the Middle East. According to the British, the plebiscites revealed that the majority of the former Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul wished to unify as one state under the kingship of Faisal. Actually, instead of reflecting the wishes of the Iraqi population, these plebiscites were conducted to strengthen the British status quo in Iraq.

While the British conducted two plebiscites in Iraq, they never responded to the repeated Kurdish requests for true plebiscites, especially those from the Kurdish chieftain Shaikh Mahmud Barzanji, who had led several uprisings against British authorities.⁴⁸ The British instead used the 1919 and 1921 plebiscites to justify their military hegemony and provide substitutes for the other plebiscites proposed by either Kurds or Turks; but in reality, the British plebiscites were manipulated, and their results misrepresented. For one thing, they were not actual plebiscites at all, but rather plebiscite-like inquiries—and no individual voting, either open or

secret, occurred.⁴⁹ Second, British military officers serving as part of the military occupation themselves carried out the plebiscites, enabling them to easily manipulate the results. Finally, the results of the plebiscites were not published in statistical tabular form to show the proportion of votes for and against and their ethnic distribution.

The 1919 plebiscite, which unified the three Ottoman provinces under an Iraqi state, was far from an impartial or truthful one. It was conducted because the British War Cabinet wanted to announce the result of this plebiscite to “the world as the unbiased pronouncement of the population of Mesopotamia.” In addition, Colonel Arnold Wilson, a fervent defender of the annexation of Mosul to Baghdad, orchestrated the plebiscite⁵⁰—and it was British military officers who selected the notables and community representatives to be polled. The first of the plebiscite’s three questions was “Do they favour a single Arab state under British tutelage stretching from the Northern boundary of the Mosul *wilayat* [province] to the Persian Gulf?”⁵¹ According to the British, in response to this question, “those consulted were unanimous in saying that they wished to belong to a State consisting of three *vilayets* [provinces],”⁵² and “the whole country was agreed that, whatever form of government might be set up in Iraq (as to which there was a wide divergence of opinion), Mosul should not be separated from the remainder of Iraq.”⁵³

The results of the 1919 plebiscite are highly questionable. As I have emphasized above, the British plebiscites were unreliable, owing to the misrepresentation of their results. To have been reliable, the plebiscite results would have required a statistical tabulation showing the distribution of votes according to their location in one of the three provinces and the ethnicity of the respondents. The British made use of their statistical tabulations in the following period (1922–26), when the situation (and the results) suited their own interests (see succeeding chapters). But they refrained from doing so in the case of these two plebiscites in Iraq in 1919 and 1921. This Paper will re-examine the statistical results of the 1919 plebiscite so as to elucidate the statistical realities conveyed by that data.

While conducting the 1919 plebiscite, the British collected seventy-three petitions from twenty-four districts for a total of approximately 1,800 signatures, mostly from notables, tribal chiefs, religious leaders, and

community representatives.⁵⁴ Around 20 percent of the signatures were from Mosul, corresponding to the proportion of Mosul's population vis-à-vis the general Iraqi population according to British estimations in 1919. The petitions and signatures collected from Mosul were questionable, however, because they did not reflect the ethnic and geographical composition of Mosul's population. While the British collected twelve petitions signed by 342 notables from Mosul Province, they did not collect petitions from the entire province; rather, they collected petitions only from three of Mosul's districts: Kirkuk, Kifri, and Mosul City Centre (while excluding Arbil and Sulaymaniyah). Kurds and Yazidis accounted for only two of the 57 signatures on these petitions, and both of them opposed the annexation of Mosul to Iraq. Most of the signatures belonged to Arabs and Christians who lived in Mosul City Centre and who supported the annexation of Mosul to Baghdad; around 250 signatures were from people belonging to different Christian sects. In sum, Christians, while constituting only eight percent of Mosul according to British 1921 statistics, accounted for seventy-three percent of the plebiscite results⁵⁵—whereas a plebiscite intended to ascertain a given population's desire for self-determination should surely have reflected its correct ethnic and religious make-up.⁵⁶ It can be argued that had these petitions reflected the actual ethnic and religious distribution of Mosul, the results of that plebiscite would have been entirely different—and, indeed, completely reversed.⁵⁷

In the 1921 plebiscite, which brought about the accession of Emir Faisal, notables and important people from specific localities were gathered together and invited to comment on the plebiscite's question: whether they were in favor of the Emir Faisal's candidacy or not. The British reported that one million⁵⁸ Iraqis declared their opinion, and "[96 percent] voted in favor of the King."⁵⁹ But the British have never published the detailed results of this plebiscite. Until now, the votes of the Mosul population have remained in obscurity, but according to Turkish experts' reports, "a third or . . . half" of Mosul, including the Kurdish majority, voted against Faisal. In truth, as with the preceding plebiscite, the results of the 1921 plebiscite had been determined before it even took place. Already at the Cairo Conference, the 1921 plebiscite was predetermined to "choose" Faisal as the Arab leader of Iraq.

The international political scene between 1919 and 1921 was an extremely ironic period. While on the surface the Wilsonian principle of self-determination dominated, in practice it had little effect, as the states established in the Middle East following World War I were in reality not based on this principle. Thus, all of the statistical and cartographic activities conducted during the negotiation of peace treaties meant little; *realpolitik* and British imperial interests determined the borders in the Middle East. The British also extended preferential treatment to their war allies, like the Sharifian family. The results of the plebiscites in Iraq, the stated aims of which were to solicit the wishes of Mosul's majority population, were, in reality, far from a reflection of the population's true feelings—but, as reported, they certainly reflected the interests of the British Empire.

Determining the Fate of Mosul Using Statistics (1922–24)

The military success of the Ankara government headed by Mustafa Kemal triggered another round of discussions during the years 1922 to 1926 revolving around the principle of self-determination and also brought about a renewed use of ethnic statistics. This new period started when the Ankara government voided the Sevres treaty and forced the holding of a new peace conference in Lausanne. During the Conference, Ankara insisted that Mosul's boundaries be determined by a plebiscite. This new political context had a definitive impact on both the British and Turkish statistical approaches. Although the two sides disagreed over the fate of Mosul, both were sympathetic to the Kurds and tried to gain their support, acknowledging in their statistical tabulation that the Kurds were indeed the majority in Mosul Province. Turkey rejected the results of British plebiscites in Iraq and demanded a new plebiscite, while continuing to claim its rights to Mosul. From 1922 until 1926, the year that Turkey renounced her sovereign rights to Mosul, there were several bilateral, multilateral, and international discussions held to determine the fate of Mosul, most notably the Lausanne Conference and the discussion at the League of Nations. During all of these discussions, the Kurdish population issue was the central question—yet Kurdish representatives were not present at any of these meetings.

At the Lausanne Conference, Turkey claimed sovereignty over Mosul, basing its arguments on military, historical, geographic, economic, political, and ethnographic data.⁶⁰ Turkey demanded the “uncontestable authority of a plebiscite” in the name of Kurds and Turks. The head of the Turkish commission in the Lausanne Conference, Foreign Minister İsmet İnönü, argued that the Turkish state was the state of both the Turks and the Kurds and claimed that Mosul's Kurds and Turks, who together constituted a majority in the province, desired to belong to Turkey. İnönü subsequently requested a new and “true” plebiscite for Mosul.

The British rejected this Turkish request, however. Aside from claiming that conducting a plebiscite in Mosul was impractical, the British argued that the Turks had no right to ask for a plebiscite, since they had “[n]ever

encouraged the vanquished to demand a plebiscite” in any of the territories they had conquered by force of arms.⁶¹ In addition, the British asserted, “the Kurds have never asked for it. Poor fellows, they do not know what [it means].” The British considered a plebiscite to be valid only for a society with a “high stage of education and civilization.” And, furthermore, a plebiscite is needed, they argued, only when “we don’t know the result.”⁶²

The Use of Ethnic Statistics to Determine the Wishes of Mixed Populations

Once the British rejected the Turkish demand for a plebiscite in Mosul, ethnic statistics became the most suitable method for determining the wishes of the Mosul population. Based on the assumption that each ethnic group would vote in accordance with their identity, both the British and the Turks used statistical tables to counter the other’s arguments. While doing so, both sides claimed that their statistical data were more accurate and less politicized than the other’s. In fact, it was the political meaning given to these ethnic categories, rather than those categories themselves, that constituted the real focus of discussion and disagreement.

The Turks claimed that their data were based on the 1914 Ottoman registers. Later, however, they claimed that the data was based on the 1906 and 1916 census.⁶³ Ironically, the statistical tables of the Ottoman ethnic and religious groups, which the Ottoman government presented at the Sevres Conference and which were based on the 1914 Ottoman registers, lacked data from the province of Mosul. The lack of data from Mosul was mainly a result of the Ottoman administration’s having left Mosul without taking any state documents (especially population registers), since they thought that they would recover Mosul from the British.⁶⁴ By contrast, they destroyed or took the population registers of Basra and Baghdad when they lost those provinces in battle. Since they lacked the corresponding data on Mosul, the Turks presented statistical data at the Lausanne Conference that were partly based on the preceding data (that is, those collected from 1881 to 1893) and were partially invented.

The Turkish statistical table “indicated the proportions between the various elements of the [Muslim] population” in Mosul. According to the table,

the Kurds constituted 52 percent (plus the Yazidi 3.6 percent) of the total Mosul population; Turks accounted for 29 percent, and Arabs 8.6 percent (see Table 1). Based on these numbers, the Turks claimed that the total number of Turks and Kurds, including Yezidis, constituted more than four-fifths of Mosul's population and was almost nine times larger than the Arab population.⁶⁵

While these data at first seem to validate the Turkish claim to Mosul, upon closer examination it is apparent that the data exaggerated the size of the Turkish population in Mosul. For instance, while the Turks claimed that there were 32,960 Turks in Sulaymaniyah, according to the British-Iraqi officials, who conducted “a prolonged and a careful search,” there were only “two Turks and no Turkomans.” Similarly, the Turks claimed that the two districts of Shaikan and Ashair Saba were “entirely populated by Turks,” whereas the British-Iraqi officials claimed that they did not find any Turks at all in those districts.⁶⁶

Table 1: 1914 Turkish Data as Presented to the Lausanne Conference

| | Kurds | Turks | Arabs | Yazidis | Non-Muslims | Total | Nomads |
|---------------------|---------|---------|--------|---------|-------------|---------|---------|
| Sulaymaniyah | 62,830 | 32,960 | 7,210 | 0 | 0 | 103,000 | |
| Kirkuk | 97,000 | 79,000 | 8,000 | 0 | 0 | 184,000 | |
| Mosul | 104,000 | 35,000 | 28,000 | 18,000 | 31,000 | 216,000 | |
| Total | 263,830 | 146,960 | 43,210 | 18,000 | 31,000 | 503,000 | 170,000 |

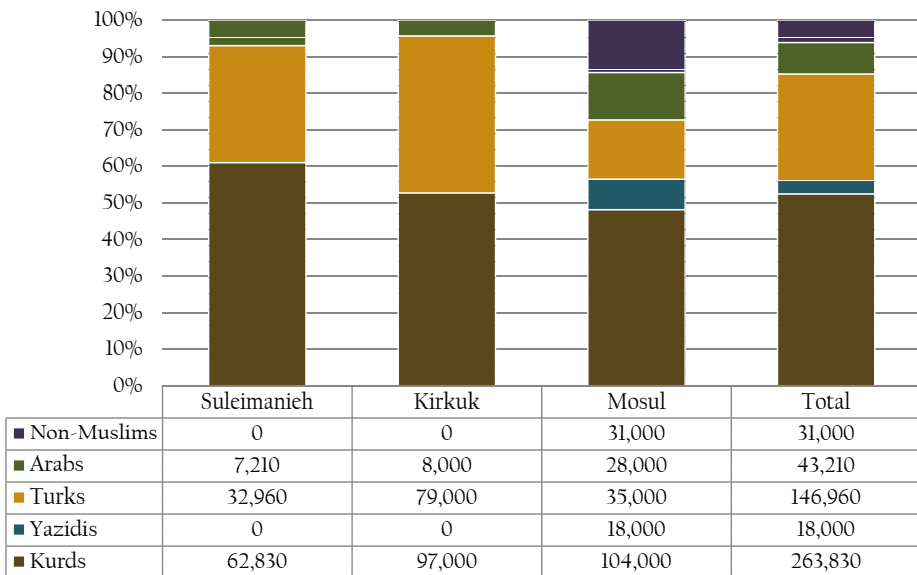
Source: House of Commons Parliamentary Papers: Turkey No. 1 (1923), Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, 1922–1923. Records of proceedings and draft terms of peace, London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1923, p. 373.

Meanwhile, the British also claimed that they had “carefully” collected population data from Mosul by visiting approximately a thousand villages and had “counted the houses and consulted the official Turkish census documents.”⁶⁷ After comparing all of the British data for Iraq (from 1917, 1919, and 1921), however, it seems that their data were not as carefully collected as they claimed. The first British data on the Kurds were compiled from the 1917 estimation for Mesopotamia, at which point the British army had not yet conquered a single part of Mosul Province (see Table 2).⁶⁸ The British prepared two population data sets: The first, in 1919, addressed

the religious and sectarian character of the population, while the second, in 1921, was mainly concerned with the population's ethnic character. In the course of those two years, according to British calculations, the entire population of Mosul had increased by eighty thousand people. The British explained this seemingly unreasonable increase in population by regarding it as a direct result of the massive return of refugees and soldiers after World War I (see Tables 3 and 4).⁶⁹

According to the British figures from 1921, the Kurds were the majority in Mosul, constituting 57.9 percent of the population; the percentage of Turks was 8.4, and of Arabs, 23.6 (See Table 4).⁷⁰ Comparing these data with those of Turks, the biggest difference between the two concerned the size and proportion of the Arabs in Mosul (see Figure 2). According to the British, who supported the annexation of Mosul to Arab Baghdad, the number of Mosul Arabs was 62,225, amounting to 23.6 percent of Mosul's population. In contrast, the Turks, who opposed annexation, claimed that the number of Mosul Arabs was only 43,210, or 8.6 percent of Mosul's population.

Figure 2: Graphic Representation of 1914 Turkish Data



Source: Data compiled by author

Table 2: 1917 British Data for Mesopotamia

| Mesopotamia | Kurds | Turks | Arabs | Syrian Christians | Jews | Persians | |
|-------------|-----------|---------|-------------|-------------------|---------|---------------|-----------|
| | | 380,000 | 110,000 | 1,650,000 | 60,000 | 60,000 | 70,000 |
| | Armenians | Yazidis | Circassians | Sabians | Chabaks | Miscellaneous | Total |
| | 57,000 | 21,000 | 8,000 | 2,000 | 10,000 | 10,000 | 2,438,000 |

Source: Secret Report entitled “Turkey in Europe and Asia,” dated October 22, 1917, Records of Iraq, V.1, pp. 675–86.

Table 3: 1919 British Religious Data

| | Sunni | Shiite | Jewish | Christian | Other | Total |
|--------------|---------|--------|--------|-----------|--------|---------|
| Arbil | 96,100 | 0 | 4,800 | 4,100 | 1,000 | 106,000 |
| Kirkuk | 85,000 | 5,000 | 1,400 | 600 | 0 | 92,000 |
| Mosul | 244,713 | 17,180 | 7,635 | 50,670 | 30,180 | 350,378 |
| Sulaymaniyah | 153,900 | 0 | 1,000 | 100 | 0 | 155,000 |
| Total | 579,713 | 22,180 | 14,835 | 55,470 | 31,180 | 703,378 |

Source: Original title of table was “Population of the Vilayet of Mosul by Religions according to an Estimate made in 1921,” House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Turkey 1 (1923), pp. 365–66.

Table 4: 1921 British “Racial” Data

| | Kurds ⁷¹ | Turks | Arabs | Christians | Jews | Total |
|--------------|---------------------|--------|---------|------------|--------|---------|
| Arbil | 77,000 | 15,000 | 5,100 | 4,100 | 4,800 | 106,000 |
| Kirkuk | 45,000 | 35,000 | 10,000 | 600 | 1,400 | 92,000 |
| Mosul | 179,820 | 14,895 | 170,663 | 57,425 | 9,665 | 432,468 |
| Sulaymaniyah | 152,900 | 1,000 | 0 | 100 | 1,000 | 155,000 |
| Total | 454,720 | 65,895 | 185,763 | 62,225 | 16,865 | 785,468 |

Source: Original title of table was “Population of the Vilayet of Mosul by Races according to an Estimate made in 1921,” House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Turkey 1 (1923), pp. 365–66.

In light of these discrepant data sets, it is apparent that both the British and the Turks cynically exploited both the statistical data and the principle of self-determination. As has been emphasized above, both the British and the Turks proceeded on the assumption that members of each ethnic group would vote in accordance with their ethnic identity—so the statistical data resulted from an imaginary plebiscite. By counting people based on their ethnicity, both sides argued that they had determined the Mosul population's choice, for Iraq or Turkey. The assumption regarding voting behavior was itself problematic, and what made it more complicated were the Kurds. Because neither the British nor the Turks discussed the wishes of the Arabs or the Turkomans, the dispute was over the wishes of the Kurds. While both delegations defended the self-determination principle in theory, in practice they both simply supported their own self-interest. The Turks, referring to the Arabs, asked how it was possible that an “insignificant element” who “consist [of] less than one-fifth”⁷² and are a “majority in the capital of a province [but] [make up] a tiny minority in the province itself, should decide the fate of the whole province.” The British also posed the same question regarding the Turkish population in Mosul, asking why Mosul “should [be] given back to the Turks, who constitute only one-twelfth of the whole [of Mosul].”⁷³

Ironically, the February 1925 Kurdish rebellion in Turkey had an impact on these population statistics discussions. Even though the assumption that ethnicity directly determined political wishes and voting behavior did not change, both sides shifted from emphasizing the ethnic character of the population to stressing sectarian divisions. The Turks, who were likely upset by the Kurdish rebellion in Turkey, introduced a new demographic consideration to the argument: In response to the Frontier Commission's report at the League of Nations in September 1925, the Turks claimed that while the Mosul majority “was Sunni like the inhabitants in Turkey,” the majority of Iraq (referring to Baghdad and Basra) “was Shiite, as [were] the inhabitants of Persia.”⁷⁴ Accordingly, the Turks insisted that Mosul, because of its sectarian demographic character, should be attached to Turkey. The British rejected this argument, stating that there was “only a slight majority of Shiites in the whole area of Iraq. Baghdad was divided equally between the two religious communities.” In addition, the British pointed out that King Faisal and the majority of the Iraqi government were Sunnis, and that “there was no political difference between the Shiites and the Sunnites.”⁷⁵

The statistical discussions also extended to the origins of the ethnic taxonomy reflected in the British and Turkish statistical tabulations. Although both sides' taxonomies were identical, their definitions were not. The Turks alleged that the Kurds were Turks, basing their claim on historical, political, and racial arguments. In particular, quoting the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, they claimed that both Kurds and Turks were of a common Turanian origin. Rejecting this argument, the British claimed that the Kurds were not of Turkish origin, but were rather Iranian. While the British, driven by their political aims, were very clear regarding Kurdish identity, they were not so clear with respect to *Turkish* identity: They simply assumed that the Turkomans were different from the Turks. With regard to Arab taxonomy, they claimed that there were no distinctions among Arabs, since "they all alike claim the independence of Arabs and share the Arab ideals and the use of Arabic as their mother tongue."⁷⁶

The central issue underlying these political discussions was the *loyalty* of the Kurds—that is, the political meaning of the statistical categories that they had tabulated. While the British backed their claim that the Mosul Kurds did not want to unite with Turkey by pointing out that the Kurds had been continuously rebelling against the Ottoman and Turkish states, the Turkish side claimed that Kurds not only had the same origin as Turks, but also shared the same political inclinations.

As emphasized above, both the Turks and the British considered compiling ethnic statistical data a suitable method for determining the wishes of Mosul people. To present this argument clearly as well as to show how statistics were part of the discourse within the bureaucratic state apparatus, I quote from British internal correspondence that was intended to prepare a response to the Turkish government. The British argued that whereas they did not know the wishes of the Iraqi people before the 1919 and 1921 plebiscites, they already knew the wishes of the Mosul people. This British "knowledge" was manifestly a result of their reductionist approach: All members of an ethnic group, they believed, have similar political attitudes. They further argued that they already knew the wishes of "half of the population" of Mosul, and they did not need to know the other half—that is, the Kurds'—wishes, because they considered Kurds "ignorant" and lacking a "coherent" and rational opinion. Thus, a plebiscite was unnecessary.

One half of the population of the Mosul *Vilayet* consists of Kurds. Of the other half, three-sixths are Arabs. That these Arabs desire to remain in the Iraq State will scarcely be disputed. Two-sixths are composed of the non-Muslim minority, viz: the Yezidis, the Jews and the Christians. The Yezidis have repeatedly expressed their desire to remain in Iraq, and the same is the case with the Jews and the Chaldean Christians. The Nestorian Assyrians, it is true, would prefer to be included neither in Turkey nor in Iraq, but [that they] would prefer, given suitable safeguards, to remain under a State which will enjoy, for a time at any rate, a considerable measure of British advice and protection, is not open to question. The remaining one-sixth consists of Turkoman. They are contented and prosperous under the rule of the Iraq State, and there is every reason to believe that they would remain so. Let it be assumed, however, purely for the purpose of the present argument, that they are unanimously desirous of a return to Turkish rule. Thus the position is that the wishes of one-half of the population of the Mosul *Vilayet* are well-known and that in their case, the plebiscite is completely unnecessary. The other half is composed of Kurds, the great majority of whom are ignorant tribesmen from whom no coherent expression of opinion could be obtained.⁷⁷

These bilateral discussions between the two biggest military powers in the Middle East with regard to Mosul ended without diplomatic success. After Turkey and the British Empire failed to reach a diplomatic agreement within the stipulated nine months, the Mosul question was submitted to the League of Nations on August 30, 1924.

The Frontier Commission (1925): Determining the Mosul Population's Wishes

In the aftermath of the futile Mosul negotiations, political developments, especially those in Turkey, had a significant impact on the use of statistical data. During this period, Turkish nationalism, which in the past had been inclusive and had emphasized religious identity, became a more exclusive identity following the abolishment of the Caliphate in 1924 and the Kurdish uprising in 1925. After the abolishment of the Caliphate, the Kurds were forced to reevaluate their links with Turkish culture and their political attitude toward the Turkish Republic. Whereas up to this point, the Kurds allied with the Turks primarily because of the existence of the Caliphate, once it was abolished, deep tensions were revealed, particularly following the outbreak of the February 1925 Kurdish uprising in Turkey. This political change had a definitive impact on both the British and Turkish statistical approaches to the Mosul question.

After negotiations failed to solve the Mosul question, the League of Nations set up the Frontier Commission in 1925 to determine the sentiments of the local population in Mosul. The Commission was authorized, based on its findings, to recommend a solution that the League would implement after consulting with the Iraqi, Turkish, and British governments.⁷⁸ The appointment of an inquiry commission actually marked a diplomatic success for British diplomacy, since British officials had argued that appointing a commission was “a procedure which the British Government had always thought would prove more effective for the solution of the dispute than a plebiscite.”⁷⁹

To determine the fate of Mosul, the Commission attempted to adopt a “balanced and scientific” approach. This scientific approach utilized a series of tests, based on geographical, ethnic, historical, economic, and strategic factors, and also drew on the Commission’s interpretation of the Mosul population’s wishes. The Commission traveled to Mosul in February 1925 and stayed until March. During this trip, the Commission questioned the Turkish and Iraqi-British parties. After the conclusion of the trip, the Commission submitted a final report to the League of Nations, which was slated to definitively decide the matter.

From the outset, however, the Frontier Commission was not nearly as scientific as it purported to be. For one thing, the composition of the Commission was problematic: more political than scientific. The Commission was made up of representatives from Sweden, Hungary, and Belgium⁸⁰—three minor countries who were deemed to “rarely have the courage or experience to handle such questions with real skill, judgment, and impartiality.”⁸¹ Moreover, while none of these countries had any obvious direct economic interests in the disputed area, all were very dependent on their trade with Britain.⁸²

Beyond this, the individual profiles of Frontier Commission members further skewed the Commission’s decisions. One of the three Commission members, Count Paul Teleki, was also a scholar—an expert in geography—and his academic works were largely known to the international scholarly community. He was on that account a key member of the Commission, during the research period as well as during the writing of the report. For example, the Commission based its conclusion that the Yazidis were an “entirely distinct people” from the Kurds on the fact that while the Kurds were Muslim, the Yazidis were not. This conclusion was a departure from that endorsed by both the Turks and the British during the previous bilateral negotiations—namely, that the Yazidis were in fact Kurds.⁸³ While the reason for this departure is open to speculation, it seems likely that it came about as a result of Paul Teleki’s cultural and national background.⁸⁴ Teleki’s country—as was the case in all of Central Europe—viewed religion as the most important marker of national identity, and it is likely that Teleki’s emphasis on religion at the expense of ethnicity impacted the Commission’s decision.⁸⁵

Other aspects of the Commission’s make-up also likely impacted its decisions. Although several British, Turkish, and Iraqi Arab assessors accompanied the Commission during its inquiry tour, there were no Kurdish assessors. In addition, during its fact-finding mission to Mosul, the Commission did not visit various rural areas and also did not meet specific segments of the local population. Although they questioned eight hundred “persons of some education and influence,” most of these individuals were “selected from lists submitted by the British and Turkish assessors.”⁸⁶ While the statistics provided by these representatives are unknown, it is likely that they did not accurately reflect Mosul’s diverse population.

In its final report, the Commission found the British arguments more acceptable than the Turkish ones. This conclusion, however, was based on partial and probably skewed data. In addition to not conducting any statistical inquiries in the field, the Commission examined only three statistical sources of data: the 1914 Turkish data, the 1921 British data, and the 1922–24 “Iraqi last census” data, which were actually British-Iraqi data.⁸⁷ Based on this already available evidence and without even seeing the details of the census, the Commission determined that the “Iraqi last census” was “nearer to the truth.”⁸⁸ In its report, the Commission definitively concluded that “the greater part of the population of the disputed territory is undoubtedly Kurd (about five-eighths). The Kurds are therefore numerically the most important factor. . . .”⁸⁹ On the basis of this statistical data, the Commission concluded, “If the ethnic argument alone had to be taken into account, the necessary conclusion would be that an independent Kurdish State should be created, since the Kurds constitute five-eighths of the population” (see Table 5).⁹⁰

Since the ethnic data were not taken into consideration, the other most important “fact” to be determined scientifically was the wishes of the Mosul population. It seems that the Commission’s expert, Teleki, tried to map the geographical distribution of the polled population, which numbered around 800. In a sample map that shows the geographical distribution of Arbil’s population, a majority of the population of the city center were “*proturques*” (see Figure 3).⁹¹ Considering all of Mosul, the Commission determined that Mosul’s people were “more in favor of Iraq than of Turkey,” but that this was not due to “any feeling of solidarity”; it was instead on account of economic reasons, and also because of the desire to preserve the continuity of the British mandate. If not for these factors, the Commission concluded, the Mosul people “would [have] preferred [to] return to Turkey.” In sum, according to the Commission, the Mosul population’s priorities were first economic and second political—and only lastly ethnic.⁹²

Figure 3: Geographical Distribution of the Opinions of Arbil's Population:
Pro-Arabs, Pro-Turks, Pro-Kurds, Discretes



Source: István & Gábor, "Der ungarische Geograph Pál Teleki als Mitglied des Mossul-Kommission," pp. 17–25.

Following these statements, the Commission noted the impracticality of holding a plebiscite in Mosul—which happens to have been the opinion that the British had held since the Mosul dispute emerged. In support of this argument, the Commission observed that aside from the fact that a plebiscite might create ethnic conflict, it would not reflect the true wishes of individuals, since the existing “social organization is medieval or feudal . . . [individuals] follow [the opinions of] their tribal chiefs. . . .”⁹³ In other words, the Commission argued that the results of a plebiscite would be determined by the communities’ leaders rather than the communities themselves. Ironically, this claim was not raised in the past, when both the British and the Commission solicited the opinions of “representatives of communities” and especially of the Christian representatives. Only once the communities under discussion were Muslim communities, in which the tribal chiefs also assumed traditional religious roles, was the Commission critical of their opinions.

To support the British argument regarding the impossibility of holding a plebiscite, the Commission argued that although the Kurds were by far the largest group, the ethnic mix in the region was so complicated that it would be impossible to draw a border along ethnic lines. But in determining that it was too difficult to draw racial boundaries between Arabs, Turks, and Kurds, the Commission took a problematic approach. In the analytical section of its report, the Commission alluded to “how the three races

intermingle and how a mixed population is gradually being formed.” Yet, despite making this claim, the Commission offered just one example of this intermingling: According to the Commission, the *Bayat* tribe was 65 percent Turkish and 35 percent Arab and included “intermarried” couples composed of members of both races.⁹⁴ Yet, without providing the actual proportion of mixed marriages, the Commission arrived at the conclusion that “so great is the confusion of races” in the disputed territories, that it would be difficult to draw ethnic borders. Instead of examining the intermarriage issue with statistical methods, the Commission drew their conclusion by generalizing from a single example. As Adolphe Quetelet had pointed out much earlier, this approach has its limits, since social facts cannot be generated by arbitrary or exceptional examples.⁹⁵

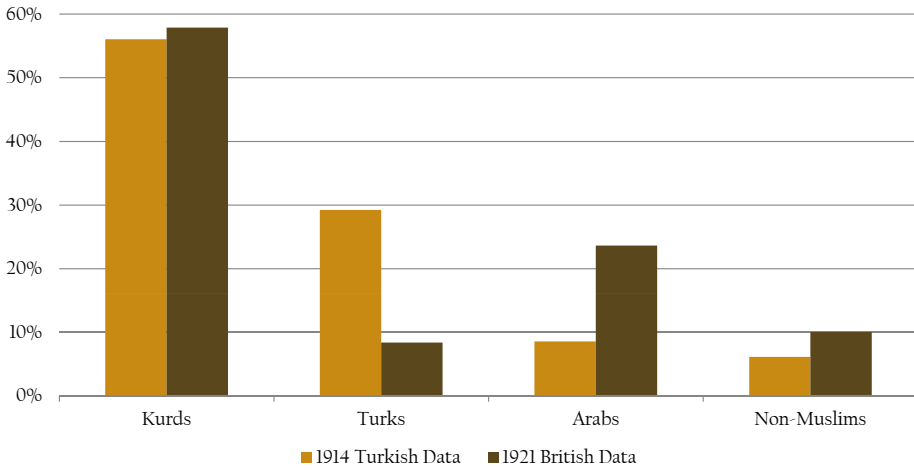
The Commission also proposed that the Brussels line, which was the border drawn in the middle of the positions of the British and Turkish armies at the end of World War I, be used to solve the frontier problem. This solution actually divided the Kurds and, to a lesser degree, the Turkomans who lived in Iraq from those in Turkey. Accordingly, it seems that the Commission found it easier to draw boundaries that would separate the Kurds from each other than to create boundaries that would separate Kurds from Arabs, who were already divided climatically and topographically (see Figures 4 and 5).⁹⁶

Table 5: 1925 League of Nations Data

| | Kurds | Turks | Arabs | Christians | Jews | Yazidis | Total |
|---------------------|---------|--------|---------|------------|--------|---------|---------|
| Sulaymaniyah | 189,900 | 0 | 75 | 0 | 1,550 | 0 | 191,525 |
| Arbil | 170,650 | 2,780 | 11,700 | 3,900 | 2,750 | 0 | 191,780 |
| Kirkuk | 47,500 | 26,100 | 35,650 | 2,400 | 0 | 0 | 111,650 |
| Mosul | 88,000 | 9,750 | 119,500 | 55,000 | 7,550 | 26,200 | 306,000 |
| Total | 496,050 | 38,630 | 166,925 | 61,300 | 11,850 | 26,200 | 800,955 |

Source: League of Nations, *Question of Frontier between Turkey and Iraq : Report Submitted to the Council by the Commission instituted by the Council Resolution of September 30, 1924* (Geneva : League of Nations : C.400. 1925, VII. no. 142, pp. 76–77.

Figure 4: Comparison of Turkish and British Population Statistics



In the end, the British strategy of “employing the League as an adjunct of British diplomacy”⁹⁷ proved to be successful, as the Commission’s conclusions were clearly pro-British. The Commission rejected a plebiscite in Mosul and drew boundaries between the Arabs, the Kurds and the Turks.⁹⁸ In addition, the Commission proposed that the Brussels demarcation line should become the permanent border between Turkey and Iraq. These borders were “practically identical” to those Curzon had proposed much earlier.⁹⁹

The Commission awarded Mosul to Iraq on the condition that the British mandate be extended to twenty-five years and that certain guarantees be given to the large Kurdish population. On December 16, 1925, the Council of the League of Nations decided unanimously that Mosul was a part of Iraq, with a permanent border to be drawn along the Brussels line. In addition, the Council instructed the mandatory government of Iraq—along with the British, as the mandatory power—to guarantee that officials of the “Kurdish race” be appointed “for the administration of their country.” The Council also instructed that the Kurdish language would “be the official language” in the Mosul administration and especially in the schools and the courts, and it stated that Kurds would be allowed to take part in the administration of Iraq.¹⁰⁰

Although the Commission criticized a few British arguments, it concluded with a pro-British stance that favored the status quo in the region. The Commission thought that the British successfully understood the wishes of Mosul people, and that it was therefore unnecessary to conduct a plebiscite. The Council's decisions spelled an end to the "scientific" discussions regarding the plebiscite, and to the resort to statistical data and the self-determination principle in the service of the military status quo. Subsequently, on June 5, 1926, Turkey and Britain agreed to the Council's recommendations, and Britain included a pecuniary compensation of £700,000 to Turkey.

Figure 5: Ethnographic Map of Mosul Compiled by the Frontier Commission



Source: In fact, this map was drawn by Teleki, who had drawn several ethnographic maps for the disputed territories in Europe—e.g., the ethnographic map of Hungary based on the density of population, according to the Census of 1910. For an examination of his ethnographic maps (including the Mosul one), see István & Gábor, “Der ungarische Geograph Pál Teleki als Mitglied des Mossul-Kommission,” pp. 17–25.

Statistics in the Delineation of Kurdish Districts (1932)

By 1926, after Turkey had relinquished its claims to Mosul, the Kurdish question turned into a problem common to Turkey, Iraq, and the British Empire. The League of Nations' 1926 promises became the basis for a rising Kurdish nationalism, which obliged the British-backed Iraqi monarchy to grant the Kurds a certain degree of autonomy. Over the course of the following years until 1932, the Kurds demanded a clarification of their rights and threatened British interests in Iraq with their widespread unrest.¹⁰¹ These political changes coincided with changes in the statistical presence of Kurds in the British and Iraqi tabulations, as both the number and proportion of Kurds were lower in both tabulations than in the earlier data.

The British, who when determining the frontier between Turkey and Iraq claimed to be very precise and scientific, lacked that precision and scientific approach when later determining the borders of the Kurdish districts and the size and proportion of the Kurdish population in Iraq. This lack of precision was likely affected by a change in the British mentality, which was reflected in their policy change toward the Kurds. In rejecting the Turkish demand for a plebiscite in Mosul, the British had based their political arguments on racial and ethnic considerations. Following the creation of Iraq, however, the British started to examine the Kurdish population and devise subsequent British policy primarily through the Kurdish language. This chapter examines the use of statistical data regarding the Kurdish population when the British and Iraqis determined the "Kurdish districts" in northern Iraq—and analyzes the differential British and Iraqi interpretation of these data.

When the details of the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi treaty became public, the Kurdish regions became scenes of unrest, out of fear that the Baghdad government might be more anti-Kurdish after the exit of British troops. On the other hand, Kurdish notables submitted an avalanche of petitions to the Permanent Mandates Commission.¹⁰² The majority of the petitions highlighted the under-representation of Kurds in the state apparatus

and the need to more clearly delineate their rights and the borders of the Kurdish districts. For example, the National Central Committee in Sulaymaniyah claimed that the majority of “administrative and executive officials of Kurdish districts” were Arabs, who “press[ed] and intimidate[d]” the Kurds. As a result of these actions, the Committee argued that once the mandatory regime ended, Baghdad would make the Kurds’ situation “worse than [in] the Turkish period.” Accordingly, it demanded the “formation of a Kurdish Government under [the] supervision of [the] League of Nations,”¹⁰³ contending that the Kurds have the “ability to form an independent State” that will be composed of “a sufficient number of inhabitants . . . more than a million souls . . . [which is] greater than that of the Sunni Arabs who constitute . . . [the] carcass of the Iraqi Kingdom.”¹⁰⁴ The petition, which was signed by five Kurdish deputies, demanded that the Iraqi government draft “a special law” and determine the boundaries of Kurdish areas.¹⁰⁵

These Kurdish petitions to the League of Nations panicked the British, who wanted to leave Iraq as soon as possible. In response, they decided to “urgently” undertake a “fresh and independent inquiry.” The British feared that as a result of the incessant Kurdish petitions, tensions would increase in this “extremely important section of the world” and culminate in a general Kurdish uprising.¹⁰⁶ To prevent this from happening, the British organized an inquiry in Mosul, sent a counter-petition to the League of Nations, and proposed to the Iraqi government that it promulgate a Language Law. After the League of Nations rejected the Kurdish demands on November 17, 1930, the British army conducted a military operation in Sulaymaniyah and forced Sheikh Mahmud Barzanji out of Iraq. Meanwhile, the Iraqi government enacted the Local Languages Law (no. 74, May 23, 1931), according to which the Kurdish language became the official language of certain districts and the primary or secondary language in the courts in certain other districts.¹⁰⁷ In addition, during May 1932, the Iraqi government made a “formal declaration regarding minorities” to the League of Nations, in which it promised that all racial, religious and linguistic minorities “shall be equal before the law.”¹⁰⁸ This declaration was promulgated on July 13, 1932.

British Statistical Inquiries and the Language Law

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In response to the Kurdish petitions, the British conceived the idea for the Local Languages Law, which was enacted in 1931. To persuade the League of Nations that Britain was the mandatory power responsible for the Iraqi state, Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, the advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, made a “careful examination” of Kurdish complaints. With the help of Iraqi state officers, Cornwallis calculated the number and proportion of both the Kurdish population and Kurdish officials in the “Kurdish districts.”¹⁰⁹ The British relied on these statistical data in their inquiries and in their internal correspondence, as well as in their external correspondence with the Iraqi government and the League of Nations. The British described the Kurds as an uneasy, suspicious, insatiable people, whereas the Kurds presented themselves as realistic and scientific. Moreover, the British generally described the Kurdish allegations as “nationalist” and claimed that they were based on “feeling.”

In his report, Cornwallis addressed the number and proportion of Kurdish officials in “Kurdish areas of Mosul.” According to Cornwallis, there were 324 Kurdish officials in these areas, constituting 44 percent of the total number of officials. Cornwallis noted, however, that if the “statistics of Kirkuk *liwa* [a subprovince] are excluded,” the remaining 279 Kurdish officials accounted for 55 percent of the total. In other words, Cornwallis was conveying that Kurdish officials constituted a majority of the total. While the Kurds did in fact account for the majority of officials, a closer examination reveals that the Kurds in the Kurdish areas constituted 72 percent of the total population, whereas the Arabs, who were only 8 percent of the total population in those areas, constituted 23 percent of the officials (see Table 6).¹¹⁰

Table 6 : Ethnic Distribution of the Officials Employed in Mosul

| | Gazetted | | | | Non-Gazetted | | | | Total | | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|----|----|-----|--------------|-----|----|-----|-------|-----|----|-----|
| | K. | T. | A. | C&J | K. | T. | A. | C&J | K. | T. | A. | C&J |
| Sulaymaniyah | 19 | 8 | 1 | 2 | 90 | 14 | 11 | 12 | 109 | 22 | 12 | 14 |
| Arbil | 18 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 95 | 23 | 34 | - | 113 | 29 | 38 | 1 |
| Kirkuk | 16 | 11 | 18 | 2 | 29 | 107 | 40 | 6 | 45 | 118 | 58 | 8 |
| Mosul (Kurdish Qadhas) | 11 | 3 | 14 | 4 | 46 | 8 | 43 | 35 | 57 | 11 | 57 | 59 |

Source: See the confidential Memo of Lord P. C. Passfield, Secretary of State for the Colonies, dated April 23, 1930, CO 730/157/1, pp. 220–36.

In an October 4, 1930, letter to the League of Nations, the British argued that the Kurdish complaint was false. To persuade the League of Nations, statistical data occupied a significant portion of the British report and of British political arguments. Using Sulaymaniyah as an example, the British argued that of 157 total officials there, 109 were Kurdish and only 12 were Arabs. Even as they made this claim, the British acknowledged that in other Kurdish districts, the proportion of Kurdish officials was not so high. Nonetheless, they reasoned that the “increase in the number of officials of non-Kurdish race” was a recent development, and that a “considerable majority” of the non-Kurds spoke Kurdish and were “scarcely distinguishable from the Kurds in the areas they administer.” To the British, the increase in the number of non-Kurdish officials was not due to the policy of the Iraqi Mandate State, but was rather a result of Kurdish ignorance and of some of the Turkoman governors’ policies. In other words, while acknowledging that Kurds were underrepresented in the government, the British rejected the Kurdish claim that this development was the fault of the British. The British stated that “to find suitable and qualified Kurds” was increasingly difficult, because “their agricultural pursuits and primitive existence are not calculated to fit them for Government service.”¹¹¹ In fact, the British noted, the Kurds were underrepresented not only in skilled jobs, but in unskilled ones as well.

When submitting their claims to the League of Nations, the British presented only one side of the results of their statistical inquiries. For example, when the British refuted Kurdish complaints and stated that the proportion of Arab officials was only 8 percent, they failed to mention that according to that very same statistical tabulation, the proportion of Kurdish officials in Sulaymaniyah was only 69 percent, while the Kurdish population was 99 percent of the total population.

Cornwallis's most dubious data in his statistical tabulations concerned Kirkuk. According to Cornwallis, the proportion of Kurds in Kirkuk was 49.5 percent—that is, not the majority. In contrast to this figure, however, the British ethnographic map of 1931 indicated that the Kurdish proportion in Kirkuk was 57 percent. To present the Kurds as a minority, therefore, Cornwallis carried out two simple falsifications. First, he increased the number of Jews from 2,472 to 8,472. Second, he *decreased* the number of Kurds from 77,608 to 67,703. The number of Jews in Kirkuk had never been more than 3,000 in other British data, and according to 1917 British data, the number of Jews was 2,472. Thus, Cornwallis inflated the number of Jews to cover up the fact that the Kurds were a majority in Kirkuk and, in turn, to decrease the extent of Kurdish officials' underrepresentation. Second, British statistical data showed that only 8 percent of the civil servants in Kirkuk were Kurds, despite the fact that Kurds constituted 57 percent of the total population; so to cover up this underrepresentation, the British misrepresented their own data. The British found it extremely important to cover up the underrepresentation specifically in Kirkuk, since by 1927 they had laid the basis there for a petroleum industry that opened up a huge job market, and had thus assumed a significant level of responsibility for the area (See Table 7).

Table 7: British Data on Kirkuk, 1930 and 1931

| Kirkuk | Arabs | Kurds | Turks | Christians | Jews | Other | Total | % Kurds |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|--------|------------|-------|-------|---------|---------|
| British 1930 data | 26,561 | 67,703 | 28,741 | 1,228 | 8,472 | 0 | 136,705 | 49.5 |
| British 1931 data | 26,561 | 77,608 | 28,741 | 1,228 | 2,472 | 192 | 136,802 | 56.7 |

Source: For 1930 data, see CO 730/157, p. 236; for 1931 data, see Records of Iraq, V.7, pp. 596–97.

The absence of Yazidis in the British statistical tabulations was also problematic. In the period following 1926, the British had argued that mother tongue, not race, had to be taken into consideration. Consequently, the British were supposed to include the Yazidis, who were mostly Kurdophone, in their statistical data. Inclusion of Yazidis, however, would have increased the proportion of Kurds, so they were excluded.¹¹²

In short, the most important problem with regard to the British statistical data was their inaccuracy, extending to the number and proportion of Kurds in the “Kurdish areas of Mosul.” The 1930 British data did not correspond to either their preceding or their subsequent data. According to the 1921 British data invoked during the Mosul negotiations, there were 454,720 Kurds (including 30,000 Yazidis), and they constituted 58 percent of the total population. The 1922–24 data, which the British and Iraqis presented to the League of Nations Commission in 1925, depicted similar statistics, as the Kurdish population in Mosul (including nomads and Yazidis) was found to be 516,924, constituting 65 percent of the population. According to 1930 data, however, which were prepared in response to Kurdish complaints, the number and proportion of Kurds were substantially lower (393,000, equal to 55 percent of the population).

While this discrepancy can be explained by technical reasons pertaining to census taking and statistics, additional data from a later period shows us the other reason why there were differences between the 1922–24 and the 1931 data. These statistical data, prepared and published in 1947 by Cecil John Edmonds, were designated for British inner circulation only and were not intended for diplomatic purposes.¹¹³ The data present the number and proportion of Kurds in Mosul Province as essentially comparable to the numbers and proportions given in the data of 1921 and 1922–24. These 1947 statistical data were prepared following World War II, when the political situation was unstable and the Soviet role in the Middle East had increased.¹¹⁴ According to these data, by 1947 the number of Kurds within the boundaries of the old Mosul Province was 804,240, amounting to 63 percent of the population. While it is evident that the Kurdish population had increased from 1921 to 1947, the proportion of Kurds is nearly identical to that found in the 1922–24 data.¹¹⁵

This British manipulation of data was certainly driven by political purposes. If the 1924 Iraqi-British data had been used, the British would not have been able to easily disprove the Kurdish allegations—and the discrepancy between the proportion of Kurds in the population and the number of Kurdish officials would have warranted an increase in the latter. According to the British-Iraqi data of 1922–24, the proportion of Kurds in the Kurdish districts was over 83 percent, not 74 percent as reported in 1930. The proportion of Kurdish officials in the Kurdish areas of Mosul that the British presented (44 percent) therefore had to be reevaluated in light of the proportion shown in the 1922–24 data (83 percent).

The British recommendation to the Iraqi government with regard to remedying the Kurdish situation proved to be the most important British impact on the Kurdish question. Following his inquiry into the Kurdish allegations, Cornwallis drew up a list of recommendations that he persuaded the Iraqi government “to adopt.”¹¹⁶ In accordance with the 1926 League of Nations directive, Cornwallis proposed a “Language Law,” by which the Kurdish language would become the official language in the administration, the school system, and the justice system in the “predominantly Kurdish *qadhas*.” This legal proposition was problematic, because it was based on the criteria of language and not “race.” In fact, though the League of Nations had stipulated that the “officials of Kurdish race should be appointed for the *administration of their country*,” the British replaced the race criterion with the language criterion when they proposed to the Iraqi government that language should be “made the test of employment.” The British reasoned that “we have justified the new policy of making language and not race the test of employment on the grounds that it is in the best interest of the Kurds.”¹¹⁷ The reality, however, was the total opposite. For example, the decision to appoint Kurdish-speaking Arabs in place of the Kurdish Governor of Sulaymaniyah, Tawfiq Wahbi Beg, and the Kurdish police chief caused major chaos in the Kurdish districts of Mosul.¹¹⁸

Last but not least, the most important effect of British statistical manipulation was on the delineation of Kurdish districts, in which Kurdish was introduced as the official language. Deputies of Kurdish origin had requested this delineation before the British left, and this delineation clarified Kurdish rights and districts. Deputies of Kurdish origin had

requested from the British, before they left Iraq, the delineation of Kurdish rights and the borders of the Kurdish districts.¹¹⁹

Since 1919, the Kurdish regions of Mosul had been called by many different names, including Southern Kurdistan, Kurdish country, and the Kurdish district or Kurdish zone. According to the League of Nation's instructions, the British government, as the designated mandatory power, was supposed to institute "guarantees regarding local administration" to the Kurdish population and was therefore obligated to demarcate the Kurdish districts.¹²⁰ The British used their population data to delineate these districts. The problem was not in the use of these statistical data, but rather in the criteria used to define terms such as "majority," "predominance," and "considerable proportion" that were intended to best determine the Kurdish districts. Although the British had used the "majority" criteria during the Mosul negotiations, they now started to use the term "predominance." They also proposed that the Iraqi government apply the Language Law in the "predominantly Kurdish *qadhas*." Interestingly, the Council of Ministers of Iraq promised to apply the law in areas "where the Kurds constitute a majority of the population." It is possible that this was owing to the presence of a Kurd, Jamal Beg Baban, at the meeting of the Council of Ministers.¹²¹

Finally, in its Protection of Minorities memorandum, sent to the League of Nations on May 30, 1932, the Iraqi Government declared that it would use the criterion of "a considerable proportion" to protect the rights of racial, religious, and linguistic minorities. The decision to use the criterion "predominance" or "considerable proportion" instead of "majority" was likely due to political considerations. Neither the British nor the Iraqis, however, established exactly what they meant by "predominance" or "considerable proportion," or whether they meant 60 percent, 70 percent or 80 percent of the population. In turn, this lack of specificity provided them with a big space in which they could maneuver and arbitrarily determine the size of the Kurdish districts.

In the end, neither the majority nor the "considerable proportion" criteria nor any statistical definitions were applied when determining the Kurdish districts. Certainly, the British and the Iraqis took into consideration the region where the proportion of the Kurdish population was very high,

but the main concerns were political, and the intention was to maintain the status quo in Iraq. This method of delineation, I think, created the historical foundations for the ongoing Kurdish problem in Iraq. The 1931 Local Languages Law, which “was drafted by the Minister of the Interior in close consultation with the Acting High Commissioner,”¹²² established that “Kurdish shall be the official language” in Arbil, Sulaymaniyah, and some districts of Arbil (Makhmur, Koi, Rania, Rowanduz) and Kirkuk (Chemchemical and Gil). Nevertheless, Kurdish was not designated the official language in the city center, or in the Makhmur districts of Arbil and the Dohuk districts of Mosul.

Essentially, the criteria for determining which *qadhas* were predominantly Kurdish were arbitrary. For instance, Kifri, where the Kurds were 69 percent of the population, was excluded from the language area. Moreover, since the Language Law criterion was based on the Kurdish language, areas where the Yazidis were the majority, including Sinjar (62 percent) and Shaikan (68 percent), were counted as Kurdish areas. Meanwhile, the definitions of the terms “majority” and “predominant” were even more arbitrary, especially with respect to the districts in which “the courts shall be Kurdish.” The law excluded the following districts: Makhmur, Kifri, Arbil center, Sinjar, and Shaikan, where the proportions of Kurds were respectively 88.6 percent, 69.8 percent, 64.9 percent, 62 percent, and 68 percent.¹²³

The most important problem of British statistics was the arbitrary changes they exhibited over time. As emphasized above, all British and British-backed Iraqi data showed the Kurdish population to be around 64 percent of the population; but in the 1930 and 1931 data, the proportion of Kurds was 55 percent. Thus, if a figure similar to that in the 1922–24 data had replaced that in the 1930–31 data, the number of Kurds in Mosul would have been approximately 566,924, not 393,000, and the proportion of Kurds would have been 63 percent and not 55 percent. If these data had been applied, the boundaries of Kurdish-language regions would certainly have extended over more districts.

The tragedy is magnified by the fact that British officials were aware that their delineation of Kurdish districts would not satisfy the “more ardent [Kurdish] nationalists, and there will certainly be a demand at the very

least for the extension of the Kurdish educational area and the formation of Dohuk liwa.” The British assisted with the delineation of these districts because they needed the Iraqi government to take some steps to satisfy the Council of the League of Nations in order that they could carry out a planned evacuation from Iraq. The British were not fortune-tellers, but they were aware of the extent to which they had arbitrarily changed their Kurdish policy and delineated Kurdish borders. Nonetheless, they did not refrain from offering advice to the Iraqi government and suggesting that “the door may be left open for reasonable extensions of Kurdish-language districts.”¹²⁴ I think that this British heritage of a half-opened door became one of the destructive reasons for Iraqi instability in the succeeding years.

Table 8: 1930 British/Iraqi Data

| | Arabs | Kurds | Turks | Christians | Jews | Yazidis | Assyrians | Persian | Total |
|---------------------|--------|---------|--------|------------|--------|---------|-----------|---------|---------|
| Arbil | 4,492 | 83,430 | 9,921 | 2,689 | 3,225 | 0 | 2,090 | 287 | 106,134 |
| Kirkuk | 26,561 | 67,703 | 28,741 | 1,228 | 2,472 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 126,705 |
| Mosul | 5,847 | 78,865 | 0 | 11,771 | 4,146 | 2192 | 9,492 | 0 | 112,313 |
| Sulaymaniyah | 37 | 91,426 | 0 | 148 | 1,327 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 92,938 |
| Total | 36,937 | 321,424 | 38,662 | 15,836 | 11,170 | 2192 | 11,582 | 287 | 438,090 |

Source: “Racial Statistics for Kurdish Areas according to Latest Figures February 1930,” CO 730/157, p. 236.

Table 9: Comparison of 1924 and 1931 Iraqi-British Data for Mosul Province

| Years | Arabs | | Kurds | | Turks | | Christians | | Jews | | Yazidis | | Total | | % Kurds | |
|---------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | 1924 | 1931 | 1924 | 1931 | 1924 | 1931 | 1924 | 1931 | 1924 | 1931 | 1924 | 1931 | 1924 | 1931 ²⁵ | 1924 | 1931 |
| Arbil | 11,682 | 2,546 | 53,315 | 28,587 | 2,574 | 9,000 | 2,822 | 2,000 | 2,180 | 1,900 | - | 0 | 73,774 | 44,040 | 74 | 65 |
| Koi | - | 20 | 60,250 | 19,279 | 144 | 38 | 1,070 | 321 | 504 | 302 | - | 0 | 61,968 | 19,961 | 97 | 97 |
| Rowanduz | - | 0 | 55,930 | 15,987 | 60 | 0 | 30 | 1,550 | 80 | 250 | - | 0 | 56,190 | 17,787 | 100 | 90 |
| Mahikmur | - | 1,710 | - ¹²⁶ | 14,534 | - | 0 | - | 50 | - | 100 | - | 0 | - | 16,394 | - | 89 |
| Ranna | - | 0 | - | 9,441 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 117 | - | 0 | - | 9,558 | - | 99 |
| Arbil Total | 11,682 | 4,276 | 180,756 | 87,828 | 2,778 | 9,038 | 3,952 | 3,921 | 2,764 | 2,669 | 0 | 0 | 191,932 | 107,740 | 94 | 82 |
| Kirkuk | 19,644 | 19,185 | 29,073 | 27,004 | 20,642 | 25,458 | 1,000 | 1,196 | 1,003 | 1,745 | - | 0 | 71,362 | 74,780 | 41 | 36 |
| Kifri | 16,005 | 7,328 | 18,423 ¹²⁷ | 25,703 | 7,753 | 3,028 | - | 29 | 540 | 722 | - | 0 | 72,721 | 36,810 | 67 | 70 |
| Chemehnal | - | 27 | 15,250 | 11,793 | - | 138 | - | 3 | 10 | 5 | - | 0 | 15,260 | 11,966 | 100 | 99 |
| Gil | - | 21 | 16,900 | 13,108 | - | 117 | - | 0 | 150 | 0 | - | 0 | 17,050 | 13,246 | 99 | 99 |
| Kirkuk Total | 35,649 | 26,561 | 79,646 | 77,608 | 28,395 | 28,741 | 1,000 | 1,228 | 1,703 | 2,472 | 0 | 0 | 146,393 | 136,802 | 54 | 57 |
| Mosul | 149,461 | 130,187 | 14,188 | 4,324 | 3,778 | 870 | 38,240 | 33,009 | 4,000 | 3,546 | 6,991 | 2,429 | 166,658 | 174,449 | 13 | 2 |
| Zakho | 45 | 198 | 15,546 | 18,731 | - | 0 | 2,103 | 5,934 | 1,732 | 1,471 | 422 | 500 | 18,848 | 26,834 | 79 | 70 |
| Amadia | - | 0 | 15,249 | 22,964 | - | 0 | 6,886 | 7,970 | - | 812 | 492 | 0 | 22,627 | 31,746 | 70 | 72 |
| Zibar | - | 0 | - | 10,000 | - | 0 | - | 250 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 10,250 | - | 98 |
| Ayra | - | 4,600 | 14,975 | 12,075 | - | 0 | 1,044 | 1,000 | 550 | 1,000 | - | 0 | 16,569 | 18,675 | 90 | 65 |
| Dohuk | 2,068 | 5,649 | 18,307 | 16,645 | - | 0 | 5,784 | 6,925 | 829 | 843 | 2,870 | 1,692 | 29,458 | 31,754 | 72 | 52 |
| Tel afar | 14,440 | 14,400 | 5,678 | 5,700 | 5,524 | 4,274 | 27 | 168 | 7 | 28 | - | 500 | 25,676 | 25,070 | 22 | 23 |
| Sinjari | 3,528 | 8,210 | 4,057 | 4,200 | 455 | 1,700 | 850 | 1,546 | 15 | 23 | 16,374 | 14,600 | 25,279 | 30,279 | 81 | 14 |
| Slakaan | - | 956 | - ¹²⁸ | 7,687 | - | 0 | - | 5,171 | - | 0 | - | 5,517 | - | 19,331 | - | 40 |
| Mosul Total | 164,200 | 97,000 | 102,326 | 9,737 | 6,844 | 54,534 | 61,973 | 7,133 | 7,723 | 27,149 | 25,238 | 305,115 | 368,388 | 41 | 35 | |
| Sulaymanna | 18 | 0 | 30,885 | 46,400 | 2 | 0 | 87 | 200 | 762 | 900 | - | 0 | 31,754 | 47,500 | 97 | 98 |
| Halahja | 55 | 0 | 48,000 | 32,500 | - | 0 | - | 0 | 475 | 400 | - | 0 | 48,530 | 32,900 | 99 | 99 |
| Shaherbaizer | - | 0 | 28,260 | 10,000 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | - | 0 | 28,260 | 10,000 | 100 | 100 |
| Qaha Diza | - | 0 | 45,280 | 11,100 | - | 0 | - | 0 | 155 | 0 | - | 0 | 45,435 | 11,100 | 99 | 100 |
| Sulaymaniyah Total | 73 | 0 | 152,375 | 100,000 | 2 | 0 | 87 | 200 | 1,502 | 1,300 | 0 | 0 | 154,039 | 101,500 | 99 | 99 |
| Mosul Region Total | 216,946 | 195,037 | 539,777 | 367,762 | 40,932 | 44,623 | 59,573 | 67,322 | 13,102 | 14,164 | 27,149 | 25,238 | 827,479 | 714,430 | 65 | 55 |

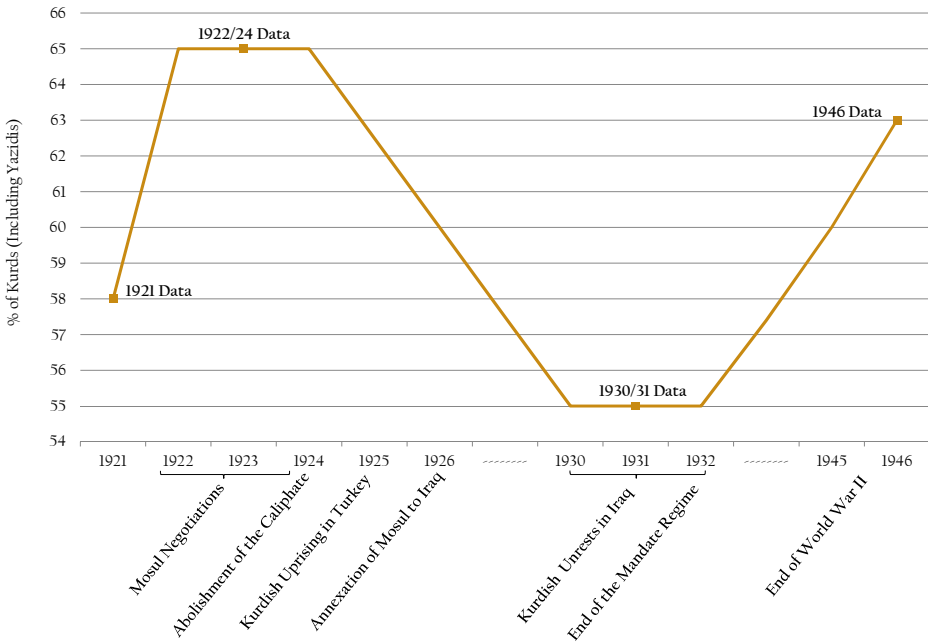
Source: The data are compiled from the map that indicates the statistical data regarding "Races" and "Religions" of Mosul and its neighboring districts, which is entitled "Enclosure of Ministry of Economics Memo No. 677". In Records of Iraq, V.7, pp. 596-97.

Table 10: The Number and Proportion of Kurds in Mosul Province according to British, Turkish, Iraqi, and League of Nations Data

| Year / By | Kurds | Yazidis | Mosul Total | % of Kurds and Yazidis |
|--|---------|---------|-------------|------------------------|
| 1914 Turkish Data ¹ | 263,830 | 18,000 | 503,000 | 56 |
| 1917 British Data ² | 380,000 | 21,000 | 737,026 | 54 |
| 1921 British Data ³ | 424,720 | 30,000 | 785,468 | 58 |
| 1922-24 British/Iraqi Data ⁴ | 490,067 | 26,857 | 798,229 | 65 |
| 1925 League of Nations Data ⁵ | 496,050 | 26,200 | 800,955 | 65 |
| 1930 British/Iraqi Data ⁶ | 367,762 | 25,238 | 714,430 | 55 |
| 1947 British/Iraqi Data ⁷ | 804,240 | - | 1,274,290 | 63 |

Source: 1. Turkey 1 (1923), p. 373. 2. See the Secret Report entitled "Turkey in Europe and Asia," dated Oct 22, 1917, Records of Iraq, V.1, pp. 675–86. 3. Turkey 1 (1923), pp. 365–66. 4. FO 371/10825-007, E-2533. Actually according to the Commissioner's representation of the British/Iraqi data for 1922–24, the number of Kurds in Mosul (with 26,257 Yazidis) was 520,264 out of a total of 799,090. See Frontier Commission Report, p. 31. 5. Frontier Commission Report, p. 76–77. 6. Records of Iraq, V.7, pp. 596–97. 7. Records of Iraq, V.10, pp. 65–66, and Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks, and Arabs*, pp. 338–40.

Figure 6: Proportion of Kurds (including Yazidis) in Mosul in British statistics compiled in the course of political events post-1919



Source: Compiled by author

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this historical investigation has been to demonstrate how Great Britain used statistics and statistical reasoning to protect the status quo in Iraq and conceal Britain's absolute power, which exacerbated the Kurdish problem in Iraq. This case study documents the important role of population measurements during the British creation of Iraq and shows how numbers constituted a critical part of the British discourse on Iraq.

Statistics were an extremely subtle weapon in the hands of the Great Powers, since they were very obedient to their "creator." Regarded (or, at least, presented) as a "scientific" tool, statistics were in fact highly elastic and flexible. Statistics were used to rationalize the irrational acts of any power, including military occupation and the devising of undemocratic political borders. They could be adapted or even changed to reflect an evolving political situation or an altered national or international political context, and especially in accordance with the attitude and loyalty of subjects (in this case, Kurds), who were counted and classified. In the case of Iraq, statistics were a weapon that concealed, under "scientific" cover, the medieval, arbitrary, and violent British style of sovereignty.

As this study has shown, statistics were never either totally applicable or totally irrelevant. The British statistics, which showed a Kurdish majority, did not create a Kurdistan, but they were an important argument invoked to prevent Iraqi Kurdistan's annexation to Turkey. If Turks had constituted a majority in Mosul, the annexation of Mosul to Iraq might have been made significantly difficult, and it most likely would have been rejected by the League of Nations. In the 1930s, when the Kurdish language districts were designed, the statistical data were arbitrarily resorted to, with some predominantly Kurdish areas excluded and some not.

This study has emphasized that all parties recognized that statistical reasoning was an important tool of political argumentation, and that statistics were especially useful in dealing with local complexities and in creating a common ground on the basis of which all parties could negotiate. These characteristics made numbers the essential basis of

communication between all three parties: Britain, Turkey, and the League of Nations.

In contrast to the British-Indian case, where both British and Indian officials used numbers for internal purposes, in Iraq, numbers were used mainly for international purposes. Numbers were utilized at different levels within the British Empire—the India Office, the Foreign Office, and the British government—but they were also used to negotiate with Turkey, Mandatory Iraq, and the Council of the League of Nations, all of whom relied on numerical data. Numbers provided a lingua franca for transferring information and for expressing conflicting claims between the concerned parties. Numbers enabled a host of bureaucrats from various national and international bodies to scrutinize the Mosul population.

In complex national and international situations such as the Iraqi Kurdish case, numbers served two functions: One can be described as justificatory and the other as exclusionary. According to the first, all parties defended their earlier policies or justified their political goals with numbers; they frequently relied on percentages, including that of Kurds in Mosul and of Kurdish officials in the administration, to prove their points.

By contrast, British and, later, Iraqi functionaries in Mosul used an exclusionary approach: That is to say, a large part of the statistical information they gathered excluded the participation of Kurdish experts. While the Kurds were included in British and Iraqi tabulations, they were excluded in the process of data collection. This left the British and the Iraqis with the liberty to arbitrarily maneuver statistics to suit their own purposes. An even more dramatic result of this policy of exclusion fostered the persistence of Kurdish nationalist claims. Their strong protest regarding their underrepresentation, and the unjust delineation of Kurdish districts, owing to the manipulation of British and Iraqi data, was derided, and their claims dismissed as stemming from irrational emotional feelings—and, therefore, as insufficiently “objective” or “civilized” to fall within the reach of statistical reasoning.

To better understand the impact of British data and statistical reasoning on Iraq and on Kurdish nationalism, an examination of the post-1932 period is needed. The present study focused on the policy of the powers, especially

the British; It did not include the realities “on the ground,” including Kurdish reactions against the British and also against the Christians, both of which impacted British policies. Future research is needed to measure the impact of British statistical reasoning on the rise and development of Kurdish nationalism. This will be an important contribution to understanding how nationalist movements use statistical data and statistical reasoning to achieve their goals.

- 1 Alexander Dawoody, "The Kurdish Quest for Autonomy and Iraq's Statehood," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 41 (2006), pp. 483–505. See especially p. 496.
- 2 See, for example, Bakhtiyar Shaways, *Kurdistani Nuwe*, October 5, 2010, p. 17. For the post-1991 Kurdish question in Iraq, see D. Natali, *The Kurdish Quasi-State: Development and Dependency in Post-Gulf War Iraq* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2010); G. R. V. Stansfield, *Iraqi Kurdistan: Political Development and Emergent Democracy* (New York, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).
- 3 The KRG warned the Baghdad government that "the region of Kurdistan will probably not participate in the census." See *Kurdistani Nuwe*, October 22, 2010, pp. 2–3. See also "[Kurds Threaten to Boycott Iraq Census,](#)" *Al Arabiya*, October 20, 2010*; [Timothy Williams, "Turkmens in Contested Oil-Rich Province Vow to Boycott Iraq's National Census,"](#) *New York Times*, July 23, 2009.*
- 4 [International Crisis Group, "Iraq and the Kurds: Trouble along the Trigger Line" \(Middle East Report No. 88, July 8, 2009\), p. 5.*](#)
- 5 For example, the Turcoman mostly use Turkish data presented at Lausanne, which shows that they constitute 22.8% of Mosul (43% of Kirkuk), and focuses especially on the Kirkuk city center data. The Arabs mostly use post-1958 data, especially from 1977/1987.
- 6 By "statistical reasoning," I mean the use of statistical data as a way for politicians to justify their goals in a supposedly scientific rather than politicized manner—that is, by "reasoning with statistics." For the strict scientific meaning of "statistical reasoning," see Alain Desrosière, *The Politics of Large Numbers: A History of Statistical Reasoning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- 7 For general aspects of the Kurdish question in the Middle East, see H. Bozarslan, *La Question Kurde États et Minorités au Moyen-Orient* (Paris: Sciences Po., 1997); M. Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh, and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books, 1992); and W. Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2006).
- 8 Obviously, this periodization corresponds neither to Iraqi history nor to the Iraqi Kurdish question, but rather to the changes in the use of statistics by the British Empire. For a more accurate periodization of Iraqi and Iraqi Kurdish history, see Peter Sluglett's masterpiece, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country* (London, I.B. Tauris, 2007). See also M. R. Izady, "Kurds and the Formation of the State

of Iraq, 1917–1932,” in *The Creation of Iraq, 1914–1922*, ed. R. S. Simon and E. H. Tejirian (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp.95–109.

- 9 [Sarah Shields, “Mosul Questions: Economy, Identity, and Annexation,” in Simon and Tejirian, *The Creation of Iraq, 1914–1922* \(New York: Columbia University Press, 2004\), pp .50–60*](#); “Mosul Questions: Economy, Identity, and Annexation,” *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 3:2, (2009), pp. 217–30; *Mosul before Iraq: like bees making five-sided cells* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000).
- 10 Most of the literature that analyzes the relationship between British colonial knowledge and its governmentality was inspired mainly by Bernard S. Cohn, “The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia,” in his seminal work, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987). See also Arjun Appadurai, “Number in the Colonial Imagination,” pp. 314–40, and David Lelyveld, “The Fate of Hindustani: Colonial Knowledge and the Project of a National Language.” pp. 189–214, in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives*, ed. C. A. Breckenridge, On South Asia New Cultural Studies (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); and Nicholas B. Dirks, “The Invention of Caste: Civil Society in Colonial India,” *Social Analysis* 25 (1989), pp. 42–52. For the French colonial census and classification, see Sam Kaplan, “Documenting History, Historicizing Documentation: French Military Officials’ Ethnological Reports on Cilicia,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44:2 (2002), pp. 344–69.
- 11 For an excellent analysis that contextualizes British continuity and discontinuity vis-a-vis earlier Mughal registers, see Sumit Guha, “The Politics of Identity and Enumeration in India, c. 1600–1990,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45:1 (2003), pp. 148–67.
- 12 Kathrin Levitan, *A Cultural History of the British Census: Envisioning the Multitude in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
- 13 K. Ittmann et al., *The Demographics of Empire: The Colonial Order and the Creation of Knowledge* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), p. 4.
- 14 Arjun Appadurai, “Number in the Colonial Imagination,” in Breckenridge, *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, pp. 314–40, at pp. 317–318.
- 15 Eileen Janes Yeo, “Social Surveys in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *The Cambridge History of Science, vol. 7: The Modern Social Sciences* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 83–99.
- 16 Cohn, “The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia,” pp.224–54.
- 17 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 163–70.

- 18 Ibid.
- 19 For more details on the Ottoman censuses and population registers, see Kemal Karpat's monumental work, *Ottoman Population 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). See also Stanford J. Shaw, "The Ottoman Census System and Population, 1831–1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9, no. 3 (August 1978), pp. 325–36; Daniel Panzac, "L'enjeu du nombre: La population de la Turquie de 1914 à 1927," *REMMM* 50, no. 4 (1988), pp. 45–67. See also Justin McCarthy's article, amongst his numerous other studies, "The Population of Ottoman Syria and Iraq, 1878–1914," *Asian and African Studies* 15:1 (1981), pp. 3–44.
- 20 For the history of the Ottoman census and statistics, see Kemal Karpat, "Ottoman Population Records and the Census of 1881/82–1893," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9:2 (1978), pp. 237–74; Cem Behar, "Qui compte? 'Recensements' et Statistiques Démographiques dans l'Empire Ottoman, du XVI^e au XX^e siècle," *Histoire & Mesure* 12:1 and 2 (1998), pp. 135–46; Cem Behar, "Sources pour la Démographie Historique de l'Empire Ottoman: Les Tahrirs de 1885 et 1907," *Population I–II* (1998), pp. 161–78; Tevfik Çavdar, "Osmanlı döneminde nüfus bilgileri," *Osmanlı Ansiklopedisi* 4 (1999), pp. 551–57; Enver Ziya Karal, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda İlk Nüfus Sayımı 1831* (Ankara: İstatistik Genel Müdürlüğü, 1943).
- 21 In the Ottoman millet system, communities following monotheistic religions were autonomous in their internal affairs and were subject to a different kind of taxation, in the form of a poll tax. For more details, see Kemal H. Karpat, "Millets and Nationality: The Roots of the Incongruity of Nation and State in the Post-Ottoman Era," in *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire: The Functioning of a Plural Society*, vol. 1 (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), pp. 141–70.
- 22 Marr argues that "British policy relied on, and simply reproduced, Ottoman hierarchies" in Iraq, giving preference to the Sunni sect. See P. Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004), p. 25.
- 23 In contrast to the general perception, Ottoman population registers recorded not only the religious identity but also the ethnic and sectarian ones of the population. For instance, the Ottoman register of Deir Zor, dated 1300 (1884), categorized the Muslim population as "Muslim" and "Shia," and subcategorized "Muslims" as "Hanefi" and "Shafi." On the other hand, the Ottoman registers of Sivas-Göksun, dated 1914, distinguished Muslims as Kurds, Turks, and Circassians; see DH.EUM.KLU (Interior Ministry/Public Security Directorate, General Secretariat), 9.24 and 10.36. See also *Crime of Numbers: The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2010) pp. 25–27, 95.
- 24 Interestingly, Shields, who criticizes the British taxonomy, says nothing regarding the Ottoman and Turkish taxonomies. See Shields, "Mosul Questions: Economy, Identity, and Annexation," p. 223.

- 25 Apparently, Lenin and Stalin as well based their nationality policy on the self-determination principle, even before Woodrow Wilson.
- 26 The Wilsonian Self-Determination Principles were reconfirmed by the Anglo-French Declaration of November 8, 1918. One could interpret this Declaration as supporting self-determination for Arabs generally.
- 27 Arnold Wilson, *Mesopotamia, 1917–1920: A Clash of Loyalties; A Personal and Historical Record*, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. 144. In fact, the opinion of British officials was quite divided during the negotiation of the Peace treaties. London (i. e., the Foreign Office) was more ardent in support of the self-determination principle, while the British Commissaries in Mesopotamia/and Iraq were more against. For example, the Foreign Office found the inclusion of Cilicia in the boundaries of Syria unacceptable on both ethnographic and historical grounds. See John Fisher, "Syria and Mesopotamia in British Middle Eastern Policy in 1919," *Middle Eastern Studies* 34: 2 (1998), pp. 129–70, at p. 139.
- 28 Fontana cites Sir Percy Cox stating that the definition of the new state's frontiers was "of academic rather than of practical importance." See Guiditta Fontana, "Creating Nations, Establishing States: Ethno-Religious Heterogeneity and the British Creation of Iraq in 1919–23," *Middle Eastern Studies* 46:1 (2010), pp. 1–16.
- 29 The term "self-determination," in this period did not necessarily presuppose the establishment of a new state, which the term "self-government" *did* imply.
- 30 Elie Kedourie, *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914–1921* (Boulder, Colo.: Mansell Publishing and Westview Press, 1987). See especially the British promise of an Arab State to Sharif Hussain on October 24, 1915, in T. G. Fraser, *The Middle East, 1914–1979*, Documents of Modern History (London: Edward Arnold, 1980), pp. 12–13. The British took into consideration the ethnographic distribution of the Arab population, and the criterion was not Arab language but just "Arabs."
- 31 See the Anglo-French Declaration dated November 8, 1918, in Foreign Office Files, Public Record Office (henceforth FO) 371/5226-0002.
- 32 For British encouragement of self-determination during the first years of the peace conferences, see Fontana, "Creating Nations, Establishing States," pp. 4–5.
- 33 Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 4 and 60.
- 34 The Fourteen Points were introduced in a speech delivered by President Woodrow Wilson to a joint session of the U.S. Congress on January 8, 1918. The Twelfth point reads as follows: "The Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under

Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees." Available at: ["President Wilson's Fourteen Points," The World War I Document Archive, Ed. Richard Hacken, Brigham Young University Library Online.](#)*

- 35 These memoranda were presented by La Ligue Social Kurde in Istanbul (Président Emin Ali Bedirhan), La Ligue des Kurdes de Kurdistan, Constantinople (President [Seyyit] Abdel Kader, Ottoman Senate), and Kurdistan Committee (Seyh Ubeydullah). Kurdish memoranda can be found especially in the files of the Public Record Office – Foreign Office (hereinafter PRO.FO) 608/95 and 608/78.
- 36 See map presented by [Seyyit] Abdel Kader, Ottoman Senate, and president of "La Ligue des Kurdes de Kurdistan, Constantinople" in French Archives in Nantes, Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN), Ankara Ambassadeur 1919-52/92, file:24I, p.9. FO 608/95, Peace conference 1919 file 365/1/1-365/1/4, Kurdistan. Map presented by Sharif Pasha, the ex-Ottoman ambassador to Stockholm.
- 37 "Au nom de cinq million Kurdes." Sureyya Bedirkhan, refuted the Armenian claims, on December 27, 1918, in FO 141/810, 8166/9, p. 24. Actually, the Muslims in the regions they claimed to constitute Kurdistan numbered under five million. See 1906/7 and 1914 Ottoman census data in Kemal H. Karpat, *Ottoman Population, 1830–1914: Demographic and Social Characteristics* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), Appendix I17B. Purporting to refute the Armenian claim article by article, Sureyya Bedirkhan exaggerated the number of Kurds in the world, which he estimated as approximately 10 million! See his memorandum, probably prepared in August 1919, in FO 608/78, p. 105.
- 38 See Edward William Charles Noel, *Note on the Kurdish Situation*, 1919, the Government Press in Baghdad.
- 39 Ibid
- 40 For Arnold Toynbee's note, dated January 27, 1919, see PRO.FO 608/95-0049. Toynbee, author of *Armenian Atrocities: Murder of a Nation* (1915), was active in the Armenian humanitarian problem.
- 41 See Articles 62, 63, and 64 of the Treaty of Sevres at ["Peace Treaty of Sèvres," The World War I Document Archive, Ed. Richard Hacken, Brigham Young University Library Online.](#)*
- 42 For British early strategy in "Southern Kurdistan" (i.e., Mosul), see the Report prepared by the India Office on December 3, 1920: *Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia (during the British military occupation to the summer of 1920)*, London:

Printed and Published by His Majesty's Stationery Office, pp. 57–74. For the British policy regarding Iraqi Kurds, see "The Kurds, Britain, and Iraq" (pp. 151–83) in David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, rev'd ed. (London, I. B. Tauris, 2000).

- 43 According to Peter Sluglett, between 1917 and 1919, the British (especially Major Soane and Major Noel) sought to promote a what Sluglett calls a "Kurdish Kingdom," "extending as far north as Van in Eastern Anatolia" (Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 77).
- 44 For the Interdepartmental Conference on Middle East Affairs on April 17, 1919, meeting held at the India Office dated November 8, 1919, see K. Mazhar Ahmed, *Kerkük: Tarih Politika ve Etnik Yapi* (Istanbul: Avesta, 2005), p. 111, and Saad Eskander, "Britain's Policy in Southern Kurdistan: The Formation and the Termination of the First Kurdish Government, 1918–1919," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 27:2 (2000), pp. 139–63.
- 45 Report on Middle East Conference held in Cairo and Jerusalem, March 12 to 30, 1921, CAB/24/126. This Conference was interpreted differently by different academicians; for a Kurdish view, see M. K. Ahmed, *Kerkük*, pp. 123–36.
- 46 Saad Eskander, "Southern Kurdistan under Britain's Mesopotamian Mandate: From Separation to Incorporation, 1920–23," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 37:2 (2001), pp. 153–80, based on S/S for the Colonies to High Commissioner for Mesopotamia, May 25, 1921, C0730/2, PRO. And High Commissioner for Mesopotamia to S/S for the Colonies, Part One: June 24 and Part Two: July 5, 1921, F0371/6346, PRO.
- 47 The Cairo Conference also decided that "until such time as a representative body of Kurdish opinion might opt for inclusion in Iraq, Kurdistan should be dealt with directly by the High Commissioner, and be kept separate from Iraq itself." See Report on Middle East Conference held in Cairo and Jerusalem, March 12 to 30, 1921, p. 5.
- 48 Eskander, "Southern Kurdistan under Britain's Mesopotamian Mandate," p. 171.
- 49 The results of plebiscites were applied only to a few territorial changes following World War I: in Germany (Northern Schleswig, Upper Silesia, Allenstein, and Marienwerder), Austria (Carinthian), and Hungary (Sopron). Unlike the Iraqi plebiscites, all these plebiscites were based on free voting by the entire public involved.
- 50 Timothy J. Paris argues that Arnold Wilson, a self-described "imperialist," was the biggest opponent of the self-determination principle. See "British Middle East Policy-Making after the First World War: The Lawrentian and Wilsonian Schools," *The Historical Journal* 41:3 (1998), pp. 773–93.

- 51 The other two questions were: 2) In this event, do they consider that a titular Arab head should be placed over this new State? And 3) In that case, whom would they prefer as head? See Wilson, V.2, p. 111.
- 52 See "Questionnaire for the British Government with Answers," in Air Ministry Files, Public Record Office (hereinafter AIR) 5/389 Pts. I, document 43, p. 6.
- 53 See "The Question of Mosul: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for the Colonies [Devonshire]," dated November 11, 1922, in CAB/24/140, CP 4303.
- 54 See "Self Determination in Iraq: Copies and Translations of Declarations and Other Documents Relating to Self Determination in Iraq, 27 pages, February 18, 1919, in FO 608/96, pp. 361-76.
- 55 The data were compiled from the ethnographic map that included data for "Races" and "Religions," entitled "Enclosure of Ministry of Economics Memo No 677" in Records of Iraq, V.7, pp. 596-97. This map does not include a date, but I think it was probably prepared after the British unofficial census in 1931. See Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, p. 219. Because their data correspond, with very slight differences, to the data prepared by British officials in 1930, see and compare Tables 7 and 8.
- 56 For example, the King-Crane commission prepared statistical data from its oral interviews and the petitions that they received to scientifically prove the political desire of people in the Middle East for self-determination. See "[King-Crane report on the Near East](#)" in *Editor & Publisher 55, no. 27 (1922), 2d section (Dec. 2) xxviii p. illus. (incl. map).* For more details on the role of the King-Crane Commission, see Harry N. Howard, *The King-Crane Commission: An American Inquiry in the Middle East* (Beirut: Khayats, 1963).*
- 57 As Lieutenant Colonel Gerard Leachman reported on December 22, 1918, "At least half of the population consists of Kurds, who inhabit two-thirds of this [Mosul] division . . . [and] are strongly anti-Arab," and who rejected this plebiscite. Today we know that the British did not report this Kurdish rejection to the public. According to the American Presbyterian Mission at Basra, Rev. J. Van Ess, the Basra population was not in favor of British tutelage. But the British Political Officer, Major A. S. Meek, claimed that Basra's majority thought that "strong British control is essential" (Wilson, V.2, pp. 111-14).
- 58 See telegram of Major R. A. M. C., British agent and Consul to H. M. King Hussein, Mecca, August 20, 1921, in FO 686.100_1921 Plebiscite.
- 59 League of Nations, *Question of the Frontier Between Turkey and Iraq : Report submitted to the Council by the Commission instituted by the Council Resolution of September 30th, 1924 [henceforth Frontier Commission Report]*, [Lausanne : League of Nations], p. 15. The British, to answer the Mosul Commission question, declared that "there was no individual voting," but that they "ascertained their views" in both

“referendums.” See “Questionnaire for the British Government with Answers,” 9 pages, in AIR 5/389 Pts. I, document 43, pp. 5–6. For the opinions of Kurds who were questioned by the Commission, see K. M. Ahmed, *Kerkük*, pp. 137–53. Iraq Report on Iraq Administration: October 1920–March 1922.

- 60 *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers : Turkey No. 1 (1923), Lausanne Conference on Near Eastern Affairs, 1922–1923. Records of proceedings and draft terms of peace [henceforth Turkey No. 1 (1923)]*, London, His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1923, pp. 337–405.
- 61 *Ibid.*, p. 370.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 357. Actually, the British never responded to the repeated Kurdish requests for plebiscites, especially those from the Kurdish chieftain Shaikh Mahmud Barzanji, who led several uprisings against British authorities. Eskander, “Southern Kurdistan under Britain’s Mesopotamian Mandate,” p. 171.
- 63 Frontier Commission Report, p. 32.
- 64 As will be explained below, the British would draw on these Ottoman population registers when estimating Mosul’s ethnic and religious population distribution. Most probably, I think, these registers would also be the basis for Iraqi population registers.
- 65 Turkey 1 (1923), p. 340.
- 66 See the answers of High Commissioner B. Bourdillon to the “supplementary questionnaire” prepared by the League of Nations Commission, January 29, 1925, in AIR 5/389 Pts. I, document 32A.
- 67 Frontier Commission Report, p. 32; Turkey 1 (1923), p. 355.
- 68 For 1917 British data, see Foreign Office Report: Turkey in Europe and Asia, October 22, 1917, unsigned, Records of Iraq, V.1, p. 681.
- 69 See “Questionnaire for the British Government with Answers,” 9 pages, in AIR 5/389 Pts. I, document 43, p. 1; see also “Minutes of Meeting of Committee of Investigation on the Iraq Boundary, 7 pages, in AIR 5/389 Pts. I, document 48c, p. 2. It is true that as with other Ottoman provinces, the population of Mosul was enrolled in the Ottoman army. However, there was no deportation policy on the part of the Ottoman government vis-à-vis the Christian population (mostly Assyrians) of Mosul. On the contrary, the Mosul province was reserved for the settlement of deportees. For the Ottoman deportation policy during World War I, see Fuat Dündar, *Crime of Numbers: The Role of Statistics in the Armenian Question* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2010).

- 70 *Turkey 1* (1923), pp. 355, 366.
- 71 Including 30,000 Yazidis.
- 72 *Turkey 1* (1923), p. 381.
- 73 *Ibid.*, p. 399.
- 74 *Official Journal of League of Nations*, 1925, p. 1324, cited by Fadhil Hussain in "The Mosul Problem: A Study in Anglo-Iraqi-Turkish Diplomacy and Public Opinion" (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1952), p. 186.
- 75 For the opinion of Leopold Amery, British representative to the League of Nations, see *Official Journal of League of Nations*, 1925, p. 1333, cited in Hussain, "The Mosul Problem," p. 195.
- 76 "Questionnaire for the British Government with Answers, 9 pages, in AIR 5/389 Pts. I, document 43, p.3.
- 77 See "Rejoinder to the Memorandum submitted by the Turkish government to the Council of the League of Nations at Geneva (C.494.1924.vii)," dated December 4, 1924, in FO 371/10826.
- 78 John Rogers, "The Foreign Policy of Small States: Sweden and the Mosul Crisis, 1924-1925," *Contemporary European History* 16, 3 (2007), pp. 349-69.
- 79 Frontier Commission Report, p. 5.
- 80 Carl Einar af Wirsén (Chairman, a Swedish diplomat), Count Pal de Teleki (a geographer and a former Premier of Hungary), and Colonel Albert Paulis (a Belgian officer).
- 81 Peter J. Beck, "'A Tedious and Perilous Controversy': Britain and the Settlement of the Mosul Dispute, 1918- 1926", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 17:2 (1981), pp. 256-276, p. 263.
- 82 For instance Swedish imports from Britain in 1924 were 3,500 times more than from Turkey, and Swedish exports to Britain were 287 times greater than to Turkey. See Rogers, "The Foreign Policy of Small States," pp. 365-66, n. 62.
- 83 *Turkey 1* (1923), pp 342, 365.
- 84 Determining ethnicity by a census played a huge role in Hungarian statistical academic activities. See, for example, A. Kovacs, "Le Problème de la Statistique des Nationalités," *Journal de la Société Hongroise de Statistique*, 1/2, (2004), pp. 67-115.

- 85 For more details on the role of Taleki, see P. Kovács, "Paul Teleki et le règlement de l'affaire de Mossoul dans la Société des Nations," *Miskolc Journal of International Law*, 1:2 (2004), pp. 156–87.
- 86 Frontier Commission Report, p. 75.
- 87 Actually, there were two different representations, with very slight differences. One, as indicated on the Mosul map, was presented by British officials to the Frontier commissioner on April 24, 1925. See FO 371/10825-007, E-2533. The other was represented by the Commission in their report; see the Frontier Commission Report, p. 31.
- 88 FO 371/10825-007, E-2533.
- 89 Frontier Commission Report, p. 43.
- 90 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- 91 Unfortunately, I could not determine whether all opinions had been mapped. István & Gábor, who published the geographical distribution of the opinions of the Arbil population do not give detailed information about this mapping activity. See Klinghammer István & Gercsák Gábor, "Der ungarische Geograph Pál Teleki als Mitglied des Mossul-Kommission," *Cartographica Helvetica* 19 (1999), pp. 17–25.
- 92 Frontier Commission Report, p. 88.
- 93 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 94 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
- 95 Lambert Adolphe Jacques Quetelet (1796–1874), one of the leading statisticians of his period, pursued a social science of numerical laws, applying statistical methodology to society to find out the principles of *physique social*.
- 96 Frontier Commission Report, p.87. On the other hand, Shields argues that the Frontier Commission found out that "the ethnicity in this region [Mosul] did not determine politics" and the situation was "much more complex." See "Mosul Questions: Economy, Identity, and Annexation," in Simon and Tejirian, *The Creation of Iraq, 1914–1922*.
- 97 Beck, p. 260.
- 98 A Turkish newspaper evaluated the League of Nations as "the servant of the strongest, namely Great Britain." See Mustafa Kibaroglu and Aysegül Kibaroglu, *Global Security Watch – Turkey: A Reference Handbook* (Westport, Conn. : Praeger

- Security International, 2009), p. 25. For unofficial British diplomatic pressure on the Hungarian government and on Teleki, see FO 371/10825, E 2093/32/65.
- 99 See Harold Nicolson, *Curzon: The Last Phase, 1919–1925 – A Study in Post-War Diplomacy* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), pp. 328–40.
- 100 Frontier Commission Report, pp. 88–89.
- 101 For a more comprehensible analysis of the Kurdish question during the 1930s, see Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq*, pp. 121–35, 140–46, and 150–55.
- 102 The League of Nations' mandatory system guaranteed minorities a right of petition, and the Permanent Mandates Commission was the body primarily responsible for inquiring as to the legitimacy of these petitions.
- 103 Records of Iraq, V.6, p. 443.
- 104 For the Memorandum of August 31, 1930, see Records of Iraq, V.6, pp. 460–22.
- 105 For the Memorandum dated April 1, 1930, see Colonial Office Files, Public Record Office (hereinafter CO) 730/157/1, pp. 186–88.
- 106 "Iraq and Its Northern Provinces," *The Near East and India*, Oct. 16, 1930, p. 423, in CO 730/157/2, p. 174.
- 107 Records of Iraq, V.6, pp. 494–55.
- 108 The English translation of the "Declaration of the Kingdom of Iraq" can be accessed at <http://www.solami.com/a3a.htm#DECLARATION>.*
- 109 See Cornwallis's report, p. 229.
- 110 The opinion on the Local Languages Law and the determination of the boundaries of the Kurdish districts by Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior, see the confidential Memo of Lord P. C. Passfield, Secretary of State for the Colonies, dated April 23, 1930, CO 730/157/1, pp. 220–36.
- 111 Inquiry sent to the League of Nations on October 4, 1930, entitled "Comments of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland upon the Petition Dated 26th July, Presented by Azmi Beg Baban and Fellow Signatories," in CO 730/157/2, document 150A, pp. 48–54. A copy can be found in Records of Iraq, V. 6, pp. 444–50.
- 112 See April 23, 1930 report, circulated among British agents, CO 730/157/1, pp. 226.

- 113 See C. J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks, and Arabs: Politics, Travel and Research in North-Eastern Iraq, 1919–1925* (London, Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 438–40. Edmonds, a well known pro-Kurdish British diplomat in Iraq, was advisor to the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior between 1935 and 1945. For Edmonds' role in Iraqi Kurdish politics, see Liora Lukitz, "Dating the Past: C. J. Edmonds and the Invention of Modern Iraq," in *Political Thought and Political History Studies in Memory of Elie Kedourie*, ed. M. Gammer et al. (London: Frank Cass, 2003), pp. 88–98.
- 114 The "Kurdish Problem" report gave important attention to the impact of Russia on the Kurdish population in the Middle East. On the other hand, another reason for the British statistical inquiry into the Kurdish population could have been the unrest of Mulla Mustafa Barzani, which happened during 1943–45. One of the main reasons for this unrest, however, was described by the British as "economic difficulties, rather than thwarted [Kurdish] nationalism." See Records of Iraq, V.10, 1946–52, p. 649. For the Soviet role in the Kurdish question, see W. L. Westerman, "Kurdish Independence and Russian Expansion," *Foreign Affairs* 24 (1946), pp. 675–86.
- 115 See Records of Iraq, V.10, 1946–52, p. 649: The "Kurdish Problem" report, dated August 3, 1946. See also Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks, and Arabs*, pp. 438–40.
- 116 See CO 730/157/1, p. 221.
- 117 See Sir Kinahan Cornwallis's report dated August 18, 1930, CO 730/157/2.
- 118 Ibid.
- 119 The Iraqi Kurds speak two Kurdish dialects: Sorani and Kurmanci. Kurds, however, did not emphasize this division in any of the Kurdish petitions that I found in the British archives in which they claim linguistic rights. In contrast, the British and Iraqis took this division of the Kurdish language into consideration, and hence instead of proposing a "Kurdish Language Law," they called it the "Local Language Law."
- 120 Consequently, the Iraqi prime minister declared that in "the Kurdish zone," the officials would be Kurds and Kurdish would be the "official language." See "Memorandum on Administration of Kurdish Districts in Iraq," in Miscellaneous No. 3 (1926): League of Nations, London, printed and published by His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1926, 6 pages. In CO 730/157/2.
- 121 The Council of Ministers of Iraq decided on July 17, 1930, that the "measure to be adopted for remedying the Kurdish question", was... "a) ... creation of a post of area Inspector of Education for the liwas [subprovince] of Sulaimania and Arbil and many such qadhas [district] in the Kirkuk liwa where the Kurds constitute a majority of population." See the report sent by Karim Raffi to the secretary to

the Council of Ministers in CO 730/157/1, p. 121. Similarly, the Iraqi Council of Ministers stated that “a Kurdish language law” would be drafted “for localities inhabited by Kurdish majorities.” See the confidential and secret letter of Ja’far al’Askari, acting president of the Council of Ministers, to Major Hubert Young, p. 136.

122 CO 730/157/1, p. 227.

123 See the ethnographic map, Records of Iraq, V.7, 1932-36, p. 596.

124 Sir Kinahan Cornwallis, “The Determination of the Language Law and the Kurdish Districts.” See the confidential Memo of Lord P. C. Passfield, Secretary of State for Colonies, to the Foreign Office, dated April 23, 1930, CO 730/157/1, pp. 220-36.

125 Including Armenian, Iranian, Persian; around 284 in total .

126 Map indicates 10,000 Kurdish nomads around Makhmur district, but this number was not included in the total calculation.

127 Map indicates 30,000 Kurdish nomads around Kifri district, but this number was not included in the total calculation.

128 Map indicates 10,000 Kurdish nomads around Shaikan district, but this number was not included in the total calculation.

129 Map indicates 50,000 Arab nomads at the Baghdad border of Mosul Province, Shaikan district, but this number was not included in the total calculation.

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About the Author

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