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Nelida Fuccaro

**Aspects of the Social and Political History of the Yazidi Enclave of Jabal Sinjar (Iraq) under the British Mandate, 1919-1932.**

This thesis focuses on various aspects of the social and political history of the Yazidi Kurds of Jabal Sinjar (Iraq) during the British mandate. When relevant to the history of mandatory Sinjar it also deals with the neighbouring Yazidi community of Iraqi Shaikhan. Chapters I and II are primarily concerned with the society and economy of Jabal Sinjar in the period under consideration with particular emphasis on the socio-economic and political organization of the Yazidi tribes settled in the area. They also provide a general historical perspective of the socio-economic development of the region. Chapter III discusses the late Ottoman period in detail with a view to defining community-state relations and the development of Yazidi inter-tribal affairs in Jabal Sinjar. Chapters IV and V examine the history of the Yazidi Mountain in the years of the British mandate when the emerging structures of the Iraqi state had significant repercussions on Sinjari society, especially on the attitude of a number of Yazidi tribal leaders. These developments are analysed primarily in the context of the policies implemented in the northern Jazirah by the British and Iraqi administrations and by the French mandatory authorities who controlled its Syrian section. Particular emphasis is placed on the dispute between Great Britain and France concerning the delimitation of the Syro-Iraqi border in the Sinjar area which affected relations between the Yazidis, the British mandatory administration and the Iraqi authorities. Chapter VI gives an account of the Sinjari Yazidis' quest for autonomy which became increasingly associated with the Assyro-Chaldean autonomist movement in the last years of the mandate.

**Aspects of the Social and Political  
History of the Yazidi Enclave of  
Jabal Sinjar (Iraq) under the  
British Mandate, 1919-1932**

**Nelida Fuccaro**

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**Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy**

**University of Durham  
Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies**

**1994**



**27 NOV 1995**

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## Abbreviations

### Reviews:

BEO	Bulletin d'Études Orientales
EI <sup>2</sup>	Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition
GJ	Geographical Journal
IJMES	International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
JA	Journal Asiatique
JRCAS	Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society
JRGS	Journal of the Royal Geographical Society
ROC	Revue de l'Orient Chrétien
RSO	Rivista degli Studi Orientali

### Archives:

AIR 23	Royal Air Force Records, Public Record Office
BEY	Fonds du Beyruth, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères
CO	Colonial Office, Public Record Office
EDM	Major C.J.Edmonds' Private Papers
FO	Foreign Office, Public Record Office
IO	India Office
LPL	Assyrian Mission Papers, Lambeth Palace Library
MAE	Correspondance Diplomatique, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères
SAL	Fonds de la Mission Dominicaine de Mossul, Bibliothèque de Saulchoir

## Note on Transliteration

The system followed for the transliteration of Arabic terms is that of the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies although long vowels and diacritical marks have been deliberately omitted to simplify the spelling. Only the Arabic ta marbuta ﻝ has been transliterated as -ah mainly because this is the most common transliteration used for Arabic place names on the maps available. Names of major localities like Mosul, Baghdad, Damascus are given in the forms in which they normally appear in English.

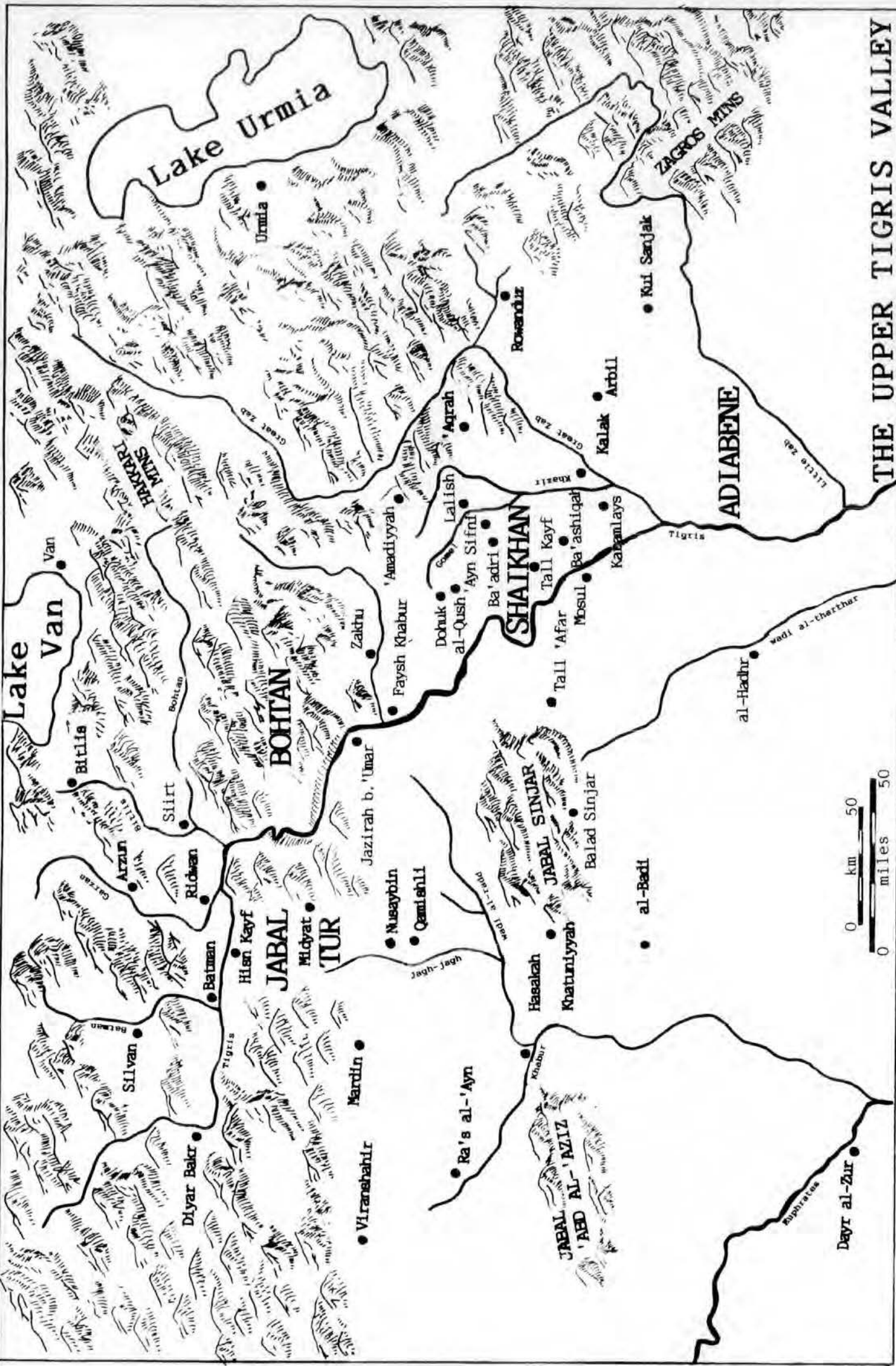
Given the lack of Kurdish sources, Kurdish personal and place names have been transliterated according to their spelling in Arabic (if they appeared in Arabic sources) or to their forms given in British or French sources. This is the case with the majority of the names of Sinjari and Kurdish tribes (Mandikan, Habbabat, Miran, Artushi) and of Kurdish individuals (Hamu Shiru, Hajo Agha). The same applies to the few Turkish names mentioned in the text.

Certain words which frequently occur in the text and are used throughout the Middle East have been given in their Arabic spelling (shaykh, faqir) unlike those terms which are specifically Kurdish (beg, bav).

## Maps

1. The Upper Tigris Valley
2. Jabal Sinjar
3. Sketch map showing administration boundary and 1920 Convention line (attached to despatch from British High Commissioner Baghdad to French High Commissioner Beirut, 31-1-1923, n.1643, BEY 1519)

THE UPPER TIGRIS VALLEY



Lake Urmia

Lake Van

ADIABENE

BOHTAN

SHAIKHAN

JABAL SINJAR

JABAL 'TUR

JABAL 'AED AL-'AZIZ

Kul Sanjak

Rowanduz

'Agrah

Kalak Arbill

'Amadiyyah

Lalish

Khazir

Karamlays

Dohuk

al-Qush

'Ayn Sifni

Ba'adri

Tall Kayf

Ba'ashiqat

Mosul

Tall 'Afar

al-Hadhr

Bitlis

Siirt

Aznan

Richwan

Batman

Hisn Kayf

Midyat

Mardin

Musayybin

Qamishli

Viranahizr

Ra's al-'Ayn

Hasakah

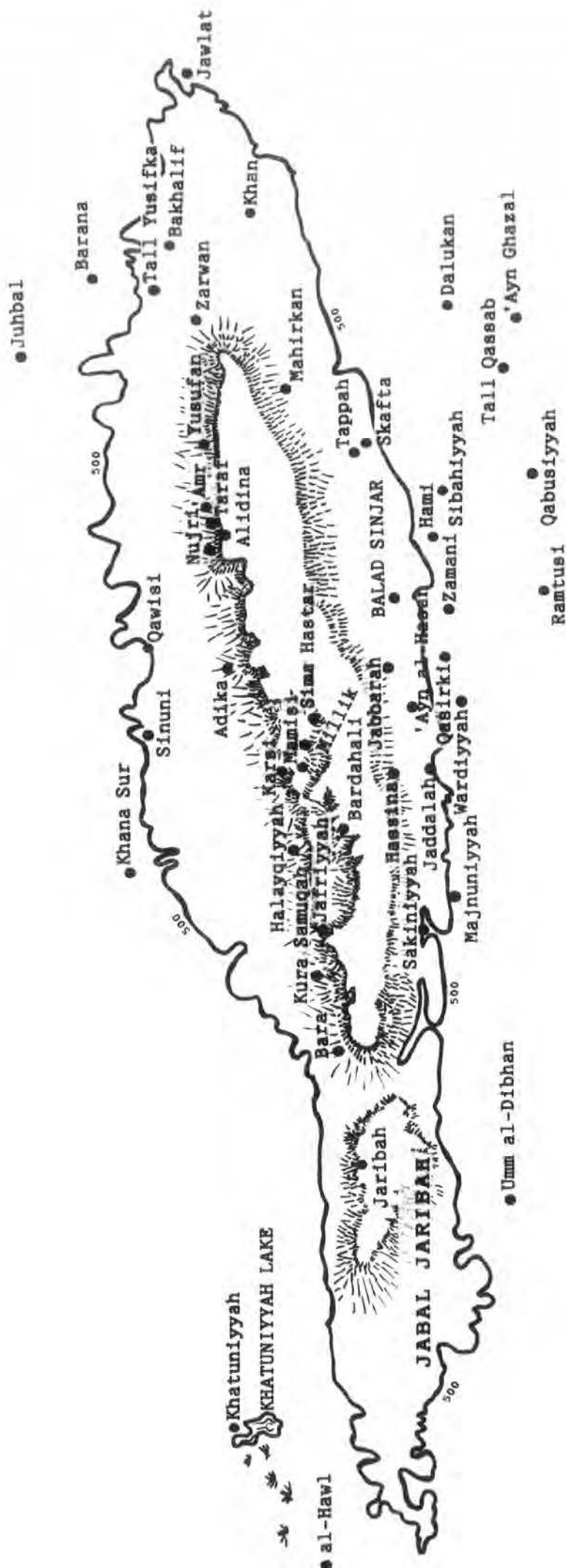
Khairunniyyah

Balad Sinjar

al-Badi

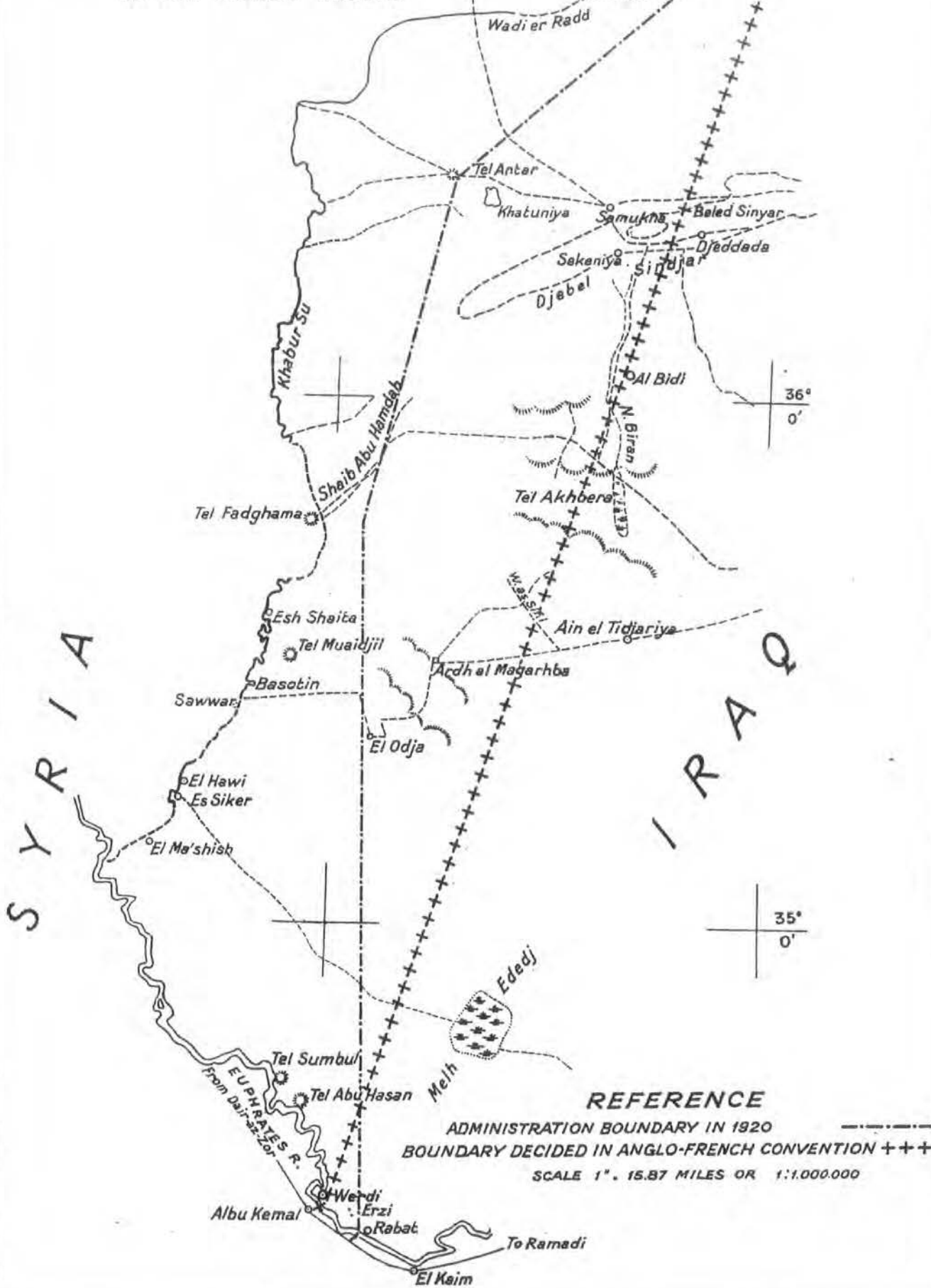
Dayr al-Zur





JABAL SINJAR

CROQUIS ANNEXE à la LETTRE N°1643  
 en DATE du 31 JANVIER 1923  
 de SIR HENRY DOBBS



REFERENCE

ADMINISTRATION BOUNDARY IN 1920 -----  
 BOUNDARY DECIDED IN ANGLO-FRENCH CONVENTION +++  
 SCALE 1" = 15.87 MILES OR 1:1,000,000

To Paola, Clinio and Ida



## PREFACE

This thesis is a contribution to the historiography of Iraq and of the Kurdish people at a particularly crucial stage in their development. The presence of Great Britain in the three former Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, the area which became the modern state of Iraq under British mandate in 1920, had a decisive impact on society as a whole, a process whose broad outlines have been documented elsewhere (1). In what follows I intend to concentrate on the political and social impact of the British presence and of the emerging structures of the modern state of Iraq upon a small and closely knit community living in the north-west of the country, the Yazidi Kurds of Jabal Sinjar.

The repercussions of the British mandate on the multi-ethnic and multi-sectarian society of Iraq were manifold and brought about significant developments among the various communities which had been subject to Ottoman rule from the early 16th century until the arrival of the British. Generally speaking the Ottoman authorities had exercised loose and rather distant control upon these groups, especially those inhabiting the rural areas. During the mandate the relations of the Kurds, Shi'is and others with the new administration underwent rapid and substantial changes as a consequence of the progressive

---

1. H. Batatu, The Old Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq, Princeton 1978, pp.5-386. The first book of Batatu's work is the most significant study of the social and political history of Iraq in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

establishment of much more thorough-going bureaucratic structures and of a governmental authority which impinged much more directly upon the population.

This was particularly evident in the case of the Yazidis, whose heterodox religious beliefs had greatly complicated their relations with the Ottoman authorities. As with ghulat groups such as the Druzes, Shabak and Nusayris, the Yazidis were neither part of the Islamic ummah nor included among the ahl al-kitab and as such were often subject to attempts to convert them forcibly to Islam. In consequence such groups tended to be excluded or isolated from Ottoman civil society and to be concentrated in more or less inaccessible areas (2). Partly as a result of religious persecution, the Yazidis of Iraq had been divided into two major clusters, one grouped around the shrine of Shaikh 'Adi in the Shaikhan district north of Mosul and the other, essentially splintered off from it, in Jabal Sinjar, an isolated mountainous area located in the middle of the northern Jazirah plateau. Especially in the case of the enclave of Sinjar the isolation of the settlement had largely protected the Yazidi community from Ottoman attempts to convert, tax, conscript or otherwise exercise effective control over lands and people until the latter part of the 19th

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2. For what concerns ghulat sects see M.Momen, An Introduction to Shi'i Islam, Yale 1985 (although the book is primarily concerned with twelver Shi'is, it also discusses Ismailis and ghulat) and M.Moosa, Extremist Shiites: the Ghulat Sects, Syracuse 1987. Fuad I. Khuri in his Imams and Emirs. State, Religion and Sects in Islam, London 1990 is primarily concerned with the interaction between sects and states and the religious and power elite in contemporary Islamic societies. Yazidis are also discussed although no hints on these interactions are provided. Ibid., pp.147-152; 194-196.

century, by which time the military and administrative reforms of the Tanzimat had begun to take effect in the Mosul vilayat.

As the same time as the Ottoman state was clearly more effective in its centralization policy, in a period which also saw more comprehensive economic and political penetration on the part of the Western powers in the area (especially Great Britain and France), important changes were taking place within Yazidi society. In Muslim Kurdistan this same period saw a significant rise in the power of the leaders of the religious orders (tariqat), and a concomitant decline in that of the lay or 'traditional' tribal leadership. A similar development took place among certain Yazidi tribes of Sinjar, where the lay leadership was eclipsed by the growing temporal authority of a number of Yazidi men of religion. However, among the Yazidis, the Ottomans were generally unable to impinge upon the unity of the community by employing their usual tactic of singling out and supporting certain individual leaders or factions against others.

By the time the British arrived in the Mosul vilayat at the end of 1918 the authority of the new Yazidi leadership had been firmly established. Given the unfavourable reaction on the part of the Yazidis to Ottoman attempts at fiscal, military and religious control, the community of Sinjar was generally well disposed towards the British, with whom cordial contacts had already been established through the archaeologist Sir Henry Layard, his assistant Rassam (who later became British vice-consul in Mosul) and Sir Stratford Canning, British Ambassador

in Istanbul.

Any discussion of the social and political history of the Yazidi community of Jabal Sinjar between 1918 and 1932 has to take into account a number of interrelated yet often contradictory factors, some of which apply equally to other groups living in Iraq. In the first place it entails an analysis of the interaction between the new central administration and those communities who remained organized as tribes since the social organization of Sinjari Yazidis had retained many tribal features. Unlike the Shammar, whose mobility and quasi military organization had enabled them to keep the Ottoman authorities at least at arm's length, the Yazidis, as sedentary and semi-nomadic agriculturalists and cattle breeders, had greater difficulty in escaping government control, although they kept up a fairly active degree of resistance, made possible largely because of their physical isolation. During the mandate the new administration was considerably more successful than its predecessors in penetrating into the Yazidi Mountain. Two permanent administrative posts were established which enabled the new government to interfere more directly and effectively in Yazidi affairs, as part of a general policy of attempting to incorporate as much of the country as possible into the new state structures.

Another important feature of the mandate period was that the religious and ethnic specificity of the Yazidis became increasingly at odds with the general principles of national

unity as adumbrated by the new government in the Organic Law of 1924. Additionally, unlike the Kurds many of whom served in the administration or sat as members of Parliament for the Kurdish areas, religious taboos surrounding literacy and a general disinclination to have anything to do with Muslims meant that Yazidi participation in local and national affairs was minimal. In the course of the mandate this natural disinclination was initially strengthened by the support given by the British to a number of Yazidi chiefs, but by the middle and late 1920's the implications of Britain's concern to leave Iraq resulted in a virtual reversal of this policy. More specifically the management of local affairs, in Jabal Sinjar as in the rest of the country, was handed over increasingly to Iraqi officials and the British Administrative Inspectors' influence was correspondingly reduced. Furthermore while the sensitivities of the non-Muslim minorities had to some extent been assuaged in the past by the appointment of Christian officials, this practice was gradually abandoned. An important consequence of these tendencies was the gradual development of a more systematic hostility on the part of the community towards the government which led eventually to open conflict in the years following the promulgation of the Conscription Law of 1934. Towards the end of the mandate the government had developed its own carrot and stick policy, attempting to promote the influence of particular individuals from the religious classes both in Sinjar and Shaikhan, while pursuing policies which were widely unpopular in both areas.

There is a considerable body of literature on Iraq in the 1920's and 1930's, although the great bulk of it concentrates on political issues (3). The history of the Kurdish areas is also reasonably well documented, notably in the writings and private papers of Edmonds, Hay and Noel who served in northern Iraq in various capacities (4). As far as specific surveys on Kurdish tribal society are concerned these are few field studies exist on the topic which were carried out after the termination of the mandate in 1932 (5).

This study is based largely on records from the British and French national archives which constitute the main sources for chapters IV, V and VI dealing with events occurring in Jabal Sinjar during the mandate and when relevant with the other Yazidi enclave, located in Shaikhan. Royal Air Force records from the British national archives (overseas command, AIR 23) have been particularly useful especially for the development of tribal affairs in Jabal Sinjar. Edmonds' private papers also

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3. E.Main, Iraq from Mandate to Independence, London 1935; P.W.Ireland, Iraq, a Study in Political Development, London 1937; S.H.Longrigg, Iraq 1900-1950, London 1953; E.M.Monroe, Britain's Moment in the Middle East, 1914-1956, London 1963; H.Mejcher, Imperial Quest for Oil: Iraq 1910-1928, London 1976; P.Sluglett, Britain in Iraq, 1914-1932, London 1976.

4. C.J.Edmonds, Kurds, Turks and Arabs, London 1957; W.R.Hay, Two Years in Kurdistan: Experiences of a Political Officer, 1918-1921, London 1921; E.W.C.Noel, Diary of Major Noel in Kurdistan from June 14th to September 1921, Basra Government Press 1920.

5. E.R.Leach, Social and Economical Organization of the Rowanduz Kurds, London 1940 (on the Balik and Dergala tribes of the Rowanduz district); F.Barth, Principles of Social Organization in Southern Kurdistan, Oslo 1953 (dealing with the Jaf and Hamawand confederations living around Sulaymaniyah). The primary and most comprehensive reference on the social and political organization of Kurdish tribes is undoubtedly provided by Van Bruinessen, although he does not specifically deals with Iraqi Kurdistan. M.van Bruinessen, Agha, Shaikh and State, London 1992.

included a great deal of material on Sinjar as a result of his participation as British assessor in the Syro-Iraqi frontier commission constituted by the League of Nations in 1930. His surveys of the economy and society of the Yazidi Mountain constitute the main primary sources for chapters I and II together with the documentation produced by the French assessors working on behalf of the Syrian government. Secondary sources in Arabic, French, English and Italian have complemented the archive material although no Kurdish sources on the Iraqi Yazidis (either in Kurdish or written by Kurds in other languages) seem to be available for the period under consideration.

Published material on the Yazidis, and more specifically on the Iraqi communities, is very scarce especially for their political and social history: in other words there is no satisfactory or comprehensive Yazidi historiography, either in Arabic or Kurdish, or in Western languages (6). The peculiarity of the Yazidi religion attracted the attention of many scholars, travellers, journalists and amateurs especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries who produced fascinating descriptions of Yazidi rituals and beliefs and attempted to give a coherent explanation of the origins and formation of the

---

6. The most recently published book on the Yazidis (J.S.Guest, The Yazidis: a Study in Survival, London 1987, 1st ed.) provides an excellent bibliography for the community although it does not appear to focus adequately on socio-economic and political issues. As main contributions to the scarce historiography on the Iraqi Yazidis see: J.Menant, Les Yézidiz: Épisodes de l'histoire des adorateurs du diable, Paris 1892; R.Lescot, Enquête sur les Yézidiz du Syrie et du Djebel Sindjar, Beirut 1938; A.'Azzawi, Tarikh al-Yazidiyyah, Baghdad 1353 AH; S.Damluji, al-Yazidiyyah, Mosul 1949; S.S.Ahmad, The Yezidis: their Life and Beliefs, Miami 1975.



Yazidi dogma (7). During the mandate a few works were produced on the Iraqi Yazidis which were a result of observations made on the spot. The most interesting was a doctoral dissertation by K.M.MacLeod, a RAF chaplain in northern Iraq. It provides a good insight into the Yazidi society of Shaikhan but only mentions the Sinjari community sporadically. However, even in the case of MacLeod the interest aroused by the Yazidi religion was the main incentive for his enquiry (8).

The importance of the Yazidi religious creed as a source of communal identity for the group is undeniable especially in Iraq where the religious centre of the sect is located. However, it is clear that there is no scholarly multi-sided approach to the study of the community. In my view <sup>it</sup> is extremely important to analyze the development of Yazidism in an historical context taking the political and socio-economic

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7. For a critical discussion on the existing literature on the Yazidi see N.Fuccaro, Gli Yazidi: bibliografia analitica e studi, Tesi di Laurea Univ. of Venice, 1988. Travel accounts still provide the majority of the available information on the community for the late Ottoman period. See C.J.Rich, Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan and on the site of ancient Nineveh, London 1836, 2 vols, vol.2 pp.68-71/107-108/121-122; F.Forbes, 'A Visit to the Sinjâr Hills in 1838, with some account of the sect of the Yezidis and of various places in the Mesopotamian desert between the River Tigris and the Khábúr', JRGS, 9(1839), pp.409-430; G.P.Badger, The Nestorians and their Rituals, London 1852, 2 vols, vol.1 pp.105-134; A.H.Layard, Nineveh and its Remains, London 1849, 2 vols, vol. 1 pp.225-266; E.Sachau, Reise in Syrien und Mesopotamien, Leipzig 1883, pp.320-336; M.Sykes, 'Journeys in North Mesopotamia', GJ, 30(1907), pp.387-392; E.B.Soane, To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise, London 1912, pp.100-114. In the 1930's and 1940's much has been produced on the Yazidi religion by Giuseppe Furlani and Michelangelo Guidi. See Fuccaro, op.cit., chp.III. } exp.

8. K.M.MacLeod, The Yezidis or 'Devil-Worshippers' of Assyria; an Investigation into their Social and Religious Cult, Ph.D thesis Univ. of Edinburgh, 1933. MacLeod's observations however have been most useful. See also H.C.Luke, Mosul and its Minorities, London 1925.

influence of the surrounding environment into account, especially of those different communities who came into contact with the Yazidis in the fragmented society of northern Iraq where community boundaries were and still are very flexible and permeable to outside influences. I have attempted to give as a clear picture as possible of the interaction between the Yazidis and other groups in the period under consideration, especially Sunni Kurds, Muslim Arabs and Christians. In particular an analysis of some aspects of the socio-economic and political relations between the Yazidis and the Sunni Kurds should throw some light on the thorny issue of the extent to which religion or other relevant factors have contributed to set this Kurdish heterodox community apart from 'mainstream' Sunni Kurdish society.

## CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION. JABAL SINJAR: GEOGRAPHY,  
ECONOMY AND POPULATION

## I.1 - THE MOUNTAIN

The area known as Jabal Sinjar consists of a small group of low hills of varying height rising from the arid plateau of the northern Jazirah between the Khabur and Tigris. The massif begins some 90 km west of Mosul and extends in a south-westerly direction to a point some 50 km from the town of Hasakah, which is located near the confluence of the Khabur and the river Jaghjagh.

Within the Jabal there are two principal geographical formations: the arid western Jabal Jaribah, and the main Sinjari Mountain, which is fertile and has plentiful supplies of water. The former reaches 942 meters at its highest point while the latter has an average height of 900 meters with its highest peak, called the Sinn, reaching 1200 meters. North of the Jaribah lies the barren basin of the Khatuniyyah lake, a marshy region crossed by the Wadi al-Hawl which discharges its waters into the Khabur river. South of the main Sinjari massif lies a lower secondary chain called al-Tawq, (Arabic for necklace), linking the Jabal to the Jazirah plateau lying south of Sinjar, separated from the main Jabal by a narrow valley running parallel to its edges. These groups of hills merge gently into the flatland a few kilometers south of the capital of the region, Balad Sinjar. The valleys and wadis provide the main connections between the lands of north Sinjar and the open plains of the Jazirah. Similarly the low

hills lying on the south-eastern side of the Mountain function as intermediaries between the northern region and the region of Tall 'Afar, which is located between the Yazidi Mountain and Mosul (1).

It is in the north that we can pinpoint the particular geographical features generally associated with Sinjar which have made a vital contribution to its past and present history: abundance of rainfall, fertility and, above all, a number of geomorphological traits which have favoured the relative isolation of its peoples.

The northern boundaries of the Mountain also slope down into fertile hills overlooking the plain below. Yet access from outside is much more difficult than in the south because of the absence of communicating wadis. Furthermore the Yazidi strongholds are strategically located on the top of the main relief, thus enabling the inhabitants to control the whole plain stretching between Sinjar and Mardin. This is the so called 'Yazidi country', commonly referred to by Arabs, Kurds and Yazidis as 'Shimal'. Strategically speaking, possession and the control of the Shimal provides an excellent base both for defence and offence. Understandably, it does not encourage outsiders to penetrate from the north and contributes to keeping the situation in check in the lower-lying southern areas which are much more easily

---

1. Comprehensive descriptions of the Sinjari mountains are provided by: note from Fr Consul Mosul to Fr Consulate Baghdad, Frontières. Le Sindjar et les Yézidis, 22-1-1930, n.5/17, MAE 462; Note sur la frontière de la Djezireh, May 1932, BEY 1524; Le Sindjar, report SR de la Region de l'Euphrate, 14-8-1929, n.3.340/DZ, BEY 1529; Note sur le Jebel Sinjar, SR Section d'Etudes, March 1922, n.471/K, MAE 307.

accessible from the Northern Jazirah.

It is here in the north that the majority of Yazidi tribesmen have tended to concentrate. By and large they managed to establish and maintain firm control both over the land and over groups of non-Yazidis settled in the area, as a general consequence of the natural shelter provided by the Sinjari Mountain. This has allowed them to develop a lifestyle in which they proudly assert their cultural difference, both as against their Arab neighbours and, more interestingly, as against various groups of Muslim Kurds. It is important to point out that the preservation of their separate identity and position has been possible largely because of the various resources which the Mountain has been able to offer, both in economic and strategic terms. This privileged status enjoyed by the mountaineers vis-à-vis the people of the plains is a recurrent phenomenon in human history; as Ferdinand Braudel has remarked on the subject of the lands bordering the Mediterranean:

'The mountains are as a rule a world apart from civilizations, which are an urban and lowland achievement. Their history is to have none, to remain almost always on the fringe of the great waves of civilization, ... The feudal system as a political, economic, and social system, and as an instrument of justice failed to catch in its toils most of the mountain regions and those it did reach it only partially influenced. ... In Sardinia, as in Lunigiana and Calabria ... if social archaisms (the vendetta among others) persisted, it was above all for the simple reason that mountains are mountains: that is, primarily an obstacle, and therefore also a refuge, a land of the free. ... Not that their resources are negligible: every mountain has some arable land, in the valleys or on the terraces cut out of the hill side.' (2).

---

2. F. Braudel, The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II, London 1972, 2 vols, (2nd ed.), vol.2 pp.34;38;39;42.

## 1.2 - TERRITORY

Having described Jabal Sinjar in terms of its position and geomorphological structure, it is necessary to give a brief sketch of some of the relevant features of the lands and peoples surrounding it in the first three decades of the 20th century. In this way we will come to a better understanding of the role played by geography in determining the history of the Mountain after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and during the period of British and French rule over the northern Jazirah. As such, Sinjar will be defined in relation to its neighbours. This 'definition by default' will be useful in setting the development of the Jabal in terms of a nomadic/sedentary, mountain/plain dialectic.

The territory lying to the west of Sinjar, towards the Khabur valley, was relatively arid and inhospitable, with no permanent settlements before the riverain areas surrounding the town of Hasakah (3). It was Bedouin country mainly affected by the movement of the Shammar Zur, the Shammar of the frontiers. At the beginning of the rainy season the Shammar would leave their summer pastures around the Jaghjagh to migrate southwards between the Jabal Sinjar and the Jabal 'Abd al-'Aziz. Along this migration route they sometimes encroached upon the Sinjari Jaribah, whose Yazidi inhabitants, the Samuqah tribe, practiced limited seasonal migrations towards the plains and the Khatuniyyah area.

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3. M.Sykes, The Caliphs' Last Heritage, London 1915, p.322.

However, the gradual extension of the cultivated lands in the 1920s and early 1930s (the result of better territorial control by the Yazidis over the area) eventually had the effect of keeping nomadic Arab tribesmen away from Yazidi territory. The Shammar would just approach the Jaribah without penetrating into its lands. On their way to the south they would pass through the Arab village of al-Hawl lying to the west of the Khatuniyyah lake (4).

The plain to the south of Sinjar was and still is the most arid on the Mesopotamian plateau. The land was barren and even during the rainy season its pasturage was barely sufficient to provide subsistence for a relatively limited number of flocks and herds. Scattered salt deposits here and there interrupted the monotony of the landscape. The impermeable subsoil prevented the infiltration of water which, exposed to evaporation, left deposits of pure salt after the rains (5). From the beginning of the 17th century these territories had been subject to many waves of Shammar migration from Najd. From the beginning of the 19th century they were mainly controlled by the group known as Shammar Jarbah, so that Arab nomads dominated the majority of

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4. French Memo to the League of Nations, N. E1302/15/89, 14-03-32, pp.13-14; Report of the Commission entrusted by the Council with the Study of the Frontier between Syria and Iraq, C.578.M.285.1932.VI, 10-9-32, p.26; Chammars, Tribal Intelligence from the Sanjaq of Jazirah, 12-2-/, p.2, BEY 1528.

5. Report of the Commission entrusted by the Council with the study of the Frontier between Syria and Iraq, C.578.M.285.1932.VI, p.24; Renseignements sur les Salines, document placed before the Frontier Commission by French and Syrian Assessors, 18-4-32, BEY 1528.



territories east and south of Sinjar (6).

Away from the immediate vicinity of the Euphrates and the Khabur it was almost impossible to practise settled agriculture except with artificial irrigation. However, the lands north and east of the Yazidi Mountain enjoyed much more favourable climatic conditions for the development of agriculture on a permanent or seasonal basis, mainly because of their proximity to the foothills of what is now Iraqi and Turkish Kurdistan and the presence of lower fertile hill country along the Sinjar-Mosul road. The Turkoman town of Tall 'Afar was located on these low hills which, geologically speaking, represented the continuation of the Sinjari relief although separated from the Yazidi Mountain by a strip of flatland. Here extensive agriculture and stock farming prevailed, supporting a sedentary population grouped in nine different tribes (7).

Apart from the sedentary Tall 'Afaris, the area between Sinjar, Mosul, Nusaybin and Ra's al-'Ayn had a mixed tribal population of Kurds and Arabs. Kurdish migration to the upper part of the northern Jazirah from Turkish and Iraqi Kurdistan started at the beginning of the 20th century, when Kurdish groups began populating the grazing grounds traditionally occupied by the Bedouin who were pushed southwards and only

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6. R.Montagne, Contes poétiques bédouines, BEQ, 5(1935), pp.40-42,49; Military Report on Mesopotamia. Area 1 Northern Jazirah, General Staff, British Forces in Iraq, 1922, p.2, IO L/MIL/17/15/42.

7. 'Tall Afar' in Military Report on Mesopotamia. Area 1, pp.134-139.

occasionally able to regain their old pastures (8). By the early 1930s Kurdish tribes were settled along the fertile lands along the banks of the Tigris and the Jaghjagh. The tribes of Sharabiyyin, Alian and Kikieh devoted themselves almost exclusively to the permanent cultivation of their lands along the west basin of the Jaghjagh, while the Arabized Hassanian and Jirjiriyyah moved around the east bank of the Tigris. The former were settled cultivators in the Zummar district, the latter semi-nomads with extensive lands between the Hassanian lands and Tall 'Afar which they usually abandoned to pasture their flocks during the autumn months (9).

Although the powerful Bedouin tribes, especially the Shammar, were no longer able to exert full control over these fertile lands they were still a major determinant in the economy of the area. The Shammar and the powerful semi-nomadic Tayy controlled the barren open spaces lying between north Sinjar and the Kurdish settlements. Although less mobile than the Shammar, the Arab Tayy, controlling their cropping lands on the Jaghjagh, adversely affected the economy of the area by practising the traditional ghazuww against the sedentary populations of Sinjar and Tall 'Afar and the more recent Kurdish settlements along the river banks

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8. M.Chevalier, Les montagnardes chrétiens du Hakkâri et du Kurdistan septentrional, Paris 1985, p.41-42, footnote n.2 p.42; M.Sykes, 'Journeys in North Mesopotamia', GJ, 30(1907), p.394.

9. Since the early 1920s the marginal settlement of the Kurdish tribes appears very clearly in all the available ethnographic maps of British military reports concerned with the area. In particular see map attached to Military Report on Mesopotamia. Area 1, IO L/MIL/17/15/42. See also C.528.M.285.1932.VI, p.27.

(10).

By and large the arid nature of the steppes, the adverse climatic conditions and the extortion of the agricultural surplus by the nomads, and especially their theft of seeds and tools, combined to bring about circumstances in which the area produced little beyond the bare necessities of subsistence. The difficulty of increasing agricultural production was also the result of archaic agricultural techniques and the absence of a system of canalization and water storage. Furthermore, the position of the sedentary peoples and their agricultural holdings were not adequately guaranteed by clear property rights over the land they cultivated. In the second half of the 19th century the Ottoman authorities started to distribute tapu deeds both to the peasantry and the tribes in an attempt to limit tribal raids and safeguard the position of the agriculturalists. However, these measures proved to be largely unsuccessful, and a great number of peasants continued to be exposed to attacks from the nomads and these sought the protection of powerful Arab aghawat or absentee landlords whose extortions gradually contributed to the severe impoverishment of the sedentary population (11).

One outstanding feature of Sinjar was its abundant water resources, although, unlike the riverain areas inhabited by other Kurds along the Tigris and the Jaghjagh, the Yazidi

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10. N.E/1302/15/89, French Memo to League, pp.11-12.

11. For the Ottoman and British land policy in northern Jazirah and in the Yazidi enclaves of Sinjar and Shaikhan see pp.121-122;133-134; 234-243; 290.

country was not watered by a major permanent watercourse. Water mainly came from rainfall and natural springs. Both the northern and the southern slopes of the Mountain had a number of wadis which were replenished by abundant rains, usually between November and April, brought by southern winds which discharged their precipitation mostly upon the southern slopes of the range. This was one of the reasons why these lands were more extensively cultivated than the northern districts. Furthermore the geological configuration of al-Tawq allowed the southern wadis to collect the water coming from the north. In fact they ran in a north-south direction between the hills, providing an outlet for Sinjari water onto the Jazirah plain. Wadis like the Wadi al-Tharthar ran south for 130 km. in the Jazirah plateau before disappearing in the marshes of Sabkha Umm Rahhal. In general, the northern wadis, some of which were fed by natural springs, had shorter courses and terminated after leaving the foot of the range or ran into swamps such as the Khatuniyyah lake (12).

Soil and vegetation varied according to altitude. In the southern parts of the hills the flora in the proximity of the steppe was scarce and the soil generally dry and rocky. Approaching the main Sinjari chain, the al-Tawq reliefs became progressively covered with bay and hawthorn trees. On the main massif two different landscapes were predominant: in the east fig trees and vine terraces, in the west oak

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12. Observations on the Western Khabur by W.Allard, Director of Irrigation, Baghdad, note n.27 placed before the Syro-Iraqi Frontier Commission by the British and Iraqi Assessors, 11-5-32, EDM Box IV; Le Sindjar, note of the SR Region de l'Euphrate, 14-8-29, pp.2-3, BEY 1529; Note sur le Jebel Sindjar, SR Section d'étude, Mars 1922, pp.2-3, MAE 307.

forests. As is evident from earlier accounts these forests must once have extended very much further. Before charcoal was discovered wood must have been the only source of heating during the long winter months. In the 1830's the forest belt stretched along the northern border from the village of Taraf to that of Kurah Samuqah, near the Jaribah. A century later many of the woodlands had been replaced by cultivated areas especially in the villages of Karsi, Bara and Jafriyyah (13).

### I.3 - ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES: AGRICULTURE AND STOCKFARMING

Differences in the distribution of water resources together with a diverse natural landscape obviously influenced the lifestyle of the population and specifically the location of the Sinjari settlements. The two prevailing economic activities of the inhabitants of the Mountain were agriculture and stock-farming.

Agriculture engaged the greater part of the population, both in the Mountain, in the al-Tawq chain, and in the few Yazidi villages located on the low hills and in the plain north of Sinjar. Agricultural technology was not advanced. In Sinjar, as in the majority of the surrounding lands, wooden

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13. F.Forbes, 'A Visit to the Sinjâr Hills in 1838 with some accounts of the sects of the Yezidis, and of various places in the Mesopotamian Desert, between the Rivers Tigris and Khâbûr', JRGS, 9(1839), pp.422-423; for later observations on agricultural land see: Notice sur les populations du Sindjar(1932 c.a), BEY 1528.

ploughs were still employed in the 1930's, drawn by mules, oxen or donkeys. Horses were considered to be too noble for such menial duties and were only used for warfare and tribal parades. Agricultural machinery was still primitive and the employment of metal-tipped wooden ploughs was arduous given the stony nature of the soil (14).

In spite of the relative abundance of water the agricultural population of Sinjar did not benefit from the existence of a viable artificial irrigation system. Rain water was collected and stored in wells, especially in the mountainous areas and in the villages of the northern plain. As well as being used for farming the well water also served as the main water supply for both people and cattle. As stated before, the various watercourses in the south provided a steady reserve of water for the villagers, and they were able to guarantee almost uninterrupted cultivation generally without recourse to an artificial storage-system. Furthermore these perennial streams had an additional economic potential, namely the exploitation of their water power by means of mills (15).

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14. R.Lescot, Enquête sur les Yézidis du Syrie et du Djebel Sindjār, Beyruth 1938, p.141. Approximate figures related to the number of horses and pack-animals available in Sinjar in the early 1920s were reported as follows: 1000 horses, 200 mules, 500 donkeys. Military Report on Mesopotamia. Area 1, p.31. H.Field, 'The Yezidis of Iraq' in H.Field/J.B.Glubb The Yezidis, Sulubba and other Tribes of Iraq and adjacent regions, (General series in Anthropology n.10), Menasha (Wisconsin) 1943, p.9.

15. The majority of wells were located in the northern villages of Bakran, Sinuni and Jafriyyah. Bakran was located on the northern slope of the main chain. Sinuni and Jafriyyah were plain villages and their living depended both on agriculture and extensive stock-farming. Notice sur les populations du Sindjar (1932 c.a), pp.1-3, BEY 1528 Dossier Rapport Bonnot. In Jaddalah, Samuqah, Balad and Tappah, that is close to the main

An impressive network of artificial canals seems to have crossed the lands of southern Sinjar at least until the end of the Hamdanid period: their remains were still visible at the beginning of the 20th century, especially in the villages of Balad Sinjar, Mihirkhan, Zarwan and 'Ayn Ghazal. The local population was well aware of the existence in the past of an extended complex of hydraulic works, which they referred to as kahariz, the Kurdish equivalent of the Arabic word for canal, qanat. Moreover the whole of southern Sinjar was once known as Kurah Kanah, that is 'the district of the canals' (16).

An authoritative medieval source also described the existence of conditions which favoured the development of settled agriculture. The 13th century Arabic traveller al-Yaq'ut described the town of Balad as a 'garden city' where the cultivation of palm trees, fruit trees and vines was widespread. He even compared it, somewhat hyperbolically, with Damascus (17).

No major repairs of the ancient canal system were undertaken in Ottoman times, and in addition the local inhabitants did not make use of even the simplest techniques

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watercourses of southern Sinjar, there were some 17 mills, 10 of which located in Balad. The majority were water powered mills although some of them were mechanical. Notice sur les populations du Sindjar, pp.4-6.

16. A detailed description of the old canal system in Sinjar is included in 'Asha'ir al-Yazidiyyah fi Jabal Sinjar, (Arabic, typescript 19 pp.), pp.14-19, EDM Box XIX file 5.

17. See Lescot, op.cit., pp.133-134. al-Yaq'ut is also quoted as a reference for the situation of the town of Balad before the arrival of the Saljuqs in a report on Sinjar by Ahmad Beg, former qaimmaqam of Sinjar, (Arabic typescript, 29 pp., 1944 c.a), p.5, EDM Box XIX file n.5.

to search for the abundant reserves of artesian water in the subsoil. Thus the agricultural potential of these lands was never fully exploited after the canals were destroyed by the Saljuqs, whose arrival in the 11th century provoked widespread destruction and death in the Jabal and marked a turning point in the history of the once rich Sinjari mountains (18).

Given the absence of an irrigation system, the planting season was generally determined by rainfall. The average annual rainfall in Sinjar is between 400-500mm., about twice the quantity generally considered the minimum necessary for effective rain-fed agriculture. This obviously indicates that although the potential of the land was not fully exploited its produce well exceeded the needs of the local population (19).

Crop-growing was restricted to the villages located either along the ridges of the low hills surrounding the main massif or in the plains below. The most fertile lands were those situated on the southern wadis of the al-Tawq chain, stretching from the Zarwan plain in north east Sinjar as far as the south-western village of Sakiniyyah near the Jabal Jaribah. Another fertile agricultural belt ran parallel to the north-western flank of the main Sinjari massif, including the low hills which gradually sloped down towards the steppe

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18. Report of the Commission entrusted ..., C.578.M.285.1932.VI, p.33; Ahmad Beg report, p.5, EDM Box XIX file 5.

19. Atlas manakh al-'Iraq, 1941-1970, Hay'at al-Anwa' al-Jawiyyah al-'Iraqiyyah, Baghdad 1979, p.35.



facing the town of Mardin (20).

The cultivation of shitwi (winter) crops was widespread, especially wheat and barley grown in more or less equal quantity, sown between December and February and harvested in the summer. As well as being of great importance in the local diet, barley was also used as fodder for cattle, especially for horses which were owned mainly by Yazidis (21).

Saifi (summer) crops were also occasionally grown, mainly rice and cotton; rice production was limited to the marshy areas of the Khatuniyyah Lake, while cotton was cultivated along the most important southern wadis, the Shikasti, the Sinjar and the Tharthar. Cotton production centred around Jaddalah, Balad and Tappah, whose perennial water reserves were guaranteed by the presence of the watercourses already mentioned (22).

In the southern range cultivation did not generally extend very much beyond the foot of the hills. In contrast a series of favourable circumstances in the north allowed the Yazidis to establish advanced posts in the plain: the rich

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20. Notice sur les populations du Sindjar, Dossier Rapport Bonnot (1932 c.a), BEY 1528.

21. The only available official statistics of cereal production in Sinjar concern the year 1932 and report 25,000 tons of produce among barley, sorghum and wheat, C.578.M.285.1932.VI, p.33. Unofficial statistics compiled in 1927 give the following figures: 250,000 oltchaks (3200 tons) of wheat and 200,000 (2560 tons) of barley. Le Sindjar, note SR Region de l'Euphrate, n.3340/DZ, 14-8-29, p.5, BEY 1529. If we assume that the average population of Sinjar should have been around 20,000 then the above figures seem high in relation to the inhabitants of the Mountain. Yet it does not appear so in relation to the area sown.

22. Note sur les populations du Sindjar, pp.5-6, BEY 1528; Le Sindjar, Note SR Région de L'Euphrate, p.5. There are no precise estimates available for rice: in 1927 cotton production was estimated at around 11 tons p.a., Le Sindjar, p.5.

villages of Sinuni, Khan Sur, and Juhbal. This was partly made possible by the close economic and political links existing between the Haskan Yazidis and the nomadic Arab Tayy and the control they exerted over part of the territory north of Sinjar as a result of their former activities as caravan-plunderers.

Intensive agriculture was also practised, principally in the inner districts of the Mountain on terraces and gardens cut into the steep slopes. The main products were figs, tobacco, lentils and grapes; the climate particularly favoured the cultivation of fig-trees, which usually became productive three or four years after their plantation and had an average productive life of 45 to 50 years. Sinjari figs were famous all over Iraq and represented the major export of the Jabal (23).

However villages living entirely on intensive agriculture were more the exception than the rule for the Mountain. Although certain northern districts like the area around Karsi could be considered almost monocultural given the predominance of plantations of fig-trees, most villagers cultivated cereals as well as their orchards and gardens. Wheat and barley were also cultivated in the villages located on the steep slopes of the mountains, on small patches of land at the bottom of narrow valleys. On the contrary, the people of the lowlands who devoted themselves predominantly to growing crops often had their plantations of fruit trees

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23. Forbes, op.cit., p.423; fig production in 1927 was estimated at 200 tons, Le Sindjar, p.5.

on the closest suitable ground. Agricultural villages situated on the hills near the mountains like Halika, Jafriyyah and Majnuniyyah had their gardens on the adjoining mountain slopes. Rich centres like Bara and Jaddalah developed a close partnership with smaller neighbouring villages where their gardens were often concentrated. The garden-village of Bara was Kurah Samuqah, located on the northern flank of the main massif, while Jaddalah was an extreme example of the extent to which villagers felt it necessary to own their private gardens. The garden-resort of Hassinah was specifically set up to the north of the village by its inhabitants for the cultivation of vegetables, fruit trees and legumes, probably at the beginning of the 20th century after Jaddalah had started to acquire political and economic importance as the centre of the Fuqara' tribe (24).

Agricultural production and the area under cultivation seems to have been relatively stable in the mountain districts, as the narrowness of the valleys only allowed the population a very limited expansion of their agricultural activities. Furthermore the negative effects of socio-political conflict on agricultural production was definitely felt less there than in the southern districts which were more exposed to looting and attacks by nomads (25).

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24. Notice sur les populations du Sindjar, BEY 1528; Lescot op.cit., pp.133.

25. This can be inferred from the general impression given in reports concerning the two areas in the last century. The best example is Forbes, op.cit., pp.409-430.

It was in the south that changing socio-political circumstances and occasional outbursts of local conflicts between sedentary and nomadic people had a more direct influence on agriculture. In times of turmoil, Bedouin tribes and government troops would take advantage of the general state of insecurity and try to penetrate into cultivated lands belonging to Yazidis, putting the lives and properties of the Sinjari peasants at risk. As a result the extension of the southern and northern cultivated areas used to fluctuate and agricultural production might vary greatly over time. After the campaign against Sinjar carried out in 1832 by the Circassian governor of Mosul, Hafiz Pasha, extensive agriculture seems almost to have disappeared in the south where a number of villages were depopulated, while the northern terraces were still able to provide the population with the necessary means of subsistence (26).

In the second half of the 19th century agriculture started to recover mainly because of improved public security and the better government control over the Bedouin as a result of Ottoman centralization policy. Thus before World War I the southern agricultural belt extended without interruption from Balad to Sakiniyyah. At the end of 1918, when the first British surveys were made, cultivation was confined to the vicinity of villages and the fringes of the

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26. Forbes gives as the best example of the decadence of southern Sinjar the town of Balad drastically reduced in size, population and productivity after 1832. Moreover he puts much emphasis on the wide extension of the Yazidi gardens in the north, Forbes op.cit., pp.415;422. H.Southgate, Narrative of a Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia, New York 1840, 2 vols, vol.2 p.273.

plain. After a period of relative peace in the 1930s cultivation was almost continuous along the north-eastern plains of Zarwan as far as Sakiniyyah. On the northern flank of Sinjar the agricultural belt stretched from the village of Adika to beyond Bara, almost at the foot of the Jabal Jaribah. In addition the lands around Khatuniyyah and al-Hawl started to produce wheat and barley, although still insufficient for local needs (27).

Stock-farming ranked second in importance amongst the activities of the inhabitants of Sinjar and it was always practiced alongside with agriculture. Sheep constituted the majority of the flocks of the Yazidi shepherds of the hills while goats predominated in the Mountain. Animal husbandry supplied the population of Sinjar with butter, milk, wool and meat, transforming the vegetation and livestock of the country into food and household products (28).

There was no pure nomadism in Sinjar. The absence of extended space, essential for the growth of the great nomadism of the Arab Bedouin, together with the availability

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27. Route Report from Mosul to Dair Ezzor, in Handbook of Mesopotamia, Admiralty War Staff Intelligence Division, Jan. 1917, vol.3, pp.308-311, IO L/MIL/17/15/41/4; Route Report - Bridge of Victory Balad to Jabal Sinjar, by Capt. Campbell Munro I.M.S., July 1918 in memo from Office Civil Commissioner to Director Arab Bureau Cairo, 23-9-1918, IO L/P&S/10/618; Notice sur les populations du Sindjar, BEY 1528; C.578.M.285.1932.VII, p.35.

28. Available census figures for domestic animals related to the period of the British occupation of Iraq are partial and probably inaccurate. Sheep and cattle counting for fiscal purposes was difficult to implement and the local population tried to avoid taxation by hiding the animals. Official sources reported the presence of 200,000/300,000 items of livestock in Sinjar in 1932 but only including sheep and goats (the latter representing only a proportion of 30%), C.578.M.285.1932.VI, p.33. Notice du Lieutenant Loheac sur les Yezidis, (typescript, 18pp.), 10-12-1935, p.4, SAL.

of fertile lands and water generally bound the population to the land. However, certain areas favoured the development of transhumance, especially in southern and western Sinjar in the proximity of the Jazirah steppe whose open spaces offered a natural outlet to the limited extension of the grazing grounds in the inner district of the Mountain. Only a small number of the inhabitants of the Jabal practised seasonal migration connected with cattle-breeding. In any case the transhumant Sinjari population always retained a solid base in their villages which were the real centres of the social and economic life of the tribes. These villages were usually organized along very much the same lines as those of the 'pure' sedentaries, and in addition, even during the migration periods, they would never be left completely deserted. Some members of the tribe, especially women and children, would remain to look after properties, crops and lands (29). Located in the proximity of the grazing resorts of the plain, the settlements of the Sinjari semi-nomads were agriculturally self-sufficient and had enough water supplies to support both men and animals during the summer months (30).

Transhumance was practised by three Sinjari tribes, consisting principally of Yazidis, settled on the western edges of the Jabal: the Samuqah, Qiran and Haskan. The main grazing space within Sinjar was the Jabal Jaribah, the only

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29. A typical example is that of the Samuqah tribesmen living in Bara. Lescot, op.cit., p.140.

30. This is confirmed by evidence provided in Notice sur les populations du Sindjar, BEY 1528.

nomadic area entirely controlled by Yazidi clans. On this plateau there was only one permanent village, Jaribah, which was used as a base for the tribesmen who would camp in the area for nine months a year with their cattle. The Samuqah tribe had the traditional grazing rights over these territories, although at times flocks belonging to the Qiran were allowed to penetrate the eastern side of the Jaribah and have a share of the fodder (31). Qirani tribesmen were usually settled south east of the Jaribah along the foothills facing the Jazirah plains. Their grazing grounds were poorer and less extensive than those of the Samuqah. Furthermore, since they stretched south of the villages of Wardiyyah and Majnuniyyah, they were located along the Shammari migration routes, so that access to pasture for Qirani cattle very much depended on the relations between the local Yazidi chiefs and the Shammari leadership (32).

Between the Wadi al-Radd and the northern slopes of Sinjar, well beyond the boundaries of the Mountain, was located the third major grazing space for the semi-nomadic Yazidi population, which was usually occupied by the Haskan tribe. Haskani tribesmen had established a close partnership with the nomadic Arab Tayy whose headquarters was located along the riverain areas of the Wadi al-Radd. In winter they would migrate towards Yazidi country and sometimes penetrate

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31. Evidence regarding the Yezidis: Tribal, supplement D to note n.18 placed before the Syro-Iraqi Frontier Commission by British and Iraqi Assessors, 22-4-32, EDM Box IV file 1; letter from Major C.J.Edmonds to Blaxter, 8-9-32, EDM Box IV file 1.

32. Evidence regarding the Yezidis: Tribal, p.6.

as far as the Haskani villages of Sinuni and Khana Sur (33).

Generally speaking the area covered by Yazidi migrations extended as far north as the Wadi al-Radd and reached the al-Bidi settlement 25 kilometers south of Wardiyyah, and Yazidi flocks seldom grazed further west than the Khatuniyyah lake (34). Various factors related to political and ecological conditions, played a determining role in securing Yazidi nomads access to their pastures outside the Jabal Jaribah. Among the most important were the extent of or lack of state control over the people of the plains, Yazidi relations with the Arab Bedouin leadership and favourable climatic conditions which could guarantee sufficient animal fodder.

In central and eastern Sinjar the population was sedentary and, as has already been pointed out, the main activity was agriculture. Stock-farming still represented an important economic resource for many Yazidi groups. Yet animals were usually bred by the same members of the family who either owned the cattle or entrusted them to professional shepherds. Especially in the north-east there were groups of specialists affiliated to the Yazidi tribes who were in charge of breeding the flocks for the community. Rashakan and Haywiriyyah, both Yazidis, were amongst the most important shepherd-tribes and lived scattered between the village of

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33. Note n.16 placed before the Frontier Commission by French and Syrian Assessors, 6-5-32, BEY 1528.

34. C.578.M.285.1932.VI, p.33.



Khana Sur, Juhbal and Barana (35).

Only in the proximity of the Jazirah plain, where agricultural land bordered the steppe, did agriculture again become complementary to itinerant cattle-breeding. This was especially the case of the lands around 'Ayn Ghazal inhabited by the Arab tribe of Abu Mutaywid and the mixed Muslim-Yazidi Mandikan (36).

#### I.4 - EARLY SETTLERS

Little definite information has survived about the early inhabitants of Sinjar. It has been suggested that they were of Aramean origin and practised idolatry in the pre-Islamic period, but this is probably guesswork (37).

Until the Muslim conquest in the 7th century the lands which surrounded the Mountain were located on the borders of a succession of great empires and therefore open to a variety of cultural influences as well as to the movements of different peoples. When northern Jazirah was under Assyrian rule it became a battlefield between Assyrian and Hittite generals. After the downfall of the Assyrian Empire in 538 B.C it came under the control of the Parthians, who were themselves succeeded by the Romans, who occupied Sinjar in 115 A.D. In 363 A.D. the frontier between the Byzantine and

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35. S.Damluji, al-Yazidiyyah, Mosul 1949, p.232.

36. Military Report on Mesopotamia. Area 1, p.100.

37. Ahmad Beg's report on Sinjar, p.6, EDM Box XIX file n.5.

Persian Empires was provisionally set down in a treaty which ceded the eastern part of the upper Jazirah, including Jabal Sinjar, to the Persians. Although often breached, this treaty remained in force for two hundred years and marked a period of increasing Persian influence in the Mountain. This influence almost certainly included the introduction of some Zoroastrian practices and beliefs, although it did not bring about any radical change in the racial composition of the population which continued to be of essentially Semitic origin (38).

There is some evidence to show that it was during the period of Persian rule that Christianity became firmly established in the Mountain. At the beginning of the 4th century A.D. Sinjar had already become part of the Eastern Syrian (Nestorian) Christian diocese of 'Ariyabi whose centre was in the town of Nusaybin. Sinjar remained under the aegis of the bishops of Nusaybin until at least 1318 when ecclesiastical records mention Sinjar under the jurisdiction of a bishop called John. Local histories also suggest that the town of Balad was an episcopal see between 1167 and 1345 (39). Although it is impossible to assess the actual numbers of Christians settled in Sinjar, the existence and prosperity of a number of Christian institutions would

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38. Damluji, op.cit., pp.372-374. A fairly extensive account of the Persian-Byzantine wars for the possession of northern Jazirah is available in J.S.Guest, The Yezidis: A Study in Survival, London 1987, pp.5-9. Ahmad Beg's report, p.5, EDM Box XIX file 5.

39. S.Gamil, Monte Singar: storia di un popolo ignoto, Roma 1900, footnote n.1, pp.26-27; Damluji, op.cit., pp.474-475. About the diocese of Bait 'Ariyabi see J.M.Fiey 'Balad et le Bèth 'Arabayé Irakien', L'Orient Syrien, 9(1964), pp.189-232.

indicate that Christianity had a large following amongst the population of the Mountain. Convents and churches with their religious personnel represented the most important and widespread socio-religious points of reference for the local sedentary population (40).

During the Islamic period, after the Muslim conquest of the Jazirah in 640 A.D., the presence of the Christians can be more easily recognized. The tolerant policy of the Muslims vis-à-vis the Christian communities undoubtedly guaranteed the Sinjari Christians relative security and protection from the extortions of their new rulers. The Christian inhabitants of Sinjar were allowed to profess their faith in exchange for payment of jizya and were generally allowed to retain their former rights over their lands and properties. Even the arrival of Muslim tribal people in Sinjar during the first two centuries of Islamic rule did not have any particular repercussions in the areas where the Christian population was concentrated. Arab tribesmen usually limited their movements to the edges of the southern lowlands, while the hilly districts where the majority of the Christians lived were very seldom affected by the presence of Islam (41). The prosperity of the Christian community of Sinjar is also clearly indicated by the prestige which a number of pre-Islamic Christian centres of learning and spiritual retreat,

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40. See footnote n.42.

41. Damluji, op.cit., p.378. Among the Muslim tribes which migrated to the Mountain there were sections belonging to the Bani Qashir, Bani Namil, Bani 'Aqil, Bani Taghallub and Bani Kilab.

mainly located in the hills, acquired in Islamic times (42).

#### The arrival and settlement of the Yazidis

Although these events cannot be dated precisely it seems that small groups of Kurds started to arrive in Sinjar during the 13th century, opening the way to more substantial later migrations of people from Kurdistan which continued until the early 20th century. The majority of these Kurds were Yazidis, an heterodox religious group the majority of whose members were probably organized in tribes at the time of their arrival in Jabal Sinjar. The Yazidis were Kurdish speakers and since the end of the 12th century their religious life centred around the shrine of a Sufi saint, 'Adi b. Musafir, which was located in the Shaikhan district north of Mosul (43). The followers of 'Adi were known originally as al-

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42. Among the names of the old monasteries preserved in local traditions we mention Dair Batura set up by the monk Aba Yunan al-Majusi in 596, Dair al-Kabir of Mar Addi considered one of the first companions of Jesus Christ, Dair Sarjis also known as al-Nisak and the famous monastery founded in 461 by Jibra'il al-Sinjari who was a follower of the Jacobite doctrine. We also have the names of some pious and learned men who devoted themselves to literature and science. The bishop Ilya al-Sinjari in the 8th century and the Mar Musa ibn Kayfa in the 10th century. Ibid., pp.475-476; 478. Ahmad Beg's report, p.6, EDM Box XIX file 5.

43. Shaikh 'Adi b. Musafir (1075-1162 c.a) lived in the 12th century and is considered by the <sup>same</sup> Yazidis as the founder of their religion. However, certain features of the Yazidi religious system would indicate that the Kurdish tribesmen who gathered around 'Adi b. Musafir in Shaikhan were widely influenced by pre-Islamic Iranian beliefs, especially Zoroastrianism. Therefore, although the origins of the Yazidi religion are obscure it can be inferred that an important part of its doctrines and beliefs existed before the appearance of 'Adi b. Musafir. Moreover it is most likely that the Yazidi tribes originally came from Iran. See as main

'Adawiyyah, which suggests that they were recognized by contemporary Muslim writers as members of a Sufi brotherhood. However, sometime between the 13th and 14th century, the introduction of an exaggerated cult (ghuluww) of their saintly founder and the semi-deification of the Caliph Yazid b. Mu'awiyah (680-683) changed their position vis-à-vis the Muslim establishment who started to refer to them as al-Yazidiyyah and to place the followers of 'Adi among the tawa'if al-mubtadi'in (heretical sects). Thereafter relations between the members of al-Yazidiyyah and the Muslim authorities started to deteriorate and this set in motion a series of religious persecutions which determined a slow Yazidi diaspora from Shaikhan and the surrounding areas (44).

The history of the Yazidi occupation of Sinjar can be divided into two main periods. The first of these was the original establishment of the Yazidi population in the area between the 13th and 17th centuries, during which the Yazidis shared their territories with the Christians. The second, after the 17th century, marks the disappearance of the Christians and the widespread diffusion of Yazidism as the

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contributions to the study of Muslim sources dealing with 'Adi and his brotherhood: N.Siouffi, 'Notice sur le Chéikh 'Adi et la secte des Yézidis', JA, series 8, 5(1885), pp.78-98; R.Frank, Scheich 'Adi, der grosse heilige der Jezidīs, Berlin 1911; M.Guidi 'Nuove ricerche sui Yazidi', RSO, 13(1931-32), pp.408-425.

44. Evidence about the first supposed employment of the term Yazidiyyah by Muslim writers and its coexistence with the term 'Adawiyyah in early 14th century is to be found in Abu al-Firas Ibn Taymiyyah 'al-risalah al-'Adawiyyah' in Majmu'at al-Kubra, Cairo, 1906, pp.262-317 and in the mss. by Abu al-Firas 'Ubaydallah Kitab al-radd 'ala al-Rafidah wa al-Yazidiyyah whose contents are examined by Lescot, op.cit., pp.37-43.

principal religion of the people settled in the Jabal.

In the 13th century the first groups of Yazidi refugees arrived from Badhnan, especially from the district of Shaikhan, and from Buhtan, areas located north and north-west of Mosul. In that period the community suffered widespread persecutions at the hands of Sunni Zangid <sup>A</sup>atabeg Badr al-Din Lu'lu' who ruled over northern Iraq from 1211 to 1259 . Zangid rule over Mosul had begun in 1127 when 'Imad al-Din Zangi replaced the last Saljuq governor after 30 years of Saljuq control of the city (45).

During the Zangid period Sinjar constituted a small principality dependent on Mosul, with a local leadership appointed by the Mosulawi authorities. However, the Mountain enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy which was partly why it could provide shelter for the Yazidi Kurds so harshly treated by Badr al-Din. The achievement of this semi-autonomous status was possible partly because, at least until 1220, Sinjari leadership could take advantage of the Zangid-Ayyubid dispute over the northern Jazirah and use Ayyubid attempts to occupying Sinjar as a political weapon against the Mosulawi Zangids. A couple of years before Badr al-Din's accession to power Sinjar was the first Zangid domain to give temporary

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45. For an account of Yazidi persecutions under the reign of Badr al-Din see T.Bois 'Les Yézidis: Essai historique sur leur origine religieuse', al-Machriq, 55(1961), p.213. In the present state of knowledge it is difficult to establish the extent to which the Yazidi religion had already affected Kurdish tribal groups outside Shaikhan. However, there is no doubt that in Shaikhan Yazidi tenets and practices had started to represent a source of communal identity amongst the population in the 13th century. For this reason I will refer to these people as Yazidis. For an account of Zangid rule in Mosul before Badr al-Din and his accession to power see D.Patton, Badr al-Din Lu'lu. Atabeg of Mosul, 1211-1259, Seattle 1991, pp.8-21.

recognition to the authority of al-Ashraf, one of Salah al-Din's nephews (46).

During Badr al-Din's reign the Mountain maintained a certain independence from Mosul and became an easily accessible refuge for those who dissented from the powerful Badr al-Din and the Ayyubid al-Ashraf who had in the meantime succeeded in transforming Mosul into an Ayyubid domain. In addition to the Shaikhanli Kurds a Kurdish Amir, 'Imad al-Din b. Mashtub, who belonged to the Ayyubid military cadres and had rebelled against Badr al-Din, sought refuge in Sinjar in the 1220's and obtained the support of the local ruler who joined forces with him, the two succeeding temporarily in occupying Tall 'Afar. Furthermore after Badr al-Din's death Sinjar became the centre of the last Zangid resistance against the advance of the Mongol armies. When the Mongols were about to capture Mosul in 1261, Badr al-Din's son al-Salih Rukn al-Din Isma'il launched a last unsuccessful attack from Sinjar against the Mongol besiegers of the city (47).

The difficult situation of the Shaikhanli Yazidi community was worsened by the animosity of various Sunni Kurdish tribesmen who were particularly active at the time of Badr al-Din against the sedentary people of the rich lowlands of the Mosul plain with whom the Yazidis mixed. Although

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46. *Ibid.*, pp.8-9;23-24.

47. In 1220 Badr al-Din became the guardian of a Zangid succession firmly subordinate to the Syrian Ayyubids, *ibid.*, p.22. After his death Sinjar was given to his son al-Muzaffar 'Ala al-Din 'Ali who soon after fled to Syria and was replaced by his brother Rukn al-Din Isma'il. *Ibid.*, pp.70-71;77-79.

their efforts were concentrated mainly on the rich Christian communities, whose monasteries and villages were pillaged and a great number of inhabitants killed, the Yazidis were also the victims of Kurdish military might (48). Mongol incursions into northern Iraq, which culminated in the capture of Mosul in 1262, certainly also provoked widespread destruction among the Yazidi groups settled north of Mosul. Sinjar was looted at least three times, in 1230, 1235 and 1243 (49).

That the Yazidis settled so early in the upper northern Jazirah is partly confirmed by some traditions circulating among the Jawanah or sedentary Yazidi tribes of eastern Sinjar which attribute the diffusion of Yazidism in the Jabal to Sharaf al-Din Muhammad (d.1256), the son of Shaikh al-Din Hasan, chief of the Shaikhan group who had been murdered by Badr al-Din in 1246 (50).

In the course of time the Yazidis gradually occupied the areas where the Christian population was settled. In the 13th century the important Christian centres were Balad Sinjar, the village of Karsi in the north west and Jaddalah which an observer described in 1228 as a major centre mainly inhabited

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48. E.A.W.Budge (transl), The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj, Oxford, 1932, 2 vols, vol.1 p.441. However, it is not clear the extent to which this tribal hostility on the part of the Kurds had an economic or/and religious character.

49. For the Mongol conquest of northern Iraq and Mongol attacks towards Sinjar see Patton, op.cit., p.52-53;59-64.

50. T.Bois, op.cit., p.212; Ahmad Beg's report, p.7; 'Asha'ir al-Yazidiyyah fi Jabal Sinjar, (Arabic, typescript 19pp.), p.1, EDM Box XIX file 5.



by Christians (51). A Yazidi myth reported by a Sinjari story teller at the beginning of the 1930s underlines the close contacts that probably existed between the Yazidis and the local Christian population at the time of the arrival of the first groups of refugees (52).

The Yazidi presence grew in strength over the succeeding centuries. In the second half of the 14th century Ibn Battuta reported that groups of Kurdish tribal people were well established in the north, although he did not mention the Yazidis specifically (53). A century later there were at least 30 villages in Sinjar with some settled Yazidis among their population and in the 16th century the lands north of Balad were called Saçla Dagħ, that is the mountain of the Saçilu people, Kurdish Yazidi nomads who were supposed to have eight moustaches (54). It was after the establishment of the Ottoman rule over the northern Jazirah in the 16th century, following a short period of Safavid rule, that Sinjar became a 'Yazidi Mountain' as the first major Ottoman expedition seems to indicate. The Yazidis were reported to form the main opposition to the wali of Diyar

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51. Damluji, op.cit., p.476.

52. Lescot mentions a legend current in Sinjar which portrays a Yazidi hero, 'Eliye Şer, involved in fighting a local non-Kurdish population settled in the Mountain. Lescot, op.cit., footnote n.2 pp.134-136, Kurdish text/Annexe II.

53. Guest, op.cit., p.26; H.A.R. Gibb (transl.) The Travels of Ibn Battuta A.D.1325-1354, Cambridge 1962, p.352.

54. F.Nau/J.Tfindji 'Recueil de textes et de documents sur les Yézidis', ROC, 10(1915-17), pp.238-239. Saçilu in Ottoman Turkish means long-haired, F.B.Charmoy (transl), Cheref-nameh ou Fastes de la nation kourde, by Sharaf al-Din Bidlisi, 2 vols, St.Petersburg 1868-75, vol.I part 1 p.62.

Bakr, Malak Ahmad Pasha, who attacked Sinjar with his army in 1638 (55). Ottoman persecutions in the Shaikhan enclave intensified especially in the 17th century, increasing the number of Yazidis who looked to Sinjar as their new homeland. A very old Sinjari tradition dates the arrival of the Yazidis in the Mountain to this period. The existence of this belief, confirmed by various sources, probably indicates that Ottoman hostility towards the community might have accelerated during this period and completed the process of the creation of a Yazidi enclave in Mount Sinjar (56).

It was also in the first half of the 17th century that the Nestorian diocese of Sinjar ceased to be mentioned in ecclesiastical records. The disappearance of official Christian representatives from the Mountain would suggest that Christianity had started to lose ground as a consequence of the advance of the Yazidi religion (57). An interesting indication of the threat posed by Yazidi proselytism is adduced by the cry for help sent by some Sinjari Christian notables to the Nestorian Patriarch Eliyas

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55. This military campaign specifically aimed at subjugating the Yazidi population of the Mountain who suffered heavy losses. Damluji, op.cit., pp. 385-386. We can assume that at that time the number of Yazidis settled in the Mountain was rather high.

56. Gamil, op.cit., footnote n.1 p.26; J.Menant, Les Yézidiz: Épisodes de l'histoire des adorateurs du diable, Paris 1892, pp.49-50. Layard reports a similar tradition but according to it the Yazidis arrived in Sinjar from Basra, A.H.Layard, Nineveh and its Remains, London 1849, vol.1 p.306. Lescot was convinced that the first Yazidis settled in Sinjar in the 17th century, Lescot, op.cit., pp.135-136.

57. It is interesting to remark that the position of the Nestorian church in the area north of Sinjar was worsening because of the advance of the Western Syrian Church (Jacobite) whose stronghold was located in the Jabal Tur. For example the Nestorian community of Nusaybin ceased to be mentioned after 1644. Chevallier, Les Montagnards, p.30.

of Nusaybin in 1660. They asked for the nomination of a local Christian representative as well as the despatch of priests to cater to the needs of the faithful and reinvigorate religious feeling among the population (58).

On the other hand, the very fact that the Christian community retained its identity for five centuries after the arrival of the first Yazidi groups shows the extent to which Yazidi supremacy was achieved through means of a gradual socio-economic integration and interaction with the local population rather than through military conquest.

#### I.5 - 19TH CENTURY MIGRATIONS

Precise information concerning the Yazidi and Muslim people who emigrated to Sinjar begins to be available from the middle of the 19th century together with some general references to the Yazidi tribes already established in the Mountain. Both contribute to a better understanding of the results of the Yazidi colonization of Sinjar. However, it is only at the beginning of the 20th century that the religious and ethnic composition of the Sinjari population and the

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58. H.Pognon, 'Sur les Yézidis du Sindjar', ROC, series 2, 10 (1915-1917), pp.327-329. From this record, part of a Syriac ms. copied by the Chaldean priest Ishak of Bartella in 1874, the decline of Christianity in the Mountain seems to be have provoked by the Patriarch who did not comply with the requests of the Christian notables of Sinjar. However, the presence of an established group of Yazidi men of religion is explicitly mentioned. Another Christian tradition dates the disappearance of the Christians from the Mountain to the same period although it attributes it to the absence of the monks and priest who went to Jerusalem for a pilgrimage. M.G.Campanile, Storia della regione del Kurdistan e delle sette di religione ivi esistenti, Napoli 1818, pp.146-147.

territorial distribution of its different communities can be detailed more precisely. From this point it is possible to describe and examine a considerable number of Sinjari tribes at greater length.

By and large, the majority of the tribes which were to play a determining role in the history of Sinjar during the period of the British mandate were already settled in the Mountain in the first half of the 19th century. Among the most important were the semi-nomadic Yazidi Qiran, Samuqah and Haskan, traditionally considered as the oldest Yazidi tribal settlers; the powerful Mihirkan and Habbabat, two very heterogeneous groups settled on the eastern edges of the Mountain, whose clans were much exposed to the attacks of the Ottoman governors of Mosul; the Muslim-Yazidi Mandikan, the 'Ali-Ilahi Babawat, and the Musqurah, the latter being the only Yazidi tribe whose extra-Sinjari origin can be easily recognized from the names of some of their fractions (59). The two clans of the Mala Khalata and Dunbali echoed the names of famous Yazidi tribes from the 16th century, the Khaladi and the Dunbali Bakht (60).

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59. Tribes are very seldom mentioned in the few available 19th century travel accounts of Sinjar. In 1820 Rich confirms the presence of the Habbabat by stating that they were originally a branch of the Arab Tayy who settled in Sinjar and converted to Yazidism. C.J.Rich, Narrative of a residence in Kurdistan and the site of the ancient Nineveh, London 1836, 2vols, vol.2 p.121. The Qiran are mentioned in the 1880's. E.Sachau, Reise in Syrien und Mesopotamien, Leipzig 1883, p.324. The presence of other tribal groups can be inferred from later studies on Sinjari tribes. See Lescot, op.cit., pp.136-137 and Damluji, op.cit., pp.224-242.

60. The Sinjari clan of the Khalata seem to have come from Hisn Kayf although, according to the Sharaf namah, they were settled further north, in the lands to the east of the Batman Su. Lescot, op.cit., p.316;

By this time the majority of the inhabitants of the Mountain were Yazidis. Islam was generally confined to fairly small groups of tribesmen, like the Mandikan and the Babawat, who were living around Balad as affiliates of the Habbabat. Conversions of Yazidis would occasionally occur but they were generally limited to groups of villagers who had direct experience of Ottoman occupation (61). After 1832, when the Ottoman general Hafiz Pasha destroyed villages and cultivated lands, slaughtering a great number of Sinjaris in the process, various new groups of tribesmen started to arrive in the Mountain. By the end of the century almost all of them had settled permanently in Sinjar, either as affiliate clans of major tribes or independent groups (62).

The appearance of new tribes and the increase in the population of the older tribal communities was mainly the result of the presence of new Kurdish immigrants, the majority of whom were Yazidis. Although they contributed to modify existing patterns of tribal alliances, they strengthened the position of the Kurdish-Yazidi community of

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Charmoy, *op.cit.*, vol.1 part 1 pp.61-62. The Dunbali were a famous Yazidi tribe whose genealogy went back to an Arab Syrian tribesman called 'Isa. In the 16th century they held an hereditary fiefdom to the west of Lake Urmia. *Ibid.*, vol.1 part 1 p.169; vol.2 part 1 p.64.

61. Especially among the Habbabat and the Mihirkan a number of conversions to Islam seem to have occurred during the Hafiz Pasha expedition of 1832. The all Mihirkhani clan of the Hasakayy became Muslim. Some of these tribesmen settled in the villages of Hamdan and Bajasi remained Muslim until the 1940s. Damluji, *op.cit.*, p.235.

62. In 1838 Forbes estimated 6208 people living in Sinjar on the bases of eight people per household. Despite the large depopulation this number seems far too low in comparison with figures available at the beginning of the 20th century. Forbes, 'A Visit to the Sinjâr Hills', p.429.

Sinjar to a certain extent by reinforcing the idea of Sinjar as the privileged homeland for the Yazidi diaspora.

A first wave of refugees came from the area known as Buhtan, located north of the Jabal Tur. They all belonged to Yazidi tribal clans, except the Daquriyyun whose members were Sunni Kurds. Until the middle of the 19th century Buhtan constituted the third major Yazidi enclave after Shaikhan and Sinjar; at the beginning of the century there were some 6000 Yazidis, together with a substantial number of Nestorians and Armenians, living between Arzun and Jazirah b. 'Umar. However, the Yazidi population was drastically reduced in size in the vilayat of Diyarbakr in the 1860s, and twenty years later a Dominican missionary based in Siirt reported that Yazidi settlements were confined to the banks of the Tigris (63).

The arrival of a great number of new settlers coincided with the downfall of the Buhtani Kurdish-Yazidi emirate of Ridwan whose Yazidi leader, Mirza Agha, ruled over a mixed population of Yazidis, Muslim and Christians. When he was defeated by Ottoman forces and replaced by a Turkish official in 1837, some of his Yazidi subjects escaped, fearing Ottoman

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63. J.M.Kinneir, Journey through Asia Minor, Armenia and Koordistan in the years 1813 and 1814, London 1818, pp.415; P.Brelet, 'Seert I' (History of the Seert Dominican Mission), (typescript 25pp., n.d.), p.6, SAL. Although the Buhtani Yazidi population was settled in villages their social organization was still tribal. Their progressive migration after the 1840s coincided with an advance of the Christian Jacobites whose stronghold was located in the Jabal Tur. They gradually seem to have replaced a number of old Nestorian communities. M.Chevallier, op.cit., p.119.

reprisals (64).

The most important of the Buhtani groups to arrive in Sinjar was the Sharqiyyan, a Yazidi clan whose members often associated with the Milli Kurds, a very powerful mixed tribal confederation including Muslims, Christians and Yazidis. The first Sharqiyyan arrived in Sinjar from the Viranshahir area, joined later by some members of the tribe who were part of the 'Syrian' section of the Milli. They were to form the first nucleus of the Fuqara' tribe whose authority in the Mountain rapidly grew in strength in the last decade of the 19th century with the arrival of a Yazidi Shaikhanli faqir, Hamu Shiru who claimed to belong to the Dinadiyyah tribe living in Shaikhan (65).

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At very much the same time other tribesmen affiliated to the Havarkan, a powerful mixed confederation moving around Buhtan and the Jebel Tur, reached Sinjar. They belonged to the Yazidi groups of the Chalkan and Chilkan whose members succeeded in retaining close links as well as their original tribal name at least until the 1930's, although they were

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64. Damluji, op.cit., p.23; Chevallier, op.cit., p.85 footnote n.1. For the events related to the collapse of the Ridwan emirate see Guest, The Yazidis, p.61;70-71. A very interesting description of the castle of Ridwan and of the entourage of the Yazidi amir is to be found in Kinneir, op.cit., pp.414-415.

65. It appears that Hamu just appealed to existing tribal loyalties given that some clans of the Dinadiyyah had already settled in Sinjar in the late 18th century, C.Niebuhr, Voyage en Arabie et en d'autres pays circonvoisins, Amsterdam 1776, vol.2, p.315. In the 1930s a large part of the Fuqara' were still aware of their Sharqiyyan origins although the leading group headed by the faqir Hamu, the Mala Shiru, still claimed to have originated from the Shaikhanli group of the Dinadiyyah. Damluji, op.cit., pp.228-230; Lescot, op.cit., p.136; 'Ashā'ir al-Yazīdiyyah fi Jabal Sinjār, (Arabic, typescript 19pp.), p.8, EDM Box XIX file 5.

never able to achieve territorial unity (66).

In the 19th century a second major influx of refugees arrived in Sinjar from the Shaikhan district. Unlike the Yazidi from Buhtan, the Shaikhanlis had not all originated from a tribal milieu. A great number of people who fled from Shaikhan to avoid Kurdish and Turkish persecutions were members of the Yazidi religious classes, who lived scattered in villages adjoining Shaikh 'Adi, the religious centre of Yazidism. Between 1830 and 1845 Turkish governors and Kurdish aghas repeatedly attacked Shaikhan, concentrating their efforts on hitting the core of the Yazidi religious establishment by killing members of the Yazidi priesthood or converting them to Islam (67). By the 1890's the religious policy of the government had become more articulate and effective, compelling many shaikhs, pirs and faqirs to escape to Sinjar. Many religious men in Shaikhan converted to Islam, especially among the high religious ranks, and the whole area was devastated by the arrival of General 'Umar Wahbi Pasha's army in 1892 after which the sanctuary of Shaikh 'Adi was transformed into a Qur'anic school (68).

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66. In the 1860s they lived scattered among southern rich villages like Balad, Jaddalah, Qawisi and Majnuniyyah after a period of permanence in caves located in northern Sinjar. Other minor tribes who arrived in the Mountain were the Da'udi from Diyarbakr and the mixed Yazidi-Muslim Saw'an from Viranshahir. Lescot, op.cit., pp.136;253-254; Damluji, op.cit., p.227-228; A.'Azzawi, Tarikh al-Yazidiyyah, Baghdad 1353 AH, pp.96-97.

67. For an account of these military expeditions see Layard, op.cit., vol.1 pp.275-277.

68. For details see pp.139-140. Before the military expedition Muslim missionaries together with the mufti of Diyar Bakr were sent to the area but with no apparent results. S.S.Ahmad, The Yazidis: their Life and Beliefs, Miami 1975, pp.79-80.



The integration of those Yazidi men of religion who had chosen voluntary exile in Sinjar occurred quite differently from that of the ordinary tribesmen. The prestige attached to their status as men of religion allowed them to act outside the context of traditional tribal loyalties, as will be discussed in more detail below. In Sinjar men of religion could, according to convenience and circumstances, join existing tribes, constitute their own groups, or control different groups acting as intermediaries in the resolution of disputes between conflicting sections. This versatility was to have far-reaching repercussions on the more recent history of Sinjar.

## CHAPTER II

### JABAL SINJAR: SOCIETY

## II.1 - 20th CENTURY COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS

The population of 20th century Sinjar appears extremely fragmented in terms of ethnic and religious composition. Some of the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar were fairly heterogeneous communities which generally included a majority of Yazidi tribesmen together with smaller groups of Muslim Kurds, both Sunnis and extremist (ghulat) Shi'is. Similarly, part of the Arab population of the Mountain was tribally organized but, unlike the Yazidis, the Arab tribes of Sinjar did not present such religious variety since they were usually composed of Sunnis. In addition there were also a number of Arabs in Sinjar, both Christian and Sunni, whose lives and activities were organized outside a tribal context.

Estimates of population suggest that the population of Sinjar increased considerably between 1830 and 1930. This population growth became particularly evident between 1920 and 1930, during the period of British administration. In 1834 Dr. Forbes, generally an acute and careful observer, stated that there were 6200 inhabitants in Sinjar. Although this figure seems rather low in comparison with later estimates, it can be partly explained by the considerable depopulation of the Mountain caused by the bloody campaign of Hafiz Pasha in 1832 which also resulted in large scale deportations of Yazidi, Kurdish and Muslim villagers,

especially from eastern Sinjar. In 1921, according to a rough census of the population of the Mosul vilayat carried out by the British authorities, the Sinjari Yazidis were reported to be 20,000, a figure which probably includes all the Muslim Kurds living as affiliates of Yazidi tribes. More detailed estimates are available for the year 1932 when the British assessors in charge of the delimitation of the Syro-Iraqi border calculated that 28,775 people were settled in the Mountain. This figure includes some 4000 inhabitants of a number of Arab villages located in the plain. Therefore, in the 1930s the total population of Yazidi and Muslim Kurdish villagers, including the sedentary Christian and Muslim communities settled in Balad, was nearly 24,000 (1).

This increase of population was particularly evident in southern Sinjar where a number of major villages grew considerably. In 1835 the town of Balad was almost deserted and had 500 inhabitants who were mainly Muslims: thirty years later Layard estimated its population at approximately 1000, remarking that Muslims and Yazidis looked very much alike. In 1903, although the Muslim population seems to have declined considerably, the number of the people settled in the capital

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1. Forbes, 'A visit to the Sinjâr Hills', p.429; Military Report on Iraq (Area 9) Central Kurdistan, Air Ministry 1929, p.38, CO 730/115/1. The 1932 estimates would coincide both with the official figures provided by the League of Nations and those of the first official census of the Iraqi Republic in 1947. See: C.578.m.285. 1932.VI, pp.27-28; Ihsa' al-sukkan li sanah 1947, Wizarat al-Shu'un al-Ijtima'iyah, Baghdad 1954. In 1932 the racial and religious distribution of the Sinjaris was as follows: Yazidi Kurds 17,595, Sunni Kurds 2380, extremist Shi'is 1060, Muslim Arabs 6675, Muslim Turks 1225. 'Evidence regarding the Yazidis: tribal', supplement D to note n.18, 22-4-32, pp.13-14 incl docs Syro-Iraqi border commission by British and Iraqi assessors, EDM Box IV vol.1; 'Observation on the French Mémoire Descriptif', note n.1, 4-4-32, incl in docs by British and Iraqi assessors, EDM Box IV vol.1.

reached 2000 thanks to the inflow of many Yazidi tribesmen and the presence of many Christians. In the 1930s the number had increased to 3840 inhabitants, mainly Muslims and Christians, while the Yazidis seemed to have moved to the outskirts of the town. The same happened in the Arab village of Wardiyyah, located south of Balad which some families of Qirani Yazidis had occupied permanently just after 1917; its inhabitants had doubled in 100 years (2).

In contrast, the demographic variation in a number of villages located along the northern borders of the main ridge inhabited both by sedentary and semi-nomadic Yazidi tribes does not indicate comparable growth. This is especially true for Kura Samuqah which was the most populous centre of the Mountain in 1834 with 700 inhabitants: their number had decreased to 210 a century later. In the lands of the Musqurah tribe the villages of Alidina, Yusufan and Nujri were more densely populated in the 19th century than in the 1930s, although Taraf, the largest village in the area in the 20th century, had not yet developed. In the villages of Karsi and Jafriyyah there had been no major change in the composition and number of their inhabitants for over 100 years. In Karsi the presence of a steady number of settlers is partly explained by its importance as the seat of the local representative of the Shaikhanli Yazidi princely family

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2. Forbes, op.cit., p.415; Layard, op.cit., vol.1 p. 321. Handbook on Mesopotamia, vol.3, Jan.1917, Admiralty War Staff Intelligence Division, p.314, IO L/MIL/17/15/41/4; Military Report on Mesopotamia. Area 1, p.8, IO L/MIL/17/15/42. About Wardiyyah see: Handbook on Mesopotamia, vol.3, p.314; 'Sinjar Qadha (South Side) - Populations' from Secretary General commission of enquiry Syro-Iraqi border to Iraqi Ministry of Interior, 14/15-6-1932, EDM Box IV file 1.

and, after 1920, as the administrative centre of the Shimal nahiyyah (3).

In the 1930s Kurds were the largest community but in the south and east the Arabs constituted a significant element of the population . The Kurds were mainly Yazidis with groups of Sunni Muslims, generally parts of mixed tribes led by Yazidis, and a fairly large community of extremist Shi'is, the Babawat tribe, who were affiliated to the Habbabat Yazidis (4).

The Yazidis were scattered almost everywhere in the Mountain except in the villages on the plain in eastern and south-eastern Sinjar towards Tall 'Afar and the lower Jazirah, which were mainly inhabited by Muslims. The Yazidi population was concentrated in the northern district where they formed a majority in all the villages. In the south, Yazidi settlements were numerous along the al-Tawq chain and in the adjoining villages of the flatland. However, Yazidis mixed very frequently with Muslims and Christians and they only represented the largest religious group in less than half of the villages (5).

The other Kurds usually lived in close socio-economic

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3. Forbes, op.cit., pp.416-419; 'Sinjar Qadha (North/South sides) - populations'. The village of Taraf in the 1930's had 900 inhabitants.

4. The Babawat were so closely related to the Habbabat that Edmonds omits to mention their name in the tribal lists, directly including Babawat tribesmen amongst the Habbabat. This is evident from the high number of Kurdish Shi'i families reported as members of the tribe: 210 as opposed to 395 houses of Yazidis. 'Tribal distribution by families - Sinjar Qadha' supplement D to note n.18 incl docs Syro-Iraqi border commission by British and Iraqi assessors, EDM Box IV file 1.

5. 'Sinjar Qadha (North/South side) - Populations'.

symbiosis with the Yazidis, usually as recognized fractions of Yazidi tribes, inhabiting their villages and sharing the same lands. Only one small Sunni tribe, the Jawabra, settled in Zamani, formed an independent unit occupying an entire village (6).

In the north the Sunni Kurdish population was not very numerous although a number of Sunni tribesmen lived scattered in the lands inhabited by the Mihirkan tribe, especially in the villages of Zarwan, Mahirkan, Zubdakan and Bajasi. Furthermore, in the core of the main Sinjari massif, there were two major Sunni Kurdish enclaves: the first in the village of Halayqiyyah, east of the Samuqah settlements of Jafriyyah and Kura Samuqah, which numbered roughly 100 people; the second in the Musqurah lands where Sunni Kurds were concentrated in the village of Taraf. The majority of the Sunni Kurds lived in the south, in the area around Balad as affiliates of the Habbabat and further south of the al-Tawq chain in the lands of the Mandikan. Some of these tribesmen belonging to the Habbabat shared their villages with the Kurdish Babawat who were the largest non-Yazidi group in the tribe (7).

The Arab population of the Mountain consisted of Sunni Muslims and Christians. Sinjari Christians were part of a group of urban traders essentially outside the tribes and the

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6. 'Tribal distribution by families-Sinjar Qadha' supplement D to note n.18, p.13.

7. In northern Sinjar the Sunni Kurds were only 485, in the south more than 3,000. 'Observation on the French Mèmoire descriptif', Chp. II, EDM Box IV file 1.

tribal system but which had close economic links with them. In fact the tribes in many cases represented the major source of income for the Christian dealers who acted mainly as middlemen, agents or commission brokers for major traders residing in Mosul. They dealt extensively with the tribal aghas, usually providing tribesmen with rice, coffee, sugar, spirits and buying dried figs, charcoal, sheep and goats from them. There are no records of Sinjari Christians being members or affiliates of tribes although they lived in close contact with tribesmen who represented the majority of the population even in large villages. The Christians were settled in the main market centres of Sinjar (Balad, Jaddalah, Bardahali and Sakiniyyah) which were mainly controlled by the Fuqara' tribe. They lived under the protection of the Fuqara' chief Hamu Shiru who had started to establish close links with them at the beginning of the 1900s (8).

These Christians were neither connected with nor aware of the very old local Christian tradition which had flourished in Sinjar before the arrival of the Yazidi people. The 20th century Sinjari Christian community did not represent a compact unit, consisting of Chaldeans, Nestorians and Armenians. The urban character of the community's

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8. There were 750 Christians in the Mountain of which 660 were settled in Balad. Christian traders were often itinerant, touring the country to be in contact with the tribes. This is confirmed by the small share Christians had in the ownership of sedentary commercial activities like shops, coffee-shop and inns in Balad. 'Sinjar Qadha (South/North side) - populations', from Secretary General Border Commission to Iraqi Ministry of Interior, 14/15-6-32; 'Balad Sinjar' supplement B to note n.18, 22-4-32, incl. doc.s Syro-Iraqi border commission by British and Iraqi assessors; C.578.M.285.1932.VI, p.34.



lifestyle and economic activities, the fairly small number of its members (the greater part of whom evidently came from outside Sinjar) and their lack of integration in the rural milieu would indicate that they had arrived fairly recently in Sinjar. This is very true for the whole Armenian community of Balad and a considerable number of Chaldeans and Nestorians who had arrived in Sinjar from Mardin, Nusaybin and Jazirah b. 'Umar after the 1915 Kurdish and Turkish persecutions (9). It is possible that the old Christian community had been completely incorporated into the Yazidi tribes when its members converted to Yazidism. Its first integration into a tribal unit must have created strong cultural, and socio-economic links with the Kurdish tribal milieu for future generations who started to be considered and to view themselves as Kurds (10).

In contrast the Arab Muslim population of Sinjar was more differentiated, both socially and economically. In the first place a number of traders and notables of Mosulawi origin lived in Balad quite separately from the local Arab Muslim communities. These local communities consisted of

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9. In 1915 there arrived in the Mountain 660 Armenians, both Catholic and Gregorian, 100 Jacobites and 100 Chaldeans and Nestorians. It seems that a great part of the Armenians scattered in areas south of Balad while other Christians populated the village of Bardahali. In 1932 in Balad there were 207 Nestorians, 178 Chaldeans and 275 Armenians. 'Les Chrétiens aux bêtes!' (anonymous handwritten report in 3 notebooks, 1916 c.a), cahier n.3, chp.15, pp. 243-245:245bis;245ter, DOM colis n.17 ; 'Balad Sinjar' supplement B to note n.18, 22-4-32.

10. The adoption of a new 'ethnic' and 'religious' consciousness according to circumstance and convenience is a phenomenon fairly common in northern Iraq. H.Batatu, The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq, Princeton, 1978, p.45. The Sunni tribal migrants from Najd who came to southern Iraq in the 18th and 19th centuries generally 'converted' to Shi'ism.

fairly small tribes settled mainly in peripheral areas towards Tall 'Afar and the Jazirah plain who seldom had direct relations with the Yazidis, being more exposed to Bedouin influence. Only one tribe, the Albu Mutaywid, was under the control of the Yazidi Fuqara', who hired Albu Mutaywid tribesmen to cultivate their lands (11).

However, a limited number of Muslim Arab tribesmen did live in the heart of the Yazidi lands, belonging to the Khawatina tribe and to the Bedouin Juhaish. The Khawatina were a numerous group of mixed Bedouin origin inhabiting the villages of Khatuniyyah and Wardiyyah. From the end of the 19th century until the 1920's they were also settled in the rich village of Jaddalah which became the headquarters of the Yazidi Fuqara' tribe during the mandate. Their stronghold was the village of Khatuniyyah, located north-west of the Jabal Jaribah, which they had abandoned during World War I and completely reoccupied by 1930. As for Wardiyyah, which the Khawatina tribesmen were sharing with the Qirani Yazidis in 1932, it was evidently an old settlement since its population was entirely Khawatini until 1917 (12). Some 380 families of Bedouin Juhaish also lived in eastern Sinjar, in the Mihirkani lands, which they use to leave after the ploughing season to graze their flocks in the Jazirah lands south of

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11. Military Report on Mesopotamia (Iraq) Area 1 Northern Jazirah, pp.100-103.

12. Memo Air HQ to Br High Commissioner, 16-3-1927, n.I/10/1, AIR 23/154; Note au sujet des habitants de Khatunie et al-Hol, note n.12bis incl Dossier Rapport Bonnot, 27-4-1932, BEY 1528; Edmonds' Tour Notes (Sinjar 1930s), EDM Box IX file 5; Handbook on Mesopotamia, vol.3 p.34, IO L/MIL/17/15/41/4.

the Mountain (13).

Very many Muslim Mosulawis resided in the town of Balad, and along with the Christians, enjoyed the status of a rich urban elite whose interests were mainly linked to trade. The majority did not work as freelances but were protégés of rich Muslim traders of Mosul. In the same way as some of the Christian merchants living in Balad depended on influential Mosulawi traders, the Muslims played the role of intermediaries and commission agents for absentee entrepreneurs based in Mosul (14).

In Balad Muslims had the biggest share in the ownership of public services like inns, shops, coffee-shops, baths and mills and also owned most of the houses. Compared with the population figures it appears that houses also represented a profitable source of investment. House properties were an additional source of income and social control for the Muslim traders who would let them to the highest bidder and would be in a position to keep the settlement of new sedentary people in check by refusing to provide housing according to their personal interests (15).

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13. 'Tribal distribution by families - Sinjar Qadha' supplement D to note n.18, p.12, EDM Box IV file 1; Military Report on Mesopotamia (Iraq) Area 1, p.85.

14. Lists of merchants established in Balad as well as of those residing in Mosul dealing with the Sinjar Qadha are included in supplement C to note n.18, 22-4-1932, in doc.s Syro-Iraqi border commission by British and Iraqi assessors, EDM Box IV file 1.

15. In 1932 figures related to the ownership of commercial activities in Balad bear witness of the fast economic development of the Muslim community during the mandate, especially at the expense of the Christians. In Balad 185 shops were owned by Muslims, 46 by Christians and only 4 by Kurds; 4 coffee-shops were run by Muslims, only 1 by Christians; the only existing bath in town was owned by a Muslim, 3 inns were owned by Muslims

The marketing of Sinjari products outside the Mountain constituted the Muslim merchants' main activity and their main source of wealth. Assisted by a substantial inflow of capital from Mosul, returns from trade allowed them or their Mosulawi patrons to acquire landed properties, sometimes entire villages, which were cultivated both by Arab and Kurdish tribesmen. Salim al-Hajj Hamu al-Ibrahim, a Mosulawi landlord, owned several villages in the Sinjar qadha inhabited by Muslims and Yazidis. Similarly, some of the Christians became owners of lands located in the Mountain, like the Syrian Orthodox trader Najib Effendi Franjul who bought the village of Wardiyyah from Hamu Shiru (16). The amount of Sinjari animals and foodstuffs controlled by Arab merchants based either in Sinjar or in Mosul was considerable given that in 1932 some of them insistently voiced their desire for the inclusion of the Mountain in Iraq to the Syro-Iraqi frontier commission on the grounds of the considerable

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and 1 by a Christian while mills were controlled both by Muslims and Yazidis ( 6 Muslim, 1 Yazidi). Muslim constituted 70% of the population of Balad and owned 87% of the houses (320), Yazidis were 12,6% and had the 9% of the houses (60), Christians represented the 17% of the total population and had only 3% share of the housing (20 houses). As far as the Christians were concerned it has to be taken into consideration that a considerable number of those who lived in Sinjar were refugees and therefore had just recently arrived in the Mountain. 'Balad Sinjar', confidential supplement B to note n.18, 22-4-1932, incl docs Syro-Iraqi border commission by the British and Iraqi assessors, pp.1-2, EDM Box IV file 1.

16. Hamu al-Ibrahim owned the Muslim villages of 'Ayn al-Shababit, al-Khaban and al-Shura together with the Yazidi village of al-Thalathat, all located in south-eastern Sinjar. He also had a share in the mixed village of Tappah and Hatimiyyah. Edmonds' Tour Notes (Sinjar 1930's), EDM Box IX file 5; 'Economic Evidence', confidential Supplement A to note n.18, 26-4-1932, incl docs Syro-Iraqi border commission by British and Iraqi assessors, EDM Box IV file 1.

economic interests of the local trading class (17).

External trade, which represented the most widespread and profitable economic activity of the Mountain, was exclusively controlled by this Mosulawi elite, both Muslim and Christian. The growth of the Mosulawi trading community of Sinjar and the remarkable increase in their investments, especially in the town of Balad, can be partly explained by the increasing demand for Sinjari products in Mosul in the second half of the 19th century when the city functioned both as the hub of regional trade and as an international emporium, serving both local needs and the requirements of the world market. In this sense Sinjar's dependence on Mosul as a market had the result of making this remote rural area feel the indirect influence of wider economic developments.

Especially at the end of the 19th century European demand for wool and mohair increased dramatically. On a more regional level, both Ottoman Syria and Egypt developed 'an insatiable appetite for meat' which gave the Mosulawi trading class an incentive to make closer contacts with the tribal and pastoral world of the northern Iraqi hinterland (18). Furthermore in the same period the development of textile production called for an increasing supply of cotton for Mosulawi manufacturers. Although a great deal of cotton yarn was imported from Europe (because of lower prices resulting

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17. Figures provided by these traders to substantiate their demands seem however to be exaggerated. Fortnightly report ending period 7-5-1932, n.10, ref. I/M/23, AIR 23/95.

18. Quote from S.D.Shields 'Regional Trade and 19th century Mosul: revising the role of Europe in the Middle East Economy', IJMES, 23(1991), p.26.

from improved industrial technology) considerable amounts were still obtained from local suppliers. In 1896 the French vice-Consul in Mosul remarked: 'Mosul receives from the villages surrounding it, and especially from the region of Sinjar, approximately 50,000 batmans of cotton thread (1,467,100 pounds), between p 70 and 80 the batman.' (19).

In the 1930's cotton, wool and live animals together with dried figs still represented the major items of export of the Mountain. They were marketed mainly in the town of Mosul as the presence of many traders linked to Mosulawi chalabis clearly indicates. The relationship between a rich group of Muslim merchants and rural Sinjar reflects economic links which had been widespread in Iraq since the 19th century. The Muslim trading class, the prestigious chalabis, usually monopolized the trade in livestock and pastoral products and also tended to establish strong links with the countryside through the acquisition of large plots of land (20).

As far as the Syrian Jazirah was concerned local commercial exchanges were particularly affected by the new international order which followed the end of the Ottoman Empire. The de facto inclusion of Sinjar in the Iraqi state and the presence of a provisional border with Syria running very close to the Mountain had considerable repercussions on the free circulation of Sinjari goods in the area west of the

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19. Ibid., pp.23-24;26-27.

20. Batatu, op.cit., pp.259-260.

Jabal Jaribah (21) .

A comparison of Iraqi and Syrian statistics concerning custom duties levied on goods crossing the border is not really a reliable basis for establishing the volume of trade between the Sinjaris and the inhabitants of the closest Syrian market town, Hasakah. First, in the early 1930's, both Iraq and Syria wished to include the Mountain within their national boundaries. The Iraqi and Syrian figures are thus suspiciously contradictory and indicative of the bias adopted by the two governments took in their dealings with Sinjar in a crucial moment of the border dispute (22). Secondly, these statistics naturally took no account of the considerable contraband trade which had become a common occupation of those Sinjaris and Bedouins settled in the proximity of the border during the mandate.

Nonetheless a few interesting remarks can be made on this subject. Trade between Sinjar and the Syrian Jazirah had definitely declined as a result of the high import duties

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21. The central issue of the provisional border between Syria and Iraq and its wide repercussions on the history of mandatory Sinjar will be discussed in detail in sections IV.3 and V.8. There is no doubt that the partition of the Ottoman Empire had very negative repercussion on the Mosul's trade with Syria. Ibid., p.262.

22. Available figures refer to the years 1930 and 1931 and were presented before the League in 1932 at the time of the final arbitration of the Syro-Iraqi border. British statistics tended to emphasize the volume of trade Sinjar carried out with Mosul, minimizing Sinjari economic relations with the Syrian Jazirah. By contrast French Syrian authorities claimed that Syria had always represented a privileged market for Sinjari products. It is true that the negative repercussions of the war on the trade between Sinjar and Syria were noticeable at least until 1923. The commercial route which linked Mosul to Dair al-Zur via Balad Sinjar was almost paralyzed until then. Economic Considerations: Jebel Sinjar Sector, incl report of the Commission entrusted with the Study of the Frontier between Syria and Iraq, C.578.M.285.1932.VI, pp.34-35; Note submitted by M. Marrades of the Commission of Enquiry, in C.578.M.1932.VI, pp.41-42.

levied both by Syria and Iraq on goods crossing the border (23). Relations between the Sinjaris in Iraq and people living in the Syrian part of the Jazirah were discouraged by the British authorities who viewed the new French-created Syrian towns of Hasakah and Qamishli as centres of anti-British propaganda. Furthermore their inhabitants, mostly Armenians and other Christian refugees from Turkey, had a very bad reputation as the main promoters of contraband trade in the region (24). As a result of this confused situation Mosul strengthened its position as the intermediary market centre between Sinjar and Syria since many Sinjari goods were sent first to Mosul and thence distributed to the Syrian Jazirah. The implication of this was twofold: on one hand the Muslim traders, largely dependent on Mosul, increased their volume of trade especially at the expense of some of their Christian counterparts who started to be associated with the activities of Christian agitators settled in the Syrian Jazirah. On the other the price the average tribesmen received for his products became relatively small since it had to allow for a large margin of profit to the

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23. Import duties levied in Hasakah on products coming from Sinjar were 11% ad valorem on livestock and wool and 25% a.v. on butter and figs. 'Note au sujet des relations commerciales entre les commerçants de Hassetché et les populations du Djebel Sindjar', note n.15, 2-5-1932, incl docs Syro-Iraqi border commission by French and Syrian assessors, BEY 1528.

24. Even those Mardinli Christians who had recently settled in Balad and had relatives in Hasakah were looked at with great suspicion. 'Balad Sinjar' supplement B to Note n.18, p.1; Edmonds' Tour Notes (Sinjar 1930's), EDM Box IX file 5. For the smuggling activities of the Christian communities of Hasakah and Qamishli see: Annexe (i) to confidential supplement C to note n.18, 22-4-1932, incl docs Syro-Iraqi frontier commission by British and Iraqi assessors, EDM Box IV file 1.



middlemen or commission agents both in Mosul and Balad and also take the double cost of transport into account (25).

In Sinjar the greatest bulk of goods exported represented the surplus of the agricultural and pastoral produce of the tribes. In the villages traders purchased those supplies which exceeded local consumption. Such transactions were mainly carried out in kind: tribesmen would supply the trader with wheat, figs, livestock, charcoal, wool or dairy products in exchange for goods not available locally like sugar, coffee, dates, cloth and spirits (26). The tribesmen would often buy goods on credit from Muslims and Christians and pay back their debts after the harvesting or sheep-shearing (27).

Cash was not usually employed in local exchanges of agricultural produce between tribes and dealers, although some Sinjari tribal aghas started to accumulate relatively substantial monetary wealth in the 1920's. This was mainly because of the monthly subsidies which the Government started to grant to some Sinjari leaders in exchange for

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25. Note submitted by M. Marrades, Member of the Commission of Enquiry, stating his proposal regarding the Frontier in the Jebel Sinjar Sector, C.578.M.285.1932.VI, pp.41-42.

26. Given the popularity smoking generally enjoys among the Kurds and the lack of tobacco plantations in Sinjar, a certain amount of imports of tobacco would be expected. Yet it seems that among the Sinjari Yazidis there was a certain prejudice against cigarettes, especially among the members of the religious class of the faqir. 'Route Report - Bridge of Victory. Balad to Jabal Sinjar' by Capt. A.Campbell Munro I.M.S., 15-30 July 1918 incl in memo Office Civil Commissioner Baghdad to Director Arab Bureau Cairo, 23-9-1918, IO L/P&S/10/618.

27. C.578.M.285.1932.VI, p.34.

administrative duties. By and large the use of currency remained confined to purchases which would increase the personal prestige and military might of these chiefs and of their entourage. Tribal aghas and shaikhs generally used cash either to buy arms and ammunition or to acquire lands and properties (28).

In terms of monetary exchange Sinjari traders benefitted to a certain extent from their commercial relations with some of the Bedouin chiefs of the Jazirah. A great deal of trade involving Bedouins and Sinjaris was controlled directly by tribes settled close to the Shammari migration routes and the goods were bartered by the tribesmen without the mediation of their leaders. Nonetheless rich Shammari chiefs would apply for credit to the merchants in Balad and would usually pay for their purchases in cash (29).

Among Sinjari tribes the circulation of locally produced goods did not require the presence of extra-tribal middlemen. Bartering was a widespread practice adopted by virtually all groups but some internal exchanges of products took place on the basis of exchanges of labour. The village represented the primary economic unit and, to a certain extent, it was economically self-sufficient. As noted above, villages had

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28. This was particularly true for the Fuqara' tribe and their leader Hamu Shiru. Nonetheless in the mid-1920's, especially for the purchase of arms and ammunition in cash, tribes settled in northern Sinjar like the Mihirkan and the Haskan intensified their contacts with arm dealers coming from the Turkish territories north of Sinjar.

29. The Shammari leadership together with Jubur and Tayy usually supplied arms to the Sinjari tribesmen. However, at least in the 1920's and early 1930's, the Shammar seemed to have been the only Bedouin tribe to buy in cash from the Baladi traders. Lescot, *Enquête*, p.186; C.578.M.285.1932.VI, p.39; Edmonds' Tour Notes (Sinjar 1930's), EDM Box IX file 5.

generally developed either a diversified exploitation of their lands or close partnerships with adjoining centres in order to be able to cater for the needs of their inhabitants and reduce any economic dependence on other groups to a minimum. However a great deal of sedentaries who owned sheep, especially in western Sinjar, depended on those semi-nomadic tribal units who had control of the extensive grazing grounds and had the necessary skills and training to provide adequate shepherding. This was especially the case with the sedentary population of Balad, Khatuniyyah and al-Hawl: Yazidis, Christians and Muslims employed the semi-nomadic tribes of the east, Samuqah, Qiran and Haskan, as occasional shepherds for their animals (30).

The Sinjari pastoralists also controlled a very important economic resource for the Sinjari trading class. Given the role played by meat and wool which by and large represented the most important items of export of the Mountain, traders relied on Sinjari tribesmen for their supplies of these products. Their relations with the tribes were not only limited to obtaining pastoral products and livestock in exchange for other commodities, but were also

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30. C.578.M.285.1932.VI, p.35; Lescot, op.cit., p.39; Edmonds' Tour Notes (Sinjar 1930's), EDM Box IX file 5. As noted above also in eastern Sinjar existed two small Yazidi tribes whose members were specialized in providing shepherding for the cattle owned by the sedentaires. The most widespread form of contract employed by the two parts involved was that of 'association' (shirk paz). According to this agreement, which was usually stipulated for limited periods of time, the shepherd and the cattle-owner would receive an equal share of milk, butter and wool up to the third day after the sheep-shearing, then the produce would be entirely left to the shepherd until the termination of the contract. Unfortunately there are no further details available about the modalities of implementation of this contract. Lescot, op.cit., pp.139-141.

based on shirk pāz contracts similar to those stipulated between the sedentary peoples of the west and the semi-nomads. As a matter of fact Christian and Muslim merchants dealing with pastoral produce were also sheep-traders and owned large flocks of cattle which they entrusted to local tribesmen on this basis (31). Some of them would trade exclusively with certain groups and villages like the Muslim dealer Fathi 'Abd al-Rahim who dealt extensively with the Samuqah and the Haskan (32).

## II.2 - THE YAZIDI TRIBES OF SINJAR

All the Kurdish population of Sinjar lived organized in tribes in much the same way as many of the Kurds settled outside the Mountain, and it seems likely that this form of social organization had existed since the earliest Kurdish colonization of Sinjar. As mentioned above the new settlers arrived from Kurdistan in small groups which were usually part of larger Yazidi or Sunni Kurdish tribal units, and once settled in the Mountain they tended to maintain their former lifestyle and social organization. However, some changes may

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31. As in the case of the Yazidi semi-nomads a considerable proportion of the flocks which the Iraqi Shammar grazed north and south of Sinjar belonged to Mosulawi owners. British memo to League of Nation, N. E 807/15/89, 27-2-32, EDM Box IV file 1.

32. Edmonds' Tour Notes (Sinjar 1930's), EDM Box IX file 5. Other merchants specialized in sheep trading were Hajj al-'Azzawi residing in Mosul, Ibrahim b. Yahya al-'Azz and Yaqub Hamma Sarsam; 'Economic evidence', supplement A to note n.18, 26-4-32, incl docs Syro-Iraqi border commission by British and Iraqi assessors, EDM Box IV file 1.

have taken place as a result of the process of adaptation to the specific territorial and socio-economic conditions in their new areas of settlement (33).

It is very difficult to give a precise and satisfactory definition of tribe in the context of the Middle East since this term has been applied to a variety of social, economic and political forms of organization. Anthropologists, historians and political scientists have recently proposed a number of different interpretations based on cultural, structural and political parametra in order to facilitate the identification of tribal societies. However, as Tapper has suggested, tribe beyond any definition is 'a state of mind, a construction of reality, a model for organization and action' (34).

By and large tribes have been closely associated to pastoral nomadism. However, as it will become clear in the course of the present discussion on the socio-economic and political structures prevailing in Jabal Sinjar, tribal organizations can function as a viable means of association also among semi-sedentary, mountain and peasants populations.

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33. There is no evidence for the previous history of the Sinjari tribes or for possible transformations in their internal organization. The following discussion will focus on general features of the Yazidi tribes as portrayed in 1920's and 1930's available sources.

34. See I.M.Lapidus, 'Tribes and State Formation in Islamic History'/ R.Tapper, 'Anthropologists, Historians, and Tribespeople on Tribe and State formation in the Middle East'/ B.Tibi, 'The Simultaneity of the Unsimultaneous: Old Tribes and Imposed Nation-States in the Modern Middle East' in P.S.Khoury/ J.Kostiner (eds), Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East, Berkley, 1990, pp.25-47/48-73/127-152. Quote from Tapper, op.cit., p.56.

The word usually employed to indicate a Yazidi tribe was that of 'ashirah, an Arabic word used all over Kurdistan both to define the Kurdish tribes and, when relevant, to emphasize the tribal status of their members as opposed to groups of non-tribal Kurdish people (35). In some cases the word 'ashirah was also used as a synonym for 'confederation' and hence used to describe groups of different tribes loosely connected by social and political links. However, the fact that the fractions of some Kurdish nomadic tribes generally enjoyed a high degree of independence from one another may have led some Western observers to the consideration that they were tribes on their own (36). As will be shown later, the Yazidi 'ashirah shared this feature with the tribes of Kurdistan. Indeed each Yazidi tribe of Sinjar could be regarded as a coalition, a veritable mini-confederation whose primary socio-political units were its individual clans.

The majority of the inhabitants of the Mountain lived organized in tribal units consisting mostly of Yazidi

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35. The name of these non-tribal Kurds varied from place to place. They were usually called guran, misikin or ra'yat. Ra'yat usually refers to the non-tribal Nestorian peasantry subject to the Nestorian tribes of Hakkari, grouped in 5 different 'ashirat. For a discussion on guran and misikin see B.Nikitine, Les Kurdes: étude sociologique et historique, Paris 1956, pp.124-126. M.Van Bruinessen, Agha, Shaikh and State. The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan, London 1992, pp.61;105-121. About ra'yat and 'ashirat in Nestorian lands see Chevallier, Les montagnards, pp.196-206.

36. This is the case of the Jaf tribe examined by Barth and the Bilbas living east of Kirkuk mentioned by Van Bruinessen. Van Bruinessen rightly remarks that the Western perception of tribe and confederation is somewhat biased since it is subject to a preconceived idea that the tribe should be 'a tight, corporate unit'. Van Bruinessen, op.cit., p.61;125. F.Barth, Principles of Social Organization in Southern Kurdistan, Oslo 1953, pp.35-36.

tribesmen but some Yazidi tribes also included some Sunni and heterodox Shi'is Kurds, usually grouped in sections which did not incorporate Yazidis. These tribes were traditionally divided into two main groups: Jawanah and Khurkan (37). There was also existed a tribe which was not included in either of these two groups, the Fuqara', whose members were tribally organized but had a special status since they belonged to one of the Yazidi religious castes (38).

Perhaps at some stage of the history of Sinjari inter-tribal relations the division between Jawanah and Khurkan had political relevance and reflected the existence of two opposing factions. However, at least since the second half of the 19th century, political alliances among the Sinjari tribes did not take this division into account since major coalitions could include tribes of both groups.

Devoid of any relevant political meaning by the early 20th century, the terms 'Jawanah' and 'Khurkan' defined and described existing socio-economic differences among the Sinjari peoples. Tribal members themselves as well as non-tribal inhabitants of the Mountain would employ the terms

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37. This partition was first mentioned by Dr. Forbes in 1834, but it is likely that the terms Jawanah and Khurkan were employed by the local population long before. The fact that in Sinjari tradition the Jawanah are associated with the Shaikhanli Shaikh Sharaf al-Din Muhammad who is believed to have spread the Yazidi religion in Sinjar in the 13th century partly confirms this assumption. Forbes, A visit to the Sinjâr Hills, p.422; Ahmad Beg report, p.1, EDM Box XIX file 5.

38. The Fuqara' are sometimes included in the Khurkan. Damluji, op.cit., p.224. However, given the particular nature of their authority derived from their membership to the Yazidi religious establishment and their relatively recent settlement in Sinjar it is probably more accurate to consider this tribe as a separate unit. See Lescot, Annexe IV to Enquête, pp.260-261.

Jawanah and Khurkan to emphasize the tribal status of a Sinjari and at the same time to make a statement about his lifestyle. These terms were also commonly used to distinguish the sedentary from the semi-nomadic Yazidi or Sunni Kurdish tribesmen. Hence this basic division corresponded to the dual economic differentiation of the population of the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar: Jawanah were the sedentary cultivators and gardeners, Khurkan the semi-nomadic shepherds (39).

The Jawanah tribes were usually settled in eastern Sinjar and occupied both its northern and southern sides where the cultivation of gardens and extensive agriculture was widespread. The Khurkan lived in the west of the Mountain approximately from Sinuni in the north and Wardiyah in the south as far as the Jabal Jaribah near the northern Syrian Jazirah. The Khurkani tribesmen also benefitted from the presence of fertile agricultural lands. In addition the presence of grazing grounds along the ridges of western Sinjar allowed them to develop a semi-nomadic lifestyle which, as stated above, entailed seasonal migrations towards the Jazirah plain.

Hence it appears that the Jawanah/Khurkan division corresponded primarily to a territorial division of the tribes since it referred mainly to the different lifestyle of their population which was determined by the nature of the resources available. In fact it often happens that tribes who live in mountainous areas are defined in territorial terms

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39. Lescot puts much emphasis on this tribal division and its socio-economic relevance. See Lescot, op.cit., pp.137-138.



unlike those nomadic tribal groups who move in more extended spaces and place more emphasis on common descent. In the case of the Sinjari Yazidis it is likely that it was only as a reflection of this that the terms Jawanah and Khurkan came to be associated with the tribal units which occupied certain areas and continued to be used even when entire tribes or sections had moved away from their original lands.

In a number of cases it happened that sections of a tribe lived far apart from the tribal domains traditionally occupied by the central core of the group and shared their lands with members of other tribes. In addition, tribes of minor importance with no precise territorial boundaries would wander around the Mountain and settle in certain areas according to convenience. In such cases the division between Jawanah and Khurkan crossed tribal and territorial boundaries: members of the same tribe could dwell in both Jawanah and Khurkan territory and groups of semi-nomads lived scattered among the sedentary people of eastern Sinjar, especially those who had recently arrived in the Mountain. A close examination of the Sinjari Khurkani tribes well illustrates the diversified relationship between lifestyle, territorial distribution and tribal membership which was a feature of Yazidi tribalism in the Jabal.

The Khurkan group consisted of the major semi-nomadic tribes of Haskan, Samuqah and Qiran, whose settlement followed a north-south direction along the western ridge of the Mountain. They included exclusively Yazidi tribesmen organized in different sections; as a general rule members of

various sections of the tribe shared the same villages (40). Some groups of Haskan, which together with the Qiran represented the most powerful pastoral tribe of the Mountain in the 1920's, were settled among the Jawanah since they were affiliated to the Mihirkan tribe living in eastern Sinjar. Unlike their fellow tribesmen they devoted themselves entirely to agriculture in the village of Bakhalif located near the Mihirkani headquarters of Zarwan. They were all grouped in a separate section known as Hasakayy, which was considered a fraction of the Mihirkan although it seems that its members were still aware of their Haskani origin (41).

Minor Khurkani groups were the Mandikan, Chalkan, Chilkan, Kurkurkan, Rashakan and Haywiriyyah. Although settled in eastern Sinjar and politically linked to the sedentary Habbabat, the mixed Muslim-Yazidi Mandikan were also considered as Khurkani. Its members practised agriculture and itinerant cattle breeding like the large semi-nomadic tribal formations of the west (42). Similarly members of the other two tribes settled in eastern Sinjar, the Rashakan and Haywiriyyah, lived among the Jawanah but were considered Khurkani since they looked after the

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40. In 1932 the Qiran were the most numerous group with 464 families followed by the Samuqah (335) and the Haskan (226). Tribal Distribution by Families - Sinjar Qadha, pp.12-13, EDM Box IV file 1.

41. Damluji, op.cit., p.235; Lescot op.cit., p.259.

42. The Mandikan were a very large tribe consisting of 307 families of which 220 Yazidi. They were divided in six sections, three Yazidi and three Muslim. 'Tribal Distribution by Families - Sinjar Qadha', p.13; Damluji, op.cit., pp.230-232.

cattle of the sedentaries as well as being owners of cattle themselves. They were usually linked to the Mihirkan with whom they shared the villages of Zarwan, Barana, Khan, Tall Yusifka and Juhbal (43). The rest of the tribes belonging to this group were small and usually scattered in north and north-western Sinjar; the Chalkan and the Chilkan, whose members were essentially cattle-breeders, and the Khurkurkan, one of whose sections lived as part of the Samuqah tribe. There was also a group of tribesmen called Dukhiyan who lived close to the Kurkurnani lands in the village of Karsi. Their three main fractions were called Golkan, Haskan and Dawudi, names which bear witness to their mixed and partly extra Sinjari tribal origin, the Dawudi being a section of the Bahramiyyah tribe of Kurdistan (44).

The tribal map of the Jawanah appears to be less fragmented since it included only three major tribes; Habbabat, Mihirkan and Musqurah. Generally speaking Jawanah tribesmen were more permanently linked to the land and were almost full-time sedentary agriculturalists in eastern Sinjar. They were amongst the strongest and most powerful tribes of the Mountain and their leaders exercised considerable control over lands, resources and tribal people. It is mainly for this reason that in the course of time their

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43. Ahmad Beg's report, p.2.

44. Lescot, op.cit., pp.253-255. Lescot mentions the Bahramiyyah tribe of which there is no precise record in available sources concerning Kurdish tribes. However Damluji mentions a Da'wudiyyah tribe living around Diyar Bakr which could be connected to the Da'wudi clan of the Dukhiyan. Damluji, op.cit., p.248. The majority of the above mentioned minor tribes had settled quite recently in the Mountain.

Yazidi aghas were able to increase their personal prestige and military strength by absorbing and including different groups of people who were settled in the area. Minor tribes generally viewed integration into these major groups as a guarantee of protection and economic improvement, especially the possibility of being allotted some plots of the agricultural lands controlled by the tribe.

In comparison with the large semi-nomadic tribes of the west, tribal boundaries in east Sinjar were more permeable to the penetration and assimilation of marginal as well as non-Yazidi groups of tribesmen. Consequently the Jawanah tribes were generally more mixed in their composition and during the mandate they incorporated the majority of the Sunni and 'Ali-Ilahi Kurds living in the Mountain, although they never included Arab tribesmen. It is also true that the Jawanah were more exposed to social contacts with non-Yazidis. Their lands were located in the proximity of Tall 'Afar, more accessible from the Jazirah plain and were more exposed to the migrations of tribal people from Kurdistan because of their situation near the Mosul plain.

In the 1930's the Habbabat had a majority of Yazidis with 95 families of Sunni Kurds together with 210 families of 'Ali-Ilahi Babawat tribesmen whose habits, lifestyle and religious practices had been assimilated almost entirely to those of the Yazidis. The Habbabat were generally settled around Balad Sinjar and two of its sections shared the

village of Bakran with the Mihirkan (45).

The Mihirkan tribe included among its population more than 90% of Yazidi tribesmen, the rest consisting of Sunni Kurds. From the 19th century the Yazidi aghas of the tribe had encouraged refugees both from Kurdistan and western Sinjar to settle in their domains and cultivate their lands. Mihirkani chiefs had long been in control of the rural areas of the north-east with very little interference from other tribal groups. Therefore they were firmly established on their lands and tended to develop feudal relations with their tribesmen, employing them as tenant farmers of the lands they controlled. In the 1930's the Mihirkani groups appeared so tightly organized on a village level that their traditional tribal division into sections with members of common origin was of secondary importance. The Mihirkanis were thus mostly recognised as members of the villages they inhabited and in only a few cases could their precise sub-tribal affiliations be traced: the Hasakayy group of Haskani origin and the Bakiranis, a small Yazidi tribe thought to come from the Shaikhanli Dinadiyyah (46).

By contrast the Habbabat could not achieve comparable control over the lands they occupied since they had settled there more recently. They had occupied Balad around the 1800's and subsequently faced the territorial expansion of the Fuqara' tribe who had compelled the Habbabat tribesmen to

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45. 'Tribal distribution by families - Sinjar Qadha', p.13; Damluji, op.cit., p.238-240; Ahmad Beg's report p.1.

46. Damluji, op.cit., pp.234-235; Lescot, op.cit., pp.169;258-260.

migrate towards marginal areas around the capital by the beginning of the 20th century (47).

The Musqurah were the second largest Yazidi tribal group of Sinjar after the Habbabat. They were settled in the north, to the west of the Mihirkani lands, and lived tightly concentrated in a number of villages located in narrow valleys. Like the Mihirkanis most Musqurah tribesmen were agriculturalists. The bulk of the tribe lived in the village of Taraf where they shared their lands with the Sunni sections of the tribe. The Musqurah consisted of 395 Yazidi families, 89 Sunni Kurds and 2 Shi'i. Their tribal division still echoed their extra-Sinjari origin since the names of some sections of the tribe recalled those of some of the major Yazidi tribes of Kurdistan who had long disappeared. Although the sources do not agree on the division of the Musqurah tribesmen, sections like the Mala Khalati and Dumbali can be turned back to the powerful 16th century Yazidi tribes of the Khaliti and the Dumbali Bakht (48).

As will be discussed in greater detail in sections 4 and

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47. Lescot, op.cit., pp.137;169.

48. Lescot considers the Musqurah and the Mala Khalata as two distinct groups whereas Damluji, although he recognises the different origins of the Musqurah tribal sections, considers them as one tribe. Lescot, op.cit., pp.257-258; Damluji, op.cit., pp.235-237. Both agree on the existence of a fraction called Dambaliyyah which recalls the powerful 16th century Yazidi tribe of the Damabala Bakht of Hakkari origin mentioned by Sharaf al-Din Bidlisi. See Charmoy, op.cit., vol.1 part I p.64; vol.2 part II pp.169 ff. As to the Khaliti (or Khalidi) at the time of Bidlisi they were located between Diyar Bakr and the Van Lake. In the 1940's all the extra-Sinjari Khalati lived in the Van region in a district called Khalatiyyah. Damluji, op.cit., p.248; Charmoy, op.cit., vol.1. part I, p.61.

5 of this chapter the Fugara' were a tribal group consisting entirely of faqirs, a priestly order to which entry was automatic by birth but which also admitted disciples by initiation. The group was not usually included among either the Jawanah or Khurkan since most of its members came from tribes which had migrated to the Mountain in the latter part of the 19th century. The majority of the Fugara' tribesmen lived in two villages located in Khurkani lands; Bardahali in the north-west and Jaddalah in the south, where a number of Christians were also settled (49). As stated above, Christians were not integrated in the tribes although they had close economic links with the tribal milieu. This was especially true for the Fugara'. During the period of the mandate they were the richest and more powerful tribe of the Mountain. Their economic activities were diversified and had started to develop in the early 1900's when the first groups of Yazidi faqirs led by Hamu Shiru began to constitute themselves as an economically independent group (50). They settled in the area, became agriculturalists as well as cattle breeders and acquired large flocks of cattle. At the same time they continued to enlarge their base of consensus among the local population by using their influence as men of

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49. In 1932 in Bardahali lived 185 Yazidi and 15 Christian families. In the same period Jaddalah numbered 750 Yazidi, 15 Sunni Kurdish and 25 Christian families. 'Sketch map of Sinjar Qadha showing religious distribution' incl in EDM Box IV file 1.

50. Before the arrival of Hamu, Sinjari faqirs drew their support from the alms of the lay Yazidi population of the Mountain, as was customary among the other groups of faqirs scattered in Yazidi territories outside Sinjar. The most influential faqir in the period preceding Hamu's raise to power was his father who had arrived in the Mountain from Shaikhan. See pp.109-110.

religion. Thus the support of Christian traders (both in the villages the Fuqara' shared with them and in the town of Balad) became essential for the increase of their economic power. It allowed them to obtain favourable conditions for the marketing of their produce outside Sinjar and to keep in check the production and distribution of Sinjari pastoral and agricultural products coming from other districts which was usually controlled by the Christian community of Balad (51). Sinjari faqirs belonging to sections of the tribes based in Jaddalah and Bardahali were also settled in other villages but maintained close political and economic links with the leading groups of the tribe. A section of the Fuqara' lived in Mihirkani territory and was considered a fraction of the Mihirkan. Its members shared the eastern village of Ishkaftah with the pastoral Hawiriyyah tribesmen. In addition the two northern Sinjari villages of Millik and Sima Hastar close to the Haskani lands were entirely inhabited by Fuqara'. They were not affiliated to any local tribe since their chiefs were related to that section of the tribe led by Hamu Shiru, known as the Mala Shiru, whose headquarters were in Bardahali and Jaddalah (52).

In comparison with other tribes the Fuqara' did not control large areas of the countryside . The lands they cultivated were mainly located around the principal villages and did not generally extend to the rural districts. This

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51. ''Asha'ir al-Yazidiyyah fi Jabal Sinjar', p.7, EDM Box XIX; Damluji, op.cit., p.229.

52. 'Tribal Distribution by Families - Sinjar Qadha', pp.12-13; Lescot, op.cit., p.254.



essentially 'urban' settlement of the Fuqara' tribesmen came mainly as a result of the recentness of their establishment in Sinjar as a recognised tribal unit. In the well protected rural areas of the north, lands and resources were under the control of the Mihirkan, Musqurah and Haskan, all tribes which had long settled in the area. It was therefore extremely difficult for the Yazidi faqirs to penetrate into these territories and lay claims to their resources since their customary exploitation had long been granted to those groups which already lived there. However, some influential members of the tribe were able to enlarge their base of consensus in certain areas by acting as mediators in the settlement of disputes and feuds involving Yazidi tribesmen. Their personal prestige derived mainly from their status as men of religion and was undoubtedly strengthened by a careful policy of matrimonial alliances which represented one of the kernels of Hamu's policy in the Mountain at least since the early 1900's. Marriages were arranged between faqirs and members of other Sinjari groups. Membership of the tribe was then also extended to those Yazidis who did not belong to the faqir class by birth, so that the size of the group increased dramatically in a couple of decades (53). However, the close alliance between the Fuqara' and the British authorities during the mandate allowed them to occupy the

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53. See pp.95-97. By 1932 the Fuqara' tribe in Sinjar consisted of 240 families divided into six fractions. Although we do not have precise information about the number of faqirs settled in Sinjar at the beginning of the century we can suppose that it was very low since it included just Hamu and his entourage. 'Tribal distribution by families - Sinjar Qadha', p.12.

rich village of Jaddalah after a long dispute with the local Muslim population and to increase the base of their economic power thanks to the substantial monthly subsidy allotted to their chief Hamu Shiru (54).

### II.3 - GENERAL FEATURES

The internal structure of the Kurdish tribes presents various degrees of complexity, as appears from the examples which have been studied and analyzed in detail. Differences in tribal organization are due to various factors: areas of settlement, which had an obvious influence on the lifestyle of the tribesmen; socio-economic relations with neighbouring groups; their links with the central authorities, and finally the various historical circumstances which had contributed to diversify existing links both among tribesmen and between tribesmen and their leadership (55).

However, there are some common features which can be considered as fundamental to the Kurdish way of life. Thus

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54. The Jaddalah dispute and the position of Shiru vis-à-vis the British and Iraqi authorities will not be dealt here given their marked political implications. See sections IV.1/5; V.3/7.

55. The existing literature about the social and political organization of Kurdish tribes is scarce and limited to certain areas. See as best contributions: F.Barth, Principles of Social Organization in Southern Kurdistan, Oslo 1953; E.R.Leach, Social and Economic Organization of the Rowanduz Kurds, London 1940; P.Rondot, 'Les tribus montagnardes de l'Asie Antérieure. Quelques aspects sociaux des populations Kurdes et Assyriennes', BEQ, (6)1936, pp.1-50; idem, 'Quelques aspects du peuplement de la Haute-Djeziré', BEQ, 2(1932), pp.53-66; W.Rudolph, 'Grundzuge sozialer Organisation bei den west-iranischen Kurden', Sociologus, 17/1(1967), pp.19-39; M.Van Bruinessen, Agha, Shaikh and State. The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan, London 1992.

Van Bruinessen, after having denied the existence of a 'typically Kurdish' form of social organization, admits that 'Certain patterns, however, can be observed in widely different systems, and I shall treat those first, as basic to the real forms of social organization' (56). In the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar these patterns can be sketched out and considered as the basis of the socio-economic life of all the Kurdish inhabitants of the Mountain.

The very existence of the Yazidi tribes centred around three main notions which constituted the backbone of the patterns of social organization mentioned by Van Bruinessen: kinship, territory and economy. In addition there were particular features which contributed to set the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar apart from other known Kurdish tribal organizations.

Yazidi people recognised themselves as members of the various tribes on the basis of their blood relations. It was kinship in the smaller units (households, lineages) and real or fictitious common descent in the largest groups (clans) that provided the frame of the segmentary structure of the tribes.

Yazidi tribes were generally identified with a certain territory but this did not always correspond to physical reality. As noted in the context of the main division between the Jawanah and the Khurkan confederations, sections of a tribe could live away from their traditional tribal domains, and certain minor groups tended to change their dwelling

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56. Van Bruinessen, op.cit., p.50.

places according to convenience. It could also happen that the location of whole tribes changed as a result of internal struggles. At the beginning of the 19th century the tribes were competing to seize Balad and the very fertile lands surrounding the town. The Mandikan, who were settled in Bara and Sikaniyyah at that time, occupied Balad and ousted the Haskan who were compelled to move to the north in the lands around Sinuni. Subsequently the Habbabat replaced the Mandikan who finally settled south-east of Balad where they were still living at the beginning of the 20th century (57).

The tribe represented an important economic unit, although the real centres of the economic life of the Mountain were the villages, both among the sedentaries and the semi-nomads. The composition of the population of the villages could vary a lot and, as has been explained, could include members of various tribes. However, in the 1920's and 1930's divisions along tribal lines were still very evident at the level of individual villages and contemporary sources identify villagers by their tribal affiliation (58).

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57. Lescot Enquête, p.137. Murdo Kennedy MacLeod, a RAF chaplain who visited Sinjar in the 1920's, remarked: 'Tribe, as applicable to them, bears little of the patriarchal magnificence involved when the term is applied to the great Shammar tribe of the surrounding Mesopotamian desert. Tribalism among the Sinjari Yazidis largely approximates to village esprit.' K.M. MacLeod, The Yezidis, or 'Devil-Worshippers', of Assyria, Ph.D Univ. of Edinburgh, 1933, p.16.

58. The only available source which gives a fairly detailed description of the structure of the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar in the period under consideration is Lescot. However, Lescot's enquiry is largely based on observations made among the semi-nomadic tribes of eastern Sinjar and is therefore only partially applicable to the sedentaries of the west. Nonetheless his main subdivision can be taken as a point of reference since it seems that the process of sedentarization did not have any major

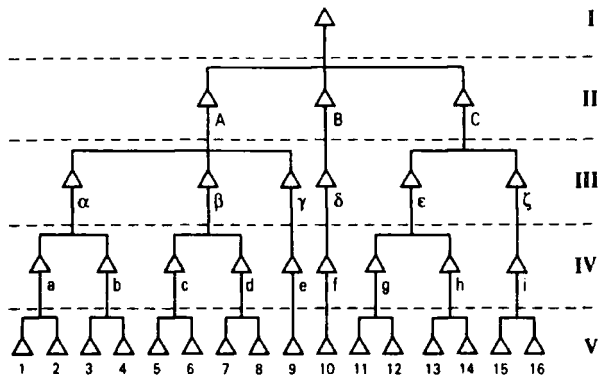
The theoretical model provided by Van Bruinessen, which can be considered as representative of the basic structure of any Kurdish tribe, can be employed to explain the basic subdivisions of the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar. This model represents a simplified segmentary lineage structure which can also be read as a lineage tree (59). Different levels of organization expressed the kinship-based, segmentary character of the Yazidi tribal units of Sinjar. These levels roughly correspond to those illustrated above (60).

In the Yazidi tribe the smallest social unit was the household which grouped members belonging to a same family group (V). A group of several households constituted a bra,

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repercussions on the basic structure of the Western tribes. See Lescot, op.cit., pp.158-166.

59.



Segmentary structure/ horizontal rows correspond to levels of organization, each triangle to a social unit: (I)tribe,(II)clan,(III)lineage,(IV)sub-lineage,(V)household. Lineage tree/horizontal rows correspond to generations, each triangle to single tribesmen. Van Bruinessen, op.cit., p.52.

60. The names which define groups and sub-groups in the Yazidi tribes imply kinship. The smaller units bear Kurdish names (bra, Kurdish for brother; bav, Kurdish for father) while the tribe is called after the Arabic word 'ashirah. The use of foreign words to indicate very large units like tribes is very common in Kurdistan. Van Bruinessen, op.cit., pp.62-64; Lescot, op.cit., pp.159;161.

a sort of extended family whose members traced their descent to a common ancestor but did not actually act as an independent political unit. Kin ties represented the base of allegiance among the members of the bra and entailed a series of common responsibilities, perhaps most notably the communal payment of the blood price for a murder committed by one of its associates (61). Hence the bra was primarily a social unit like the lineage or sub-lineage in the Van Bruinessen model (III,IV) where kinship represented the base of the group's cohesion without it necessarily having any particular political awareness or identity.

In Sinjar this political awareness existed in the next largest group, the bav, which included greater or lesser numbers of bra and corresponded to the level of social organization occupied by the clan in the theoretical scheme (II). The bav rather than the 'ashirah' represented the primary political unit of the Mountain. In the context of the same 'ashirah' different bavs could act independently from each other, which resulted in a degree of instability in political alliances inside the tribe which in its turn had wide repercussions on relations among major tribal units and constituted one of the most recurrent features of the post WWI history of Sinjar. For example in March 1925, during the rebellion of Dawud al-Dawud which created a great deal of turmoil among the Yazidi tribes, those sections of the Qiran tribe living in the rich villages of Majnuniyyah and Wardiyyah controlled by the Fuqara' sided with Hamu Shiru and

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61. Lescot, op.cit., pp.161-163.

refused to recognise the authority of their 'own' tribal leader Shaikh Khidr. On this occasion they repeatedly attacked Qirani tribesmen living in the neighbouring village of Sakiniyyah and pledged allegiance to Hamu Shiru hoping to obtain land and water concessions from the powerful Fuqara' leader (62). The stability of these new alliances could vary according to a number of circumstances but the fact that in the 1920's and 1930's some names of bavs of the Yazidi tribes still recalled the names of other tribal units living in Sinjar is evidence of the extent to which this practice was widespread in the past and could lead to the formation of permanent coalitions (63).

From the perspective of the tribesmen who belonged to the 'original' nucleus of the tribe the presence of groups which were considered part of the tribe but at the same time had retained their own specificity made it easy to accept newcomers. It is mainly thanks to the flexibility of the bav system that the Sinjari tribes, especially in the east, became very heterogeneous.

The size of the bav could vary greatly depending on the prevailing economic activities of its members. Generally speaking the semi-nomads tended to have smaller bavs given the necessity for a certain degree of mobility during the season of their pastoral migrations and usually lived concentrated in the same areas. In the case of the Samuqah

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62. Memo SSO Mosul to Air HQ Baghdad, 23-3-1925, n.n., AIR 23/143.

63. This is the case of the bavs called Korkorkan and Qiran part of the Samuqah tribe and those of the Haskan and Fuqara' living among the Mihirkanis. See Annexe IV to Lescot, op.cit., pp.251-261.

tribe, for example, all its tribal sections concentrated in the village of Bara which allowed a better coordination of their movements in the season of their pastoral migrations (64).

In the case of the sedentary tribes of the east the bavs formed larger groups, since more members helped to consolidate the presence of the group on the land and contributed to maximize the exploitation of its resources. Nonetheless the bav did not coincide precisely with the territorial division of the population at a village level. Even very powerful bavs would usually share their villages with members of other groups (65).

According to Van Bruinessen's account of the social structure of the tribes of northern Kurdistan, the bav usually corresponds to a division of the tribe at sub-village level but it does not correspond to what is generally referred to as a clan. It is merely a shallow lineage, a sort of enlarged family reinforced by unrelated adherents, a relatively small social unit whose members are concentrated in just one village (66). It is always difficult to compare the terminology used to define the levels of organization of Kurdish tribes. Different names can be employed in different areas and the same term can assume

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64. In this instance a Yazidi bav can be compared with the khel, or migratory unit, mentioned by Barth when discussing the Jaf confederation. Barth, op.cit., pp.38-40.

65. The best example is provided by a bav of the Mihirkan, the 'Estena, whose members occupied five different villages in the Mihirkani lands. Lescot, op.cit., p.160.

66. Van Bruinessen, op.cit., pp.62-65.



slightly different meanings according to various contexts. However, it seems that in the case of the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar the bavs are veritable clans, both from a structural and functional point of view (large size of the groups, common political action, diversified territorial distribution of its members) (67). A similar example may be found among the Kurdish Omeran tribe settled between Mardin and Nusaybin which Rondot studied in the 1930's. Bavs belonging to the two main groups of the tribe, the Etmankhan and Mahmudkhan, shared several villages and represented quite distinct political and social units (68).

Major bavs belonging to powerful tribes like the Habbabat and the Fuqara' had the honorific title of mala. In the Kurdish milieu the name (mala) referred to tribal groups which usually included only kin-related tribesmen. These pure lineages usually derived their power from prestigious ancestry, especially holy personages or famous temporal chiefs. In the case of the Fuqara' the privileged social standing of the members of their mala was legitimized by religion: the various fractions of the tribe were named after prominent Yazidi faqirs who lived or were still living in Sinjar. The bavs of the Habbabat tribe acquired the status of mala as a result of their political and economic influence which increased considerably at the beginning of the 18th

or  
Mala  
ملا

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67. For a general discussion of the different usages and interpretations of terms describing tribal subdivisions in Kurdistan see Ibid., pp.59-64.

68. Rondot, 'Les tribus montagnardes de l'Asie antérieure', pp.1-50. About the Omeran see Ibid., pp.16-27.

century when the tribe occupied Balad and its surroundings (69). In principle the 'nobility' of the members of a mala should have represented an obstacle to the integration of tribesmen born outside the group. In practice interests dictated by circumstances prevailed and the mala in Sinjar ceased to be a pure lineage group, since it included a number of unrelated adherents who gradually acquired full membership. The development of the Fuqara' tribe is a case in point: their need to increase their numbers quickly in order to enlarge their social and economic prestige legitimized the extension of tribal membership to Yazidis who did not belong to the religious families of the faqir.

Generally speaking the very character of a segmentary structure is based on kinship affiliation. Order and stability within such a system is provided by the preservation of the past in terms of genealogies which, through the idea of common ancestors, legitimize the existence of a structure such as a tribe, from its smaller to its larger subdivisions. The principal features of the Yazidi bav and mala which indicate that membership of and admission to a Yazidi tribe was generally open, imply that the creation of fictitious kinship ties with the dominant groups was a common practice in Sinjar. This obviously entailed a certain flexibility and lack of precision in the records of the

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69. In the 1930's all the bavs of both the Habbabat and the Fuqara' had the recognised status of mala. It is difficult to detect the exact subdivisions of these two tribes since existing sources are quite contradictory. Edmonds in 1936 gives the following sections for the Fuqara' tribe: Mala Hamu, Mala Jandu, Mala Zaru, Mala Usu, Mala Hasan, Mala Alu. Edmonds' Tour Notes - Sinjar 1936, EDM Box X file 1.

precise genealogical past of the tribes (70). As a matter of fact few Sinjari chiefs could enumerate more than five ancestors, including themselves. This was true even in the case of very powerful tribal aghas like the Mihirkani Dawud al-Dawud. Among major tribes like the Musqurah, Habbabat and Samuqah there were various oral traditions about the putative common ancestors whose offspring were the founders of the various sub-sections of the tribes, although these have to be considered as simple folk tales given their legendary and non-historical character (71). However, while blood relations represented a source of common identity for the various groups, it seems that tribal affiliation was determined mainly by a number of variables which largely reflected territorial, economic and political circumstances.

Social relations among the Sinjari Kurds functioned ~~exclusively~~ in the context of the tribes. There were no non-

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70. Unlike what usually happened among Bedouin tribes where kinship ties were very much emphasized and strictly preserved in genealogies. Nonetheless even in major Arabic tribal formations there existed groups of affiliates who were able to 'create' fictitious blood links with the dominant groups. See for example E.E.Evans-Pritchard, The Sanusi of Cyrenaica, Oxford 1963, p.57 where he mentions a similar process called laff.

71. The common ancestor of the Samuqah was a Kombel b. Wuski b. Samuqah who settled in Sinjar and had four sons (Mahmud, Khalifa, Wuski and Hamu) who gave their names to four of the bavs of the tribe. As to the common ancestor of the Habbabat he was called 'Etto; similarly, the bavs were called after the names of his offspring. Nonetheless as noticed above some bavs of the tribes still preserved the names of their original groups like those of the Qiran and Korkorkan among the Samuqah. Lescot, op.cit., p.161,167. For the Musqurah see 'Asha'ir al-Yazidiyyah fi Jabal Sinjar, (Arabic, typescript 19pp.) p.2, EDM Box XIX file 5. Ancestors could be traced back with a certain precision only in the context of the smallest units, households and bra.

tribal groups in the rural areas of the Mountain, as was sometimes the case in other areas inhabited by Kurdish tribes. At least in principle, the status of each Sinjari Kurd was equal; either as a Khurkan or Jawanah he was a recognised member of a tribal unit. Hence the basic social dichotomy between the tribal and non-tribal population which was a cause of socio-economic discrimination in some areas of Kurdistan was extraneous to Sinjari society in the period under consideration.

Within the tribes there were differences in status (lay/religious members), office (chiefs of tribes and fractions/ordinary tribesmen) and wealth, although at the level of the lay tribal population it does not seem that Sinjari society was much stratified. This relative equality can be partly explained by the importance of each single tribesmen for the very survival of the whole community, both in economic and military terms. The presence of groups of tribesmen of inferior status would have created the potential for social conflicts, jeopardizing the unity of the tribes in circumstances when communal action was required, either against the government, often trying to impose its authority over lands and people, or against attacks from nomads moving across the Jazirah plain.

In Sinjar the household represented the primary economic and fighting unit. At the level of the single household all tribesmen depended on the will of their tribal aghas or village mukhtars, who decided upon the allotment of tribal lands, water and so forth. However, except in Mihirkhani

territory where it seems that some tribal chiefs started to use tribesmen as hired manpower to cultivate lands which they controlled in the early 20th century, land was considered in principle as the common property of the tribe and not as the personal domain of individual chiefs, at least until the arrival of the British. Therefore in the rural areas of Sinjar peasants cultivated small plots essentially as free-holders since whatever their actual legal status was it is very likely that the Sinjari lands were considered mulk (72). This meant that to a great extent most of the tribal population controlled its 'own' lands and resources. In addition to this in each plot of land members of the household usually combined agriculture with stock-farming. Few groups of tribesmen practised strict economic specialization since the exploitation of the resources of the Mountain, concentrated in a limited space, was maximized by a process of combining crop-growing, cattle-breeding and the cultivation of gardens at the level of the single family group among both the eastern and western tribes, although it is true that there was a division between semi-nomadic and sedentary and that the members of certain tribes practised agriculture rather than stock-farming. However this division did not generally cut across single tribal units but marked a tribe as a whole. In some instances members of certain

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72. This can be inferred by the nature of the cultivation of the Mountain, which was predominantly intensive. In the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire the largest concentration of mulk was in Lebanon where orchards and vineyards predominated. However in the late Ottoman period certain developments occurred as a result of the application of the Land Code. See p.133-134.

minor Yazidi pastoral tribes provided shepherds for the flocks of richer and more powerful groups and developed political and economic links with them. Although no precise information is available, it is almost certain that they never become subordinated to their masters, especially as these tribesmen kept their separate identity over time and were able to give their support to rival groups according to circumstances (73).

As well as embodying the main productive unit, each household also contributed to the building up of the military strength of the tribe since it also functioned as the main fighting unit. Provided he could afford to purchase a rifle, each Sinjari male was generally allowed to carry weapons and therefore able to protect his life and properties as well as contributing to the maintenance of public security (74).

Yazidi tribes then appear to be open, flexible and relatively egalitarian as a result of the system of the semi-independent bay and of the relative equality enjoyed by its members. This came as a natural adaptation to the particular territorial, demographic and political situation of the Mountain. For this reason they were able to survive and maintain their position in Sinjar for centuries, functioning as strong corporate bodies able to mobilize a great number of people in case of external threat. However, the advent of a

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73. This is the case for the Rashakan, Haywiriyyah, Chalkan, Chilkan.

74. Tribal lists referring to the 1920's and early 1930's which include population figures and armed men confirm this. See tribal lists included in Damluji, op.cit., pp.224-241 and in Military Report on Mesopotamia. Area 1, pp.146-149.

joint British-Arab administration after the downfall of the Ottoman Empire brought about some important changes especially for the position of the Yazidi leadership vis-à-vis the newly constituted central authorities.

#### II.4 - THE PRESENCE OF THE MEN OF RELIGION

In the early 20th century the presence in the Jabal Sinjar of locally based Yazidi men of religion was considerable, especially the shaikhs and faqirs, some of whom were to assume a determining political influence during the British mandate. All the different classes of priesthood which are generally indicated as part of the Yazidi religious establishment were represented in Sinjar and as happened in the religious centre of the community in the district of Shaikhan by and large they constituted endogamous groups (75).

Members of the Yazidi clergy living in Shaikhan, whose activities were concentrated around the shrine of the Sufi shaikh 'Adi b. Musafir and the residence of the Yazidi Mir,

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75. There existed five distinct religious classes whose members were called ruhan as opposed to the lay population which constituted the group of the muridin. These were the shaikhs, the pirs, the faqirs, the qawwals, and the kochaks. The role of shaikhs (see pp.86-95), faqirs (see pp.95-97) and qawwals (pp.259-263) will be discussed in detail below since they alone are relevant to the history of Sinjar during this period. As far as the two other groups, the pirs were usually in charge of celebrating weddings and funerals and of organizing the celebrations for the Yazidi religious festivities. However, they devoted the majority of their lives to meditation and prayer. The kochaks was a Yazidi religious class whose members could be recruited from the muridin. Their prestige was usually attached to their supposed supernatural powers which enabled them to interpret dreams and to forecast the future.

the supreme religious and temporal authority of the community who resided in the Shaikhanli village of Ba'adri, would occasionally visit the Sinjari tribes providing the main link between the two groups. These contacts not only helped to reinvigorate religious feeling among the population but also served as a fairly efficient intelligence network between the two separate strongholds of Yazidism in Iraq. This was especially the case of the qawwals, belonging to the only Yazidi religious class whose members lived in two villages, Bahzani and Ba'ashiqah, rather than being scattered among the Yazidi populations. The qawwals used to visit the Mountain twice a year as special envoys of the Mir who entrusted them with the collection of the alms that each Yazidi commoner had to pay to the sacred image of Malak Ta'us, the Peacock Angel, considered by the believers as possessing the true spirit of God and often identified by Muslims and by Western observers with the devil (76). Other members of the Shaikhanli priesthood would visit the Sinjari villages where they often had relations but their presence had no particular religious significance.

The Mir of Shaikhan, who was the temporal and religious head of the community, had no permanent representative in Sinjar although the northern village of Karsi has often been indicated as the seat of his local delegate. However at the

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76. In Yazidi doctrine Ta'us is presented as the alter ego of God, a sort of executor of His will who also acts as intermediary between the Almighty and the believers. His presence has often been viewed as a proof of the dualism of the Yazidi conception of the universe. However, Ta'us' relationship with God does not seem to implicate a good-evil opposition. See G.Gasparro, 'I miti cosmogonici degli Yezidi', Numen, 21(1974)/22(1975), pp.197-227/24-41.



end of 1912, well before the arrival of the British, a cousin of Mir 'Ali Beg (1899-1913), Isma'il Beg Chol, took up permanent residence in the Mountain and entered into close relations with the leader of the Yazidi tribe of Fuqara', Hamu Shiru (77). Like other members of the Mir's family he did not hold any religious office but the prestige he enjoyed among the population was largely connected with the nobility of his descent, since, according to Yazidi tradition, his ancestors were closely related to 'Adi b. Musafir. He became considerably involved in Sinjari politics although he was never able to achieve a paramount position in the Mountain. During his long stay in Sinjar which only ended with his death in 1933 he was inclined to make use of religious slogans and propaganda to increase his personal power among the local population and in some adjoining Yazidi communities which he used to visit. The later developments of his life convey a general impression of an insincere and flamboyant, as well as opportunistic, commitment to the Yazidi religion since his main concern seemed to be to obtain a substantial share of the revenues of the Mir Sa'id Beg, who succeeded his father 'Ali in 1913 and ruled the Yazidis until the end of the mandate (78).

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77. Isma'il arrived in Sinjar for the first time in 1908. For the circumstances which accompanied his permanent settlement in the Mountain see Isma'il b. Abdi, al-Yazidiyyah: qadiman wa hadithan, Beirut 1934, pp.4 ff.; French transl of anon., (no title), Dar al-salam (Baghdad), 1918 c.a, memo Consul de France en Mesopotamie to Ministère Affaires Étrangères, 29-7-1918, n.143, MAE 11.

78. In his autobiography Isma'il claims to have been guided throughout all his life by the Peacock Angel, the main Yazidi deity. He also sometimes presents himself in a role very similar to that of a religious shaikh engaged both in the solution of disputes among the tribes and in the

The local Yazidi priesthood lived integrated in the tribes and had very sporadic contacts with Shaikhan. They were usually limited to the yearly pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Shaikh 'Adi which was the principal religious duty of all Yazidi believers and assembled a great number of laymen and religious leaders at the beginning of October. Especially after the second half of the 19th century a marked sense of separate religious identity started to gain ground in the Mountain which was perceived by the Yazidi believers as specifically Sinjari. Its development was indeed intimately connected with the growth and consolidation of the temporal power of a number of local shaikhs and faqirs among certain Yazidi tribes.

#### Shaikhs

The local Yazidi shaikhs had an established reputation among the population. They generally belonged to groups long scattered throughout various districts of Sinjar and although they considered themselves Sinjaris they claimed to be connected with holy families of Shaikhanli origin. However, it is difficult to establish historically whether all the shaikhly families established in Sinjar came originally from Shaikhan or whether a 'pure' Sinjari dynasty emerged sometime after the Yazidi conquest of the Mountain.

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religious instruction of some commoners. Isma'il b. 'Abdi, op.cit., pp.1-72. He also composed some Yazidi prayers whose publication is uncertain. A draft of these is included in EDM Box IV file 1. Political and economic aspects concerning the mirship which affected Jabal Sinjar in the period of the mandate and the role of Isma'il are discussed in sections V.5/V.6/V.7.

The holy lineages to which all shaikhs belonged, both in Sinjar and in Shaikhan, were named after eponymous Shaikhs whom the tradition recorded as the Arab companions of 'Adi b. Musafir' in Lalish. These eponymous shaikhs came to acquire a holy status in view of their closeness to the founder of the Yazidi religion and they were the objects of great veneration among all Yazidi believers since they were thought to be the successors of 'Adi, considered the representative on earth of Malak Ta'us. According to some traditions Ta'us was the head of a supreme council which included nine angels who came to be identified with the same eponymous shaikhs through a process of 'transfer' or incarnation of divine powers in certain figures of religious standing which is typical of some heterodox shi'i movements (79). In Sinjar the Yazidi shaikhs were aware of their Shaikhanli origin since they accepted the tradition linking their families to Shaikh 'Adi and his companions. However, as was the case for the tribal aghas, the genealogical past of each shaikh was confused and was generally only traceable to his direct local ancestors who came to be linked arbitrarily to legendary

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79. These holy lineages named after the eponymous saints were: family of Hasan (also called al-Sin and therefore identified with the moon), Fakhr al-Din, Siraj al-Din, Sharaf al-Din, 'Amad al-Din, Nasir al-Din, Shamsa (identified with the sun), Abu Bakr and Mand. These families were grouped in three branches (Qatani, Shamsani and Adani) which partly echoed the two separate legendary lines of the Arabs (Qatani and Adani). They were also associated to different tribal backgrounds: Adani were Hakkari, Qatani Khalti and the Shamsani Khatari. However, there is a certain confusion as to the exact patronymic and division of their various branches especially in relation to the first and second generation ancestors. H.Field, 'The Northern Jazirah' in The Anthropology of Iraq, Cambridge (Mass.) 1951, part II n.1, p.8; C.J.Edmonds, A Pilgrimage to Lalesh, London 1967, p.31; Damluji, op.cit., p.41; Ahmad, The Yazidis: Their Life and Beliefs, p.332.

Shaikhanli figures (80).

The Sinjari shaikhs were not hierarchically subordinate or dependent on those settled in Shaikhan and in consequence there was no consistent network of relations between members belonging to the same shaikhly family living in the two areas which could legitimize the prestige and power of certain shaikhs operating among the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar. In theory the relations between the shaikhs and the tribes had been built upon a network of tribal affiliations which connected certain families of shaikhs to different tribal groups (81). These affiliations, which were legitimized by religious tradition, were probably the result of an accepted practice which happened to have linked a shaikh and his offspring to a specific tribe or tribal section over time. However, in practice a shaikh could cater for the needs of muridin (disciples/commoners) who belonged to clans or villages outside the traditional jurisdiction of his family. The phenomenon was very widespread in the 1920's and 1930's as we can infer from Lescot:

'.. il est rare que tous les membres d'une tribu, voire d'un clan relèvent d'un même supérieur; par contre, les murid de chaque sexe sont dispersés dans les villages et dans le

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80. Even powerful shaikhs like Shaikh Khidr of the Qiran and Khalaf of the Haskan tribe could not provide coherent genealogies. See O.Sebrî/S.Wikander 'Un témoignage kurde sur les Yézidis du Djebel Sindjar', Orientalia Suecana, 2(1953), pp.116-117.

81. See 'The Tribes with Their affiliations' Appendix I to Edmonds, op.cit., pp.79-80 dealing with the tribes of Sinjar. According to Edmonds even the Yazidi tribes of Shaikhan, Silafani and Zummar (two districts located in the liwa of Mosul lying north east of Sinjar between the Mountain and the area of Zakhu) were traditionally affiliated to certain families of shaikhs. Ibid., pp.80-81.

districts parfois très éloignés les uns des autres.'(82).

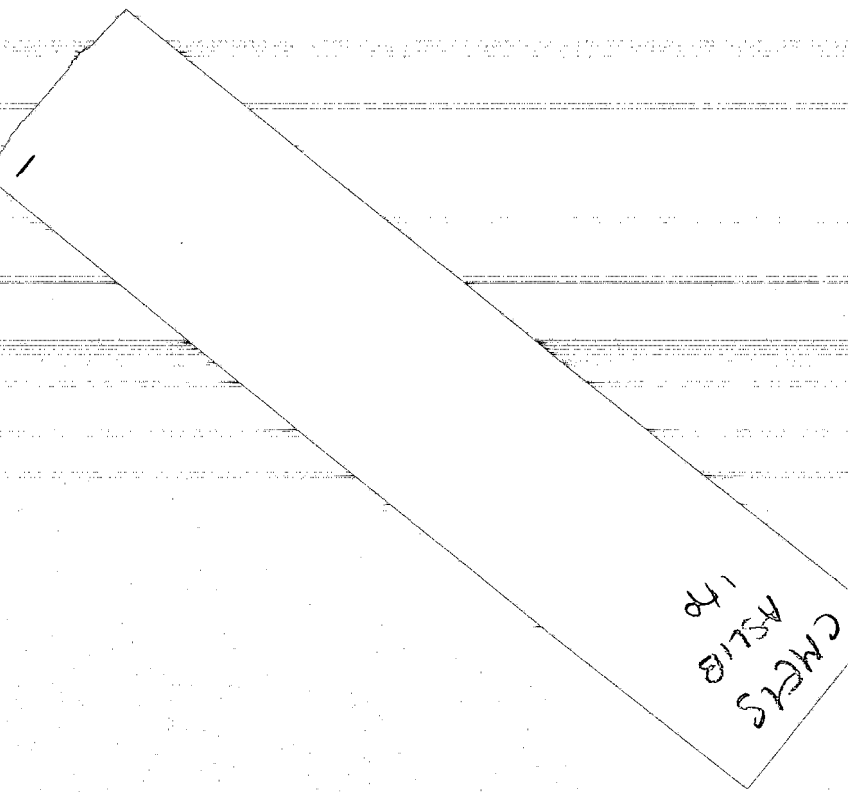
The scattered distribution of the followers of a shaikh was partly the result of one of the main social functions fulfilled by this class of Yazidi priests, that of mediating. Whenever local conflicts or disputes occurred involving members of different tribes which could not be solved by the authority of the lay tribal chieftains, the shaikh intervened trying to reach an agreement between the two parties. It often happened that some tribesmen, impressed by the personal qualities of a particular mediator, would decide to become his supporters and sometimes chose to place themselves under his patronage, thus contravening traditional rules of affiliation (83).

Generally speaking the role of the shaikhs in Sinjar had been confined to the religious sphere. They lived among the tribesmen and functioned as the spiritual guides of the community, taking charge of religious instruction and of the organization of the Yazidi religious community at a local level. They sometimes celebrated marriages and funerals and were often entrusted with the guardianship of sanctuaries which were visited on a more or less regular basis by the believers and in certain instances also by the non-Yazidi

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82. Lescot, op.cit., p.87.

83. As will be explained later on this was also the major cause of the growing influence of some shaikhs upon the temporal affairs of the tribes.



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population of Sinjar (84). The term murid, when employed to define a shaikh's disciple, specified a mainly spiritual relationship. However, the average tribesmen would be more inclined to accept the authority of a shaikh if the latter's actions could appeal to certain beliefs widespread among the populations of the countryside. In many instances the shaikh had to give proof of being endowed with supernatural powers which were considered to be a sign of divine blessing. Shaikhs were often miracle-workers, healers and propitiators. Certain families of shaikhs specialized in one of these performances: the Shamsa shaikhs were thought to be particularly effective in healing eye diseases while the members of the shaikh Mand family were believed to be snake-charmers.

Each tribesmen of Sinjar was linked to a shaikh from his birth and was considered his mulk (property) until his death. The success of a shaikh depended on his own personal qualities; piety, religious zeal, moderation and, above all, baraka, that is the sign of a divine presence in each of his performances. Only through these qualities could the shaikh maintain his personal prestige and eventually enlarge his following among the population, which was the main aim of these Yazidi 'priests'. Shaikhs never engaged in mundane activities like agriculture or stockfarming since they mainly

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84. As in many places in the Middle East where the popular cult of the saints is widespread, sanctuaries sometimes become a point of reference for members of different confessions. In Sinjar the sanctuary of Pir Zakar located near Balad Sinjar was visited both by Muslims and Yazidis. See 'Liste du Ziyaret du Djebel Sindjār et du Djebel Sim'ān' Annexe III to Lescot, op.cit., pp.244-246.

draw their support principally from the alms they received from their disciples on a yearly basis, either in cash or in kind. In addition they could get a considerable income from the fees paid for their occasional celebration of marriages and funerals, from the offerings of the pilgrims (if they were in charge of a sanctuary) and from occasional donations following successful miracle-working performances. If well established among a tribe they would also received a share of water equal to that usually allotted to the chiefs of the bavs which they usually subsequently distributed to some of their muridin (85).

The socio-religious functions of the Yazidi shaikhs in Sinjar were not very different from those of the Sunni men of religion who traditionally operated in other areas of the countryside among Sunni Kurdish tribesmen. Also called shaikhs, they were members of the Naqshbandi or Qadiri brotherhoods, two widespread Sufi religious orders which had virtually monopolized the religious life of Sunni Kurdistan since the 19th century. The Yazidi shaikhs operating in Sinjar usually transmitted their office to their sons or at least to individuals who belonged to the same holy lineage. In the case of the shaikhs of the two Sunni brotherhoods operating in Kurdistan, the recruitment of future shaikhs outside their family group was quite widespread among the Naqshbandi shaikhly families and apparently among the only Qadiri group whose members did not have a sayyid status, the

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85. Again Lescot gives the most useful information about the Sinjari shaikhs although it is quite fragmentary. Lescot, op.cit., pp.86-90.



Talabani. Especially among the Naqshbandis a substantial number of laymen were able to acquire shaikhly status by means of initiation which proved be a crucial factor in the incredibly rapid diffusion of the order in Kurdistan in the 19th century. In fact this practice generally allowed the Naqshbandi shaikhs to extend their influence in certain areas by employing members of the local communities as their khalifas, or representatives, who in turn could be 'appointed' as shaikhs (86).

In certain circumstances open recruitment to the families of shaikhs in the Sunni Kurdish milieu came as a natural result of the necessity of increasing the following of the particular order. In contrast the Yazidi shaikhly families could count on a limited number of potential followers since their influence was restricted to the Yazidi believers and they could not recruit supporters from other religious communities since proselytism was forbidden among the Yazidi men of religion. Moreover the various families of shaikhs were more or less able to control all the Yazidi lay population given that the fact that each commoner was a 'customary acquisition' of a shaikh from birth represented one of the main pillars of Yazidi religious beliefs (87).

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86. Van Bruinessen, op.cit., pp.208;220-222;224-228;260.

87. It is very difficult to draw parallels between the traditional Sufi brotherhoods and the Yazidi religious establishment, although a Sufi component is undoubtedly present in the Yazidi socio-religious organization. The role and position of the men of religion belonging to the faqir class can be closely associated with the traditional role of the shaikhs in the Sufi brotherhoods. See N.Fuccaro, 'A 17th century travel account on the Yazidis: implications for a socio-religious history', Annali dell'Istituto Orientale di Napoli, 53/3(1993), pp.241-253.

If the existence of holy lineages whose members practised strict endogamy favoured the concentration of religious authority in the hands of a number of individuals belonging to the same kin groups, it was also a disadvantage from the point of view of the consolidation of their power among the tribes, since the shaikhs could not build up matrimonial alliances with local notables and tribal chiefs as it happened in the Sunni Kurdish milieu. However, the Yazidi shaikhs had more opportunities to exercise their influence on the muridin since they usually monopolized religious instruction in the Yazidi villages, unlike their Sunni counterparts who generally imparted their religious teachings only to those Sunnis who wanted to gain access to the order while the ordinary villagers usually followed the teachings of local mullahs (88). In Sinjar the Yazidi shaikhs still instructed their disciples on an individual basis which contributed to strengthen their personal influence over the commoners unlike in the Syrian Yazidi enclave of Jabal Sim'an, where it seems that in the 1920's certain shaikhs founded a Yazidi religious school (89).

Not all the families of Yazidi shaikhs had representatives in Sinjar. Those claiming their descent from Hasan, who also resided in the village of Ba'shiqah and Bahzani in Shaikhan, were the most powerful especially because they claimed to be

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88. For the traditional role of the shaikhs in the Sunni Kurdish milieu see M. Van Bruinessen, op.cit., pp.244-249; Rondot, 'Les tribus montagnardes ', p.43.

89. Lescot, op.cit., p.88; Ahmad, op.cit., p.332.

the only keepers of the Yazidi literate religious tradition. Although there is much debate on the authenticity of the Yazidi sacred texts which started to be published and commented by Western scholars at the beginning of the 20th century, the Hasan shaikhs were the only Yazidis who were allowed to read and write, although in the 1920's and early 1930's very few of them were literate. It was among them that the Pesh Imam of Sinjar, a sort of chief local shaikh, was recruited. He kept regular contacts with the most powerful man of religion of the community, the Baba Shaikh who resided in Shaikhan, the main advisor of the Yazidi Mir in religious affairs.

According to the traditional patterns of tribal affiliation referred to above, all Jawanah tribes were under the spiritual supervision of shaikhs belonging to the Hasan family. However, only a few of them lived in eastern Sinjar during the mandate among some sections of the sedentary Mihirkan, Musqurah and Fuqara' tribes (90). Another very important family of shaikhs was that of Sharaf al-Din, one of the supposed companions of Shaikh 'Adi whose cult in Sinjar was so strong and widespread (especially among the Jawanah) that among some tribes he was considered as an incarnation of the Sufi saint. It seems this was the only shaikhly holy lineage whose members lived mostly in the Mountain with the exception of a small group settled in the Shaikhanli village

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90. 'The Tribes with their Affiliations' appendix I to Edmonds, op.cit., p.80. 'Les Şêx des tribus du Sindjar' annexe V to Lescot, op.cit., pp.262-264. Among the semi-nomads of the west some Hasani shaikhs were settled among the small Chalkan tribe, the Da'wudi section of the Dukhiyan and the Korkorkan section of the Samuqah.

of Esyian (91). The third shaikhly family which had a significant representation in the Mountain was that of Mand, the only eponymous shaikh with a Kurdish name. His shaikhs lived scattered among the Samuqah, the Qiran and among the Dinadiyyah section of the Fuqara' headed by Hamu Shiru. Shaikhs belonging to the Abu Bakr, Siraj al-Din and Fakhr al-Din groups also lived in Sinjar although, especially in the case of the latter two, their presence was not important until the end of the 19th century (92).

Although clear distinctions did exist between Yazidi shaikhly families, this did not imply that they constituted compact and co-ordinated groups as part of a coherent religious organization like the Qadiri and Naqshbandi brotherhoods where certain powerful groups of shaikhs like the Barzinji, the Sada' of Nehri and shaikhs of Barzan were able to extend their religious and temporal power considerably from the 19th century onwards. By and large the impression gained from the activities of Sinjari shaikhs is that they worked largely on very individual basis although for members of the same family their mutual kin ties and the awareness of belonging to a separate 'caste' must have created a great deal of esprit de corps.

### Faqirs

From some time around the beginning of the 20th century

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91. Damluji, op.cit., p.42; Edmonds, op.cit., pp.5-6. Edmonds states that according to local traditions Sharaf al-Din was the envoy of Shaikh 'Adi in Sinjar.

92. Lescot, op.cit., pp.262-263; Edmonds, op.cit., pp.79-80.

all the Yazidi men of religion belonging to the faqir class who resided in Sinjar were members of the Fuqara' tribe led by the Faqir Hamu Shiru. The great majority of the faqirs living outside Sinjar were concentrated in the valley of Lalish in Shaikhan. They were part of the permanent religious staff in charge of the upkeep of the sanctuary of Shaikh 'Adi where they also devoted themselves to meditation and prayer. Another major group of faqirs were settled in Syria, among the Yazidi community of Jabal Sim'an, and, like the Sinjari Fuqara', they constituted a distinct group, called the Qara Bash or Black Heads, which was usually referred to as a tribe. At least until 1907 the Sim'ani Qara Bash had retained many of the features of the Shaikhanli faqirs, a fairly rigid code of behaviour as well as their distinctive black uniform (93).

The faqirs had no specific religious office vis-à-vis the Yazidi commoners. They were primarily 'Darwishes of Shaikh 'Adi' who led a very ascetic life and did not usually have many contacts with the lay population. It was their secluded lifestyle and their general detachment from worldly affairs that gave legitimation to their position in the Yazidi religious hierarchy. They did not represent a 'status group' since outsiders could become permanent members of this class of priesthood through initiation provided that they

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93. See P.H.Lammens, 'Le massif du Jabal Sim'an and les Yézidis du Syrie', Melanges de l'Université de St. Joseph, 2(1907), pp.378-379. However, in 1936 Lescot states that the faqirs in Jabal Sim'an 'ont cessé de revêtir l'habit de Şêx Hadi' which probably means that the religious group had started to lose its specificity. Lescot, op.cit., p.215; Ahmad, op.cit., pp.336-337.

obtained the approval of the Mir. Membership in the group however could also be transmitted from father to son, provided that the latter was willing to accept to become a faqir (94). Some faqirs were also members of other classes of Yazidi priesthood, especially shaikhs belonging to the Obakr and Ibrahim Khatni families, and pirs of the family of Pir Jarwan (95). By and large this last criterion guided the recruitment of the members of the order in Shaikhan while it seems that at the end of the 19th century the Sinjari faqirs, whose recruitment by then was monopolized by the Fuqara' leader Hamu Shiru, started to be drawn increasingly from the lay tribal population. In the mid-1930's this practice had developed to such an extent that Shaikh Khalaf al-Nasir and Shaikh Khidr Qirani, two of the most prominent Sinjari leaders, reported that virtually any murid, regardless of his personal inclinations, character and reputation could become a faqir (96).

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94. Ahmad, op.cit., pp.336-337; Damluji, op.cit., p.48. It seems that it was at the age of 21 that the male sons of a faqir became eligible to join the order. J.Tfindji, 'Note sur les Yézidis' (typescript, 9pp.), 3-12-1930, p.4, DOM.

95. Edmonds, op.cit., p.7. The Ibrahim Khatni shaikhs constituted a branch of the family of Shaikh Hasan while the Obakris were directly linked to the family of the Mir. The family of Pir Jarwan represented one of the four families in which all the pirs were grouped. Ibid., pp.31;35.

96. Sebri/Wikander, op.cit., pp.117-118. A 17th source provides a very interesting example of how membership in the faqir class among a small nomadic Yazidi tribal community was open to its lay population. See Fuccaro, op.cit..

## II.5 - SHAIKELY AND RELIGIOUS POWER

During the British Mandate three of the most important Yazidi tribes of Sinjar were led by Yazidi men of religion of Shaikhanli origin: Shaikh Khalaf b. Nasir, chief of the Haskan tribe, Shaikh Khidr b. 'Atu, who led the semi-nomadic Qiran tribe and the Faqir Hamu Shiru of the Fuqara' tribe. All of these were second generation Sinjaris whose fathers had arrived in the Mountain from Shaikhan around the 1850's. The prestige they enjoyed as men of religion in the tribal milieu allowed them to devote themselves to worldly occupations, namely to become the recognised temporal leaders of Yazidi tribal groups formerly controlled by lay aghas.

Leadership in the Yazidi tribes was traditionally provided by lay chieftains (aghas) who were elected by a tribal council which included the leaders of the various bavs of the tribe (mahqul) and a number of notables. The authority of the tribal leader was by no means absolute in the sense that he acted as the delegate of the chiefs of the subsections of the tribe who were able to exercise effective control over his authority through their participation in the tribal majlis. Moreover, generally speaking, tribal chiefs had no judicial power of their own although tribesmen would usually apply to them in case of internal controversies. It seems that, especially among the semi-nomads of the west, there existed a number of families whose members in the course of time had acquired a widespread reputation for their

wisdom and therefore usually became involved in the resolution of disputes as arbitrators. In addition mediating roles were also played by men of religion who had acquired a certain standing among the tribesmen for their religious zeal and piety (97). As far as it is possible to ascertain, for the first time in the recent history of Sinjar not only some of the Yazidi tribes came to be under the control of members of the Yazidi priesthood but also these new tribal leaders belonged to families which had no established reputation in the Mountain. The two Shaikhs and the Faqir Hamu Shiru achieved supremacy over sections of Sinjari tribesmen in different ways, as will be explained later. However, the establishment of their authority over the Haskani, Qirani and Fuqara' tribesmen reflects a phenomenon which also increasingly affected the Sunni Kurdish tribal milieu outside Sinjar from the second half of the 19th century.

As has already been noted, there were two recognised religious institutions in Kurdistan in the late 19th century which provided firm points of reference for the population: the Qadiri and Naqshbandi brotherhoods. The emergence of the temporal power of a number of families of Naqshbandi shaikhs in the second half of the 19th century was linked directly to the downfall of the semi-independent Kurdish emirates which had ruled the area for most of the Ottoman period. Between 1834 and 1847 the Ottoman government re-established direct control over the Kurdish areas north of Mosul and posted

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97. Lescot, op.cit., pp.163-166.



governors on a permanent basis. Understandably these governors could not implement an effective policy of rural peace-keeping since the majority of Kurdish tribal chiefs did not recognise their authority as they had done in the past with the Kurdish princes who were generally held in great esteem and veneration for their military might and the nobility of their descent. A rather chaotic situation ensued which worked in favour of certain families of Qadiri and Naqshabandi shaikhs who were established in largely tribally populated areas and whose reputation generally cut across the boundaries of the tribes. They increased their personal power by playing their traditional role of mediators especially in the resolution of local conflicts and hence the authority of certain shaikhs started being intimately linked to the management of the temporal affairs of particular tribal groups. The Naqshabandi shaikhs were particularly assisted by the great diffusion of Naqshabandi centres in the Kurdish countryside after the beginning of the 19th century following the activities of the great reformer of the order Mawlana Khalid (98).

The circumstances which determined the rise to power of Yazidi men of religion in Sinjar were different. Generally

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98. Families of Naqshbandi shaikhs who acquired a political role in tribal affairs in the period under consideration were to play an important role in the Kurdish national movement. Best example are provided by the Sada' of Nehri whose leader Shaikh 'Ubaydallah led a revolt against the Ottomans in 1880-1881, the family of shaikhs residing in Palu, whose most famous leader Shaikh Sa'id rebelled against the Turkish government in 1925 and the Barzan family in Northern Iraq. Van Bruinessen, op.cit., pp.228-234; R.Olson, The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism 1880-1925, Austin 1989, pp.1-7; Rondot, 'Les tribus montagnardes', 6(1936), pp.45-46; A.Hourani, 'Shaikh Khalid and the Naqshbandi order' in S.M.Stern/A.Hourani/V.Brown (eds), Islamic Philosophy and the Classical tradition, Oxford 1972.

speaking the downfall of the Kurdish emirates did not have direct repercussions on Sinjari affairs and did not leave a void of super-tribally recognised authority which had such a strong effect on the situation in the Kurdish areas north of Mosul. Sinjar had never been under the authority of the Kurdish amirs largely because it was isolated geographically from the main areas of Kurdish settlement. In any case, the difficulty of establishing any permanent state-like institution among the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar, namely the general absence of the recognition or acceptance of any externally imposed authority, and the generally bad relations between the Yazidis of Sinjar and the Sunni Kurdish tribes living outside the Mountain did not favour even the most sporadic contacts between the two groups. The powerful Sunni Kurdish tribal leaders were often perceived by the local population, as well as by the Yazidis living in the Shaikhan district, as oppressors who had often acted and continued to act against the Yazidis in the name of Islam. Particularly notorious was the attack on Shaikhan in 1832 by the last independent mir of Rowanduz, Kor Muhammad Beg, who slaughtered more than half of its Yazidi population. Some groups tried to seek refuge in Sinjar but were killed indiscriminately by the tribesmen of Kor Muhammad while trying to cross the Tigris (99).

However, both the downfall of the emirates, which was the major cause of the diffusion of shaikhly power in Kurdistan, and the establishment of religious leadership

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99. Layard, Nineveh and its Remains, vol.1 pp.275-276.



among the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar can be viewed primarily as results of the centralising policy of the Ottoman state which had different impacts on the two communities. In the Sunni Kurdish milieu the attempts to eliminate the Kurdish chieftaincies were part of governmental efforts to establish closer links between the inhabitants of the rural areas and the Ottoman administration in Mosul while in Sinjar the policy pursued by the government could not even establish a permanent official presence in the Mountain, as noted above. Ottoman efforts to exert tighter control over the community were limited to attempts to impose conscription and tax-farming. Given the difficulty of implementing both, the government adopted a policy of trying to convert the Yazidis to Islam, a course of action also favoured by the Pan-Islamic policy of the Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II. This obviously had a wide impact on the religious feeling of the Yazidi population of Sinjar, especially those tribes which consisted entirely of Yazidi Kurds. It is true that the Sinjaris were less affected by religious persecution than the inhabitants of Shaikhan, who were living in a much more exposed area within easy reach from the armies of both the Pashas and the Kurdish Mirs. However, as had probably happened in the 13th century with the persecutions of the Mosul atabek Badr al-Din Lu'lu, Sinjar became the focus of anti-government Yazidi resistance since it sheltered groups of refugees from Shaikhan, many of whom belonged to the religious classes. This happened increasingly and especially after the expedition of 'Umar Wahbi Pasha in 1892 and it was during this period that Shaikh

Khalaf, Shaikh Qidr and Hamu Shiru finally consolidated their temporal leadership among the tribes of the Haskan, Qiran and the Fuqara'.

The newly-acquired role of these three men of religion must be considered as a byproduct of a historical context which favoured the development of a much stronger religious feeling among the Sinjari Yazidis, the latter began to strengthen their socio-economic links with some powerful representatives of the Shaikhanli priesthood, who were already well respected among the tribes.

#### Shaikh Khalaf al-Haskani

Shaikh Khalaf's father was a Yazidi man of religion, a Shaikh belonging to the Siraj al-Din family. Shaikh Nasir arrived in Sinjar in the second half of the 19th century from the Shaikhanli village of Ba'ashiqah and settled among the Haskan tribe whose members had long lived in Sinjar (100). The reason for Nasir's departure from Shaikhan are obscure but must certainly be linked to the general increase in religious persecution in the area in the second half of the 19th century and to the economic opportunities which Sinjar offered for members of the Yazidi priesthood, given that its inhabitants and the shaikhs' potential disciples were usually wealthier than those in Shaikhan.

When Shaikh Nasir died, probably in the last decade of

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100. Damluji, op.cit., pp.28-29. It has to be remarked that there is no precise information on the lives of Yazidi men of religion like Shaikh Nadir who lived between the 19th and 20th centuries since the information collected mainly comes from local oral sources. An approximate dating can however be assumed from the general context.

the 19th century, his son Khalaf replaced him in accordance with his will. Khalaf wanted to gain ascendancy in the rich village of Sinuni, the economic centre of the Haskani lands and the residence of the Haskani tribal agha Kimmo 'Emoka. He slowly gathered a small group of fervent followers around him, recruited both among the Sharkan section of the Haskan and other Jawanah tribes. They represented the first nucleus of his tribal force which moved to the new Yazidi settlement of Juhbal, which he had founded before the arrival of the British and had become his headquarters. Khalaf's ambitions clashed with those of the 'legitimate' agha of the tribe, Kimmo 'Emoka, who was able to maintain control of some sections of the tribe in Sinuni during the mandate but did not obtain any official recognition from the government. At the beginning of the 1930's Juhbal numbered 100 families under the control of Khalaf while in Sinuni Kimmo relied on the support of 60 families of Yazidis (101).

During the mandate Shaikh Khalaf was able to accumulate considerable wealth although he was never officially subsidized by the government, as it happened in the case of Hamu Shiru. Given his various unsuccessful attempts to control Sinuni from his headquarters of Juhbal he pursued a policy of territorial expansion in Shimal nahiyyah largely by winning the support of sections of the local population among whom he was able to use his religious influence but sometimes he also resorted to force. He succeeded in getting considerable shares of the produce of the lands the peasantry

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101. Lescot, op.cit., pp.182/255.

cultivated and in seizing the flocks owned by some of the villagers which came to represent the main source of his income in the 1920's. He sought the help of both the Arab Shammar and Juhaish to extend his influence in Qirani and Aldakhi lands, especially in the rich village of Khan Sur inhabited by Aldakhi tribesmen, who were traditional protégés of the Fuqara' (102).

However, Shaikh Khalaf did not manage to unify the Haskan under his leadership because of opposition from the bavs controlled by Kimmo 'Emoka and from minor fractions of the tribe settled in Sinuni whose members refused to recognise his authority. Furthermore, even among his followers in Juhbal, the position of the Shaikh was often threatened by internal jealousies given the fairly heterogeneous composition of his tribal supporters which included only two Haskani bavs, the Evdelian and Mille Osmana.

Until 1925 Khalaf's relations with the government were generally good: in 1924 he was granted an 'aba'ah (robe of honour) as a reward for his loyalty to the local authorities and in 1925 the government officially recognized him as legitimate 'owner' of the village of Juhbal by issuing tapu deeds in his name (103). However from 1924 he started to become increasingly involved in the seditious activities of the Mihirkani chief Dawud al-Dawud, activities which led to

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102. ''Asha'ir al-Yazidiyyah fi Jabal Sinjar', p.10, EDM Box XIX file 5.

103. 'Evidence regarding the Yazidis. Tribal', 2-5-1932, suppl. D to note n.18, doc.s Syro-Iraqi Border Commission by British and Iraqi Assessors, EDM Box IV file 1.

the 1925 tribal uprising and thus lost him the confidence of the local administration (104).

#### Shaikh Khidr Qirani

The other tribal leader of Shaikhanli origin who also belonged to the Yazidi shaikhly group of the shaikhs was Shaikh Khidr b. 'Atu whose father had come from the Shaikhanli village of Basufan at the same time as Khalaf's father. Shaikh Khidr, who belonged to the Fakhr al-Din family of shaikhs, established himself among the semi-nomadic tribe of the Qiran and took permanent residence in the village of Sikaniyyah (105). His rise to power and his progressive involvement in the management of the temporal affairs of the tribe was very much favoured by circumstances. Sometime before the outbreak of WWI he took advantage of the quarrels among some tribal notables over the succession to the previous tribal chief Nasir, whose heir was still an infant. In view of Khidr's reputation for moderation and tolerance he was provisionally given the custody of the young legitimate chief until he reached adulthood. Although he was supposed to act as moderator in the interest of the whole tribe he became particularly attached to two sections, the Mala Mahmi and the Shabi Wa Babi which he tended to favour over two other groups, the Hakrashiyyah and the Mala Salu, whose leaders were of lay origin (106).

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104. See pp.189-193.

105. Edmonds, Pilgrimage, p.62.

106. Lescot, op.cit., p.182-183.

Shaikh Khidr's tribal leadership was challenged on many fronts. Apart from the internal opposition from the leaders of some Qirani bays which were fomented by the followers of the 'legitimate' young agha, he was bitterly criticized by some shaikhs belonging to the Mand family established among the Samuqah tribesmen mainly on the grounds of his lack of piety and religious zeal. He was in fact accused of having given his support to the Turkish Commander Ibrahim Hajj Beg in 1918, when he led the last Ottoman expedition to Sinjar. Although there is no clear evidence to substantiate this accusation, Shaikh Khidr was held responsible for the killing of many Yazidis which gave him the opportunity to get hold of their lands and properties (107).

During the mandate Shaikh Khidr became the main supporter of Hamu Shiru although during the 1925 disturbances he sided with Dawud al-Dawud. He also strengthened his links with the Syrian Shammar led by Daham al-Hadi with whom he and his followers often shared tents in the Jaribah during the season of the pastoral migrations. He also became the leader of a section of Qiranis living among the Samuqah, some Musqurah tribesmen inhabiting the village of Alidina and the Estena section of the Mihirkan (108).

The cases of Shaikh Khidr and Shaikh Khalaf, who gradually acquired temporal power alongside their spiritual

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107. For Ibrahim Hajj Beg expedition see pp.154-155. 'Asha'ir al-Yazidiyyah fi Jabal Sinjar', p.10, EDM Box XIX file 5.

108. 'Les shéx des tribus du Sinjar' Annexe 5 to Lescot, op.cit., pp.262-264.



authority, are good examples of the extent to which members of the Yazidi priesthood could live and operate relatively freely among the tribes primarily because, especially at the beginning of their careers, they were not politically or socially attached to any particular group. Once their authority was established their position as temporal leaders was nonetheless quite unstable especially because they had little effective control over a number of kin-related groups which were traditionally part of the two tribes over which they had established their authority. This was not only a result of the general fragmentation of tribal alliances which had affected the position of all Sinjari lay tribal aghas within their own tribes (mainly because of the mobility and relative independence of the various bavs as explained above) but was also a consequence of the opposition emanating from the former Haskani and Qirani lay tribal leadership. Throughout the mandate, in fact, the two aghas (Kimmo 'Emoka and the successors of Shaikh Nasir) who were the legitimate leaders of the tribes according to tribal custom, continued to claim the right to rule their kinsmen, backed by the minor lay chiefs of some of the bavs. In this way kin ties became elevated into a primary constituent of political authority, and the two became the main focus of the opposition which Shaikh Khalaf and Shaikh Khidr encountered among the Haskan and the Qiran, and which prevented them from unifying the two tribes under their leadership. In an important sense therefore blood relations became a central issue in the thinking of all those Sinjari leaders who felt threatened by

the increasing presence of men of religion among their tribes. It was however Hamu Shiru who succeeded in becoming the almost autocratic leader of a new, compact and independent group which had appeared in Sinjar some time before the arrival of the British, the Fugara' tribe. Like Shaikh Khalaf and Shaikh Khidr ha made considerable use of his spiritual influence but he was also able to rely on his links with some groups of tribesmen to whom he was related.

### Hamu Shiru

Hamu Shiru came from a family of Yazidi tribesmen based in the Kurdish area north of Mosul. His father was probably a lay member of the Sharqiyyan tribe from Buhtan, some of whose sections had migrated to Sinjar in the 19th century, although Hamu Shiru himself claimed to belong to the Rubanshti fraction of the Dinadiyyah tribe based in Shaikhan (109). Soon after his arrival in Sinjar, probably occurred in the middle of the 19th century, Hamu's father became a faqir and started to gain prominence among the local members of this class of priesthood. Around the 1870's his son Hamu, who in the meantime had also become a faqir, replaced him (the precise circumstances are obscure) and started to gather a large following which included both faqirs and ordinary tribesmen, mainly from the Sharqiyyan and Dinadiyyah, the two extra-Sinjari tribal groups recently settled in the Mountain with whom Hamu was more closely

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109. Lescot, op.cit., p.183. This Shaikhanli connection was probably 'created' in order to legitimize his status of men of religion vis-à-vis his followers. For the arrival of the Sharqiyyan in Sinjar see p.36.

related. It is evident that his spiritual authority did not impinge upon existing tribal loyalties but strengthened his position among the tribesmen. Long after the establishment of the power of the Fuqara' in the Mountain Hamu Shiru was still referred to as a Dinadi chief and in the 1920's and 1930's members of at least three of the main bavs of the tribe were still aware of and closely linked by their common tribal background. It seems in fact that the Mala Hamu was almost entirely Dinadi while the faqirs belonging to the Mala Jandu and the Mala Zaru were all of Sharqiyyani origin (110).

Among the various fractions of the Fuqara', especially those who emphasize their mixed tribal backgrounds, cohesion was achieved largely through common membership in the Yazidi religious class of the faqirs. However, once united under the leadership of Hamu Shiru the Sinjari faqirs started to act primarily as "tribesmen" and their role as men of religion progressively decreased. The maintenance of a 'holy' pattern of behaviour in order to preserve holiness was no longer feasible since it clashed with the increasing necessity to extend their political and economic influence which sometimes required a readiness to resort to force. During the mandate the Fuqara' owned large quantities of arms and ammunition and became substantially involved both in internal feuds and in intertribal warfare as it will be explained below.

The last tribal leader of Sinjar to be discussed is

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110. Loc.cit.. It is interesting to notice how at the beginning of the 1930's Edmonds stated that in Sinjar lay membership to the faqir class was limited to members of these two tribal groups Edmonds.op.cit., p.36.

Dawud al-Dawud, the chief of the Mihirkan tribe, who assumed a particularly important role in Sinjari tribal affairs during the mandate. Unlike Hamu Shiru, Shaikh Khalaf and Shaikh Khidr he had no religious standing since he belonged to a ruling family of lay tribal aghas who had long led the Mihirkan tribe.

#### Dawud-al-Dawud

Dawud's position among the Mihirkan was legitimized by the prestige of his family from which the Mihirkani leaders were usually recruited. The absence of written genealogies and the lack of precise historical records make it impossible to detail the genealogical past of the tribe and thus to discover how far back in time the Mihirkani aghas were 'in fact' chosen from among Dawud's ancestors. However, stories concerning the feats of his grandfather 'Isa Agha who fought against the Turkish governor Tayyar Pasha in 1847 while Layard was visiting Sinjar were still circulating among the Mihirkani tribesmen during the mandate, and contributed to strengthened a tradition of militant resistance towards the government which was usually associated with the Mihirkani tribal chiefs (111). His status as a member of a privileged group together with a strong personality which rather romantically embodied the traditional tribal ethos (loyalty, bravery and impulsiveness) made him a very popular if somewhat an almost autocratic leader, the only Sinjari agha who put up an effective resistance against the attempts

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111. Edmonds, op.cit., p.62.

of the British and of the Iraqi government to control the Mountain by winning the support of its local tribal leaders. His rebellious attitude towards any imposed authority worsened after the British started to subsidize his enemy Hamu Shiru. He generally viewed the Fugara' chief with contempt since he considered him as a sort of 'beggar' who first had lived on the alms of the commoners and later on the support of the British and the Iraqi government.

## II.6 - SOME CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT TRIBES AND RELIGION

The inhabitants of the areas of settlement of the Yazidi communities of northern Iraq are generally divided along linguistic and religious lines: Arabs, Kurds and Turks who can also be grouped in their Muslim, Christian or Jewish creeds. There were also a number of marginal groups like the Yazidis whose heterodox religious beliefs played a determining role in drawing firm community boundaries which very much contributed to their survival. However, as generally happens elsewhere in the Middle East, in the polyethnic society of northern Iraq where groups live in close contact on a day-to-day basis, people share a great deal of practices and cultural themes regardless of their supposedly separate religious beliefs. In an important sense therefore neither confessional nor community boundaries are rigid and, although providing the individual with firm points of reference, they are flexible enough to be modified

according to circumstances. Especially in the case of small marginal groups this means a continuous process of adaptation and adjustment to the surrounding environment in order to adopt the most effective strategies for survival and the maintenance of separate identity (112). This was true of the Yazidi community of Sinjar whose strategies for survival were dictated mainly by the exceptional conditions of their settlement in the Mountain, although these conditions were also crucial in modifying and preserving their social organization.

To a considerable extent the Sinjari Yazidis were primarily a religious community. The Yazidi faith represented one of the major sources of communal identity among its members which was reinforced by the presence of Yazidi men of religion who lived integrated in the tribes. The representatives of the various religious castes did not constitute discrete groups living separately from the local lay populations as happened in certain cases in Shaikhan, nor did they form a local 'chapter' part of a central religious institution which controlled their activities. They therefore tended to act independently although they often had contacts with members of the religious classes living in Shaikhan. The Yazidi population of Sinjar shared their lands with a number of non-Yazidi tribesmen, both Sunni Muslim and heterodox

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112. See S.Zubaida, 'Components of Popular Culture in the Middle East' in S.Zubaida (ed.), Islam, the People and the State, London 1989, pp.99-120 and A.Vinogradov, 'Ethnicity, Cultural Discontinuity and Power Brokers in Northern Iraq: the Case of the Shabak', American Ethnologist, 1(1974), pp.207-218 which provides a good insight of the small Shi'i community of the Shabak and its socio-economic relations with its neighbours.

Shi'i, who generally participated in the life of the tribes without being discriminated against for their religious beliefs. This is in stark contrast with the strict prohibition of social contacts with non-Yazidis, especially Muslims, very much emphasized as an integral feature of their faith by the Yazidi men of religion in the Shaikhan area (113).

The majority of non-Yazidi Kurds living in Sinjar were settled on the Jawanah lands, in the east of the Mountain. These were the heterodox Shi'i Babawat and Sitt Zainab, the Sunni Muslim Kalab 'Ali, 'Abd 'Ali, Bayt Nasu and Halalah fractions of the Musqurah tribe and approximately a third of the tribal population of the Mandikan. The majority of these Kurdish tribesmen were not newcomers to Sinjar; in the 19th century, the greatest waves of migrations from Kurdistan consisted mainly of Yazidi groups, the only known exception being the Daquriyyun Kurds. Therefore in many cases the Muslim tribesmen could boast long membership of the Yazidi tribes. In consequence there was a general awareness and acceptance of the presence of Islam among certain tribes. The presence of Muslim tribesmen was recognised as a natural fact of life and generally made legitimate by tradition. For example the Mandikan tribe was thought to be originally a purely Muslim group which had settled in Sinjar before the

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113. In the 1920's a British observer remarked about the Shaikhanli Yazidis: 'Their creed did not encourage professions other than farming and raising animals because other occupations might naturally throw them into contact with people of other religions and pave the way for discussion, learning and acquaintance with other religious ways of life', MacLeod, The Yezidis, or 'Devil-Worshippers' of Assyria, p.38.

arrival of the Yazidis. Similarly some sections of the Habbabat claimed descent from the Arab Muslim Tayy tribe (114).

It also seems that the religious composition of some mixed tribal units varied from time to time as a result of conversions, both from Yazidism to Islam and viceversa, which often occurred in the Ottoman period as a result of the intervention of the government in Sinjar. Whenever the armies of the pashas penetrated to the Yazidi villages, tribesmen who were unable to escape were compelled to embrace Islam in order to avoid death. Given the general inability of the Ottomans to occupy Yazidi lands permanently, the population generally reverted to Yazidism soon after. A typical example is that of the Habbabat tribe, many of whose tribesmen became Muslim after Hafiz Pasha's attack in 1837 but the majority of whom reconverted to Yazidism in the following years. In the case of the Mala Fanadi section of the Mandikan it seems that around the 1850's its members all converted to Islam as a result of the intervention of the government and remained Muslims until at least the 1940's (115).

The Kurdish Muslim population of the Mandikan were grouped in separate bays of the tribe which did not usually include Yazidis. This generally prevented conflicts of religious character although it seems that the historical background of the tribe with its marked Muslim influence

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114. Damluji, op.cit., pp.11/14.

115. Damluji, op.cit., p.14; 'Asha'ir al-Yazidiyyah fi Jabal Sinjar', (Arabic, typescript 19pp.), p.6 EDM Box XIX file 5.



provided a base for a peaceful co-habitation of its Muslim and Yazidi members. Among the Musqurah tribe the Muslims were in quite a privileged position since they enjoyed the full support of the Yazidi tribal leadership. As a matter of fact the Musqurah was the Yazidi tribe which entertained the closest relations with the government and the presence of Muslim tribesmen very much contributed to increase its prestige vis-à-vis the Ottoman authorities. The heterodox Shi'is who lived among the Musqurah and Habbabat were not considered tribal members and generally lived grouped together in certain villages. However, the 'Ali-Ilahi Babawat and Sitt Zainab living in the proximity of Balad provide perhaps the best example of the cultural integration of the Mountain. Although their veneration for 'Ali placed them in direct doctrinal antagonism to the Yazidis (whose cult for Yazid b. Mu'awiyah was very strong especially in Sinjar) they established strong socio-religious links with the Yazidi Habbabat. They made offerings to the Yazidi men of religion living in Balad, to the sacred image of the Peacock Angel (Malak Ta'us) considered by the Yazidis as their main deity, and participated in their religious ceremonies. Furthermore they could generally not be distinguished from the local Yazidi population on the basis of their clothing, language or eating habits. In contrast the 'Ali-Ilahi leaders of Sinjar, although under the influence of the Yazidi Habbabat chiefs, were able to retain strong links with the Turkoman leaders of Tall 'Afar as well as with the heterodox community of the

Shabak settled in the Mosul plain (116).

The presence of Islam in the tribal milieu was generally speaking confined to the sedentary tribes of the east. Since the last two decades of the 19th century the Yazidi leaders here, with the exception of Hamu Shiru of the Fuqara', were usually of lay origin. To a certain extent this contributed to create an atmosphere of religious tolerance at least in comparison with what happened in two major western Sinjari semi-nomadic tribes whose temporal leaders were religious shaikhs of Shaikhanli origin: Shaikh Khalaf b. Shaikh Nasir of the Haskan and Shaikh Khidr b. Shaikh 'Atu of the Qiran. This had particularly bad repercussions on the situation of the Arab Muslim tribes of the Albu Mutaywid and Khawatina. Especially after WWI they had to face the territorial expansion of the Yazidi Qiran and Fuqara' tribes, both of which were led by Yazidi religious leaders. Between 1918 and 1930 both Fuqara' and Qiran compelled the Khawatina to leave their lands in the villages of Jaddalah and Wardiyyah and to seek refuge in other Sinjari villages or in the town of Khatuniyyah. Jaddalah became the headquarters of the Fuqara' and Wardiyyah was partially occupied by the Qiran (117). The Fuqara' also establish close links with the Albu Mutaywid. Unlike what happened to the Khawatina they were allowed to stay on their old lands in south-eastern Sinjar provided that they paid annual tribute in kind to Hamu Shiru.

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116. Ahmad Beg's report (Arabic typescript, 29pp., 1944 c.a), pp.20-21, EDM Box XIX file n.5.

117. See pp.46;234-243.

Membership to and participation in the life of the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar was generally speaking limited to Kurdish tribesmen but was certainly not exclusive to the Yazidis, although they constituted the great majority of the tribal population. What seems to have been crucial was their shared Kurdish cultural background, whose distinctive features were linguistic unity, that is the usage of the Kurmanji dialect, and a certain militant clannish tradition of resistance in mountainous areas which was unknown to the Arabs, both nomad and sedentary settled along the ridges of the Mountain (118).

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118. All the Yazidi communities of Iraq including that of the Jabal Sinjar speak Badhinani, which is the term usually employed in Iraq to define the local Kurmanji. See J. Blau, Le Kurde de 'Amadiyya et de Djabal Sindjar, Paris 1975.

## CHAPTER III

### THE TRIBES AND THE STATE: THE LATE OTTOMAN PERIOD (c.1850-1914)

### III.1 - TRIBAL WORLD AND STATE CONTROL

From the beginning of the 16th century much of the land and peoples of the area which forms the modern state of 'Iraq gradually came under the control of the Ottoman Empire. In 1515-17 Ottoman armies occupied Mosul, Diyar Bakr and the Kurdish regions east of the Tigris; Baghdad was captured in 1534, and Basra in 1546. From the beginning of the 19th century Baghdad was the administrative centre of the eyalets of Mosul and Basra which were constituted as independent administrative units in 1879 and 1884 respectively (1).

By and large the Iraqi countryside consisted of extended tribal lands where more than half the population were concentrated. South of the town of Mosul most of the inhabitants of rural Iraq were partly integrated into large nomadic or semi-nomadic Bedouin tribal formations whose power, numerical strength and territorial influence varied according to political, ecological and economic conditions. There were also areas of sedentary or semi-nomadic settlement which accommodated permanent or transient village communities whose internal organization usually retained a markedly tribal character. As villagers and nomads participated in the regional economy their relationship had many aspects of

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1. P.M.Holt, art 'Irak' in EI<sup>2</sup>, vol.3, p.125; A.A.Duri, art 'Baghdad' in EI<sup>2</sup>, vol.1, p.906. See also Plowden to Dufferin, Baghdad 20-8-1844, n.591/70, FO 195/1479 quoted in G.Çetinsaya, Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890-1908, Ph.D. thesis Univ. of Manchester, 1994. See also pp.123-124 below.

complementarity, the most important of which was related to exchanges in the food market. Furthermore they often shared cultural values, notably common religious beliefs and a strong emphasis on kinship ideology. Nonetheless the sedentary communities found themselves often exposed to the military might of the nomadic clans as there was no efficient state machinery capable of guaranteeing stable and long-lasting political and socio-economic control over this multi-layered socio-economic universe (2).

The character of Ottoman rule in Iraq country changed over time. From the mid-18th to the beginning of the 19th century local dynasties held power in the two main cities of Baghdad and Mosul. The provincial government became less dependent on Istanbul and its ruling elite, which consisted mainly of locally recruited personnel, concentrated more on Iraqi provincial affairs. Nonetheless, although the influence of these local administrations grew in the main urban centres and in some adjoining rural areas, in much of the countryside the power of the tribal aristocracies still continued to be arbitrarily exercised over land and people (3).

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2. T.Nieuwenhuis, Politics and Society in Early Modern Iraq, The Hague 1982, pp.108-168. In 1800 Iraq had 1,250,000 inhabitants and the agricultural production of the sedentary areas could feed 750,000 people. By the 1850's the total population of Iraq had slightly increased to 1,290,000; 35% were nomads, 41% rural and 24% urban (note that the distinction between 'nomadic' and 'rural' is not clear-cut). Ibid., p.1-2;10.

3. In Baghdad a Mamluk dynasty ruled from 1750 to 1831 while in Mosul the Jalili family seized power in 1743 and administered the town until 1834. See Nieuwenhuis, op.cit., pp.13-98 for the structure and development of Mamluk power in Baghdad, and 'Imad 'Abd al-Salam Ra'uf, al-Mawsil fi al-'ahd al-'Uthmani, fitr al-hukm al-mahalli, Mosul 1975 for Jalili rule in Mosul.

In the middle of the 19th century, after the collapse of Mamluk rule in Baghdad and of the rule of the Jalili family in Mosul, and in the context of the new centralization policy of the Tanzimat reforms, the Ottoman government attempted to re-establish its direct authority over Iraq. Various attempts were made to consolidate the presence of the government among the peoples who inhabited the countryside.

The appointment of Midhat Pasha to the governorship of Baghdad in 1869 opened a new era of Ottoman rule in the province. In order to gain tighter control over the tribes attempts were made to implement a coherent land settlement through the application of the 1858 Land Code. Generally speaking Midhat's policy of distributing title deeds (tapu sanads) among the tribesmen proved to be largely ineffective. These title deeds should have effectively conferred private 'ownership' of lands on individual members of the tribe and in theory should have linked cultivators more permanently with the plots they cultivated as well as facilitating the collection of revenue. Yet very rapidly, especially in southern and central Iraq, the State was not able to prevent the large scale distribution of tapu lands to tribal shaikhs, sirkals or absentee landlords who gradually came to control extended landed estates. Land registration was also generally viewed warily by tribesmen who regarded it as a prelude to conscription: in addition it was not greatly suited to local patterns of land use since the tribal peasantry did not

usually cultivate the same plot year after year (4).

In the upper Jazirah the need for protection from Shammari raids forced the majority of the settled cultivators to surrender their lands to the aghawat or rich city notables. Ottoman plans for tribal settlement were implemented only in the Khabur and among minor tribes like the Jubur, Baqqarah and Uqaydat (5). As a result of this it seems that around 1881 the distribution of tapu certificates among the tribes stopped. When the British arrived in 1914 they found that 80% of the land was still miri (not assigned to individuals by the State) and only 20% registered as tapu (6).

Nonetheless, as regards the authority of the nomadic tribes living in the northern Jazirah, the increased Ottoman military presence on the edges of the desert and improved technology, especially the adoption of repeater rifles and expanded telegraph communications, considerably restricted their raiding and khuwah-collecting prerogatives. Yet until 1911, when the Shammar Shaikh al-'Asi was recognised as Paramount Shaikh by the Turks, his tribesmen succeeded in

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4. See A.Jwaideh, 'Aspects of Land Tenure and Social Change in Lower Iraq During Late Ottoman Times' in T.Khalidi (ed.), Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East, Beirut 1984, pp.333-356; idem, 'Midhat Pasha and the Land System of Lower Iraq' in A.Hourani (ed.), St. Antony's Papers: Middle Eastern Affairs, 3, London 1963, pp.106-136; M.Farouk Sluglett/P.Sluglett, 'The Transformation of Land Tenure and Rural Social Structure in Central and Southern Iraq, c.1870-1958', IJMES, 15(1983), pp.491-505.

5. J.F Williamson, A Political History of the Shammar Jarbah Tribe of al-Jazirah, Ph.D. thesis Indiana Univ., 1975, pp.120-124; Military Report on Mesopotamia (Area I) Northern Jazirah, General Staff British Forces, 1922, p.23, IO L/MIL/17/15/42.

6. M.Farouk-Sluglett/P.Sluglett, op.cit., p.495.



avoiding regular taxation (7).

In the Bedouin upper Jazirah there were no precise definitions of the political and economic influence of the State at the end of the 19th century. Although the Shammar confederation was bitterly divided into factions under the various sons of Farhan Pasha, and also had to confront the rising power of Ibrahim Pasha of the Milli Kurds, Shammari tribesmen still had relatively good control over their tribal lands and vital resources. In contrast the tribes of central and southern Iraq underwent a number of important socio-economic changes which affected their internal organization although the Government did not succeed in its efforts to detribalize vast areas of the countryside.

### III.2 - THE YAZIDI CASE

Jabal Sinjar was one of the rural areas of Ottoman Iraq which were tribally populated. Generally speaking the various interventions of the local authorities in the Mountain did not succeed in penetrating into the heart of the Yazidi country, with the result that no efficient state administration was ever established there. Ottoman administration always remained confined to the peripheral areas most accessible to the armies of the local pashas, and did not have a determining influence on the political and socio-economic life of the various tribal units living in

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7. Williamson, op.cit., pp.120-126.

Sinjar.

Until 1869 the Mountain was administered by the Ottomans as a qadha of the sanjak of Mosul which had been attached first to the eyalet of Diyar Bakr, than to Van and Hakkari and finally, from the beginning of the 19th century, to the eyalet of Baghdad. For a brief period, from 1869 to 1879, the districts of Sinjar and Tall 'Afar were included within the boundaries of the newly created mutasarrifiyyah of Dair al-Zur which was ruled directly from Istanbul. In 1879, when Mosul was constituted as an independent vilayat, Sinjar was re-attached to Mosul and remained one of its qadhas until the British occupation of the Mountain (8).

The degree of Ottoman control in rural areas like Sinjar was usually measured by the amount of revenue which the local authorities were able to collect from the peasantry. It seems that these collections were very sporadic and usually implemented by military contingents sent by the local governors. Revenues started to be collected on a more regular basis from some eastern villages after the 1837 military expedition of Hafiz Pasha, the governor of Diyar Bakr. He succeeded in establishing a tax collector permanently with a few Turkish attendants in the villages of Nujri and 'Amr, located near Alidina in northern Sinjar. However, there is no

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8. 'Reply to the British Assessors to the invitation of the Commission to make suggestions regarding the alignment of the Frontier in the Sinjari region', note n.18, April 1932, doc.s Syro-Iraqi border Commission by British and Iraqi assessors, EDM Box IV file 1; 'Note sur les modifications successives apportées aux divisions administratives de Lioua de 1865 à 1920', 15-12-1920, BEY 1516; J.Mc Carthy, The Arab World, Turkey, and the Balkans (1878-1914). A Handbook of Historical Statistics, Boston 1982, pp. 16/20/23.

evidence which shows that since then local Yazidi tax-farmers were integrated permanently into the administration although some local chiefs must have played a role in dealing with the Turkish military and administrative officials. The amount of tax the Turks exacted from the Sinjari cultivators usually corresponded to one tenth of the produce (9).

However, even after the partial success achieved by Hafiz Pasha the Turkish authorities could not establish a regular presence in the Mountain. In 1849 the archaeologist Henry Layard while in Mosul remarked: 'Tayyar Pasha [the Turkish governor of Mosul] had for some time been planning an expedition into the Sinjar, not with any hostile intention, but for the purpose of examining the state of the country ...' (10).

The collection of revenues in the rural districts of the north was obviously of the utmost importance for the treasuries of the Ottoman pashas. However, the results of the various military interventions in the 18th and early 19th century shows that prior to 1837 the Government had no access to northern Sinjar. At that time the major concern both of the Jalili authorities in Mosul and of the Mamluk governors of Baghdad was to keep in check the activities of a number of bands of Yazidi villagers which often plundered the caravans along the Mosul-Nusaybin road. Both Mosulawi and Baghdadi rulers delegated the protection of this vital trade route to

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9. Forbes, op.cit., pp.413;416;428. H.Southgate, Narrative of a Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia, 2 vols, New York 1840, vol.2 p.273.

10. Layard, op.cit., vol.2 pp.307-308.

the Shammar because of the control they exercised effectively over the area (11).

In the second half of the 19th century, after the downfall of the local dynasties in Baghdad and Mosul, increasing efforts were made by the government to subdue the tribes of Sinjar. The problem of Yazidi banditry was partly solved by a general improvement in public security which resulted both in better protection of the caravan routes and in harsher measures being taken by the government against the local plunderers. Hafiz Pasha's actions had effect not only among the Yazidi bandits of northern Sinjar but also among those inhabitants of the neighbouring Tall 'Afar settlement who usually associated with the Yazidis in their plundering activities (12).

The intervention of the government in Sinjar was mainly dictated by the necessity both to increase the collection of revenue, especially the arrears due to the local appointed officials, and to enforce conscription among the Yazidi tribesmen. As a matter of fact from the 1850's all the members of the Yazidi community living in Ottoman lands became liable to military service as a consequence of the

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11. It is interesting to remark that between 1715 and 1835 the local authorities launched both from Mosul and Baghdad at least eighteen major expeditions against Sinjar. See Isma'il Ibn 'Abdi, op.cit., Beirut 1934, pp.109-110/112-113. T.Nieuwenhuis, op.cit., p.128; Ra'uf, op.cit., pp.178-181; Ahmad Beg's report (Arabic typescript, 29pp., 1944 c.a), pp.10-11, EDM Box XIX file n.5.

12. Forbes, op.cit., pp.410-411; Layard, op.cit., vol.2. p.313.

enforcement of universal conscription (13). The threat of forced enrollment in the Ottoman army had already become evident to the Yazidi leadership of Shaikhan as early as 1849 when they asked the British authorities in Istanbul to intervene (14).

As Ottoman soldiers the Yazidis were compelled to serve in mixed battalions and therefore to come into close contact with Muslims, by whom they were generally much despised. In the case of the Sinjari tribesmen their enrollment in the army would have represented a great loss for the whole community. First of all families would have been deprived of their adult males for long periods which meant that people and properties would have been much more exposed to the attacks of the Government. Secondly it must be stressed that, especially after 1837, the majority of Sinjari villages were

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13. During the Tanzimat reforms the question of universal conscription became one of the central issues in the re-organization of the Ottoman army which usually included only Muslims. The recruitment of the non-Muslim subjects of the Empire would have been an important step towards creating an improved military force shaped on European models. However, the members of the non-Muslim communities (Christians of various denominations, Jews and heterodox groups) were granted the possibility of paying a commutation tax, the badali 'askariyyah, which was a substitute, at least in the case of the Christian and Jewish millahs, for the old jizya, a poll-tax levied on each member of these communities. It is however quite likely that wealthy Muslims could also buy themselves out by paying a certain amount of money to the local authorities. Mainly for this reason universal conscription proved to be largely unsuccessful since the majority of non-Muslim subjects of the Empire were able to avoid the call to arms. See R.H.Davison, Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876, Princeton 1963, pp.44-45; M.A.Griffiths, The Reorganization of the Ottoman Army under Abdulhamid II, 1880-1897, Ph.D thesis Univ. of California, 1966, pp.18-20/24-25/31; P.Dumont, 'La période des Tanzimât' in R.Mantran (ed.), Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman, Paris, 1989, pp.481-483.

14. The Yazidi leadership of Shaikhan sought the help of Sir Stratford Canning, the British Ambassador in Istanbul, through the vice-consul of Mosul, a member of the Chaldean Mosulawi family Rassam who seemed to entertain very good relations with the Yazidis. Guest, The Yazidis: a Study in Survival, pp.207-208.

relatively poor and underpopulated and needed as much manpower as possible to increase their agricultural productivity. Mainly for these reasons Sinjaris fiercely resisted any attempt on the part of the Government to recruit their tribesmen, although for a brief period, between 1875 and 1885, they were allowed to commute military service obligation by paying the badali tax (15).

By and large Ottoman intervention in Sinjar to enforce conscription had no tangible result, and in the second half of the 19th century the frequency of military expeditions against the villages of the northern district decreased considerably in comparison with the previous 100 years. This is mainly because the Government had very much shifted its attention to southern Sinjar where Turkish officials started to be posted on a more or less regular basis during the second half of the 19th century. A local Turkish representative was reported in Balad as early as 1849 and it seems that the Turkish presence continued until the beginning of WWI (16). The establishment of a permanent Turkish garrison in the capital of the Mountain came mainly as a result of the sudden penetration of the government to the adjoining area of Tall 'Afar. After Hafiz Pasha's expedition

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15. Ibid., p.126.

16. When Forbes visited Sinjar in 1838 he did not report the presence of any Turkish official in Balad. In 1849 Layard mentions a local representative of the Government in the town. Layard, op.cit., vol.2 p.321. Thirty years later Balad had a Turkish qaimmaqam with a few attendants and at the beginning of the 20th century it seems that the government was still represented in southern Sinjar. E.Sachau, Reise in Syrien und Mesopotamien, Leipzig 1883, p.328; M.Sykes, 'Journeys in North Mesopotamia', GJ, 30(1907), p.393.

in 1837 Tall 'Afar was occupied permanently by Turkish troops and started to be used as a base to control the movements of a number of the Yazidi tribes of eastern Sinjar (17).

Although the influence of the Turkish governors varied a lot and was generally limited to those tribes living in the vicinity of the town, at least between 1869 and 1892, their presence contributed to set new patterns of relationships among certain tribes and the government. In 1869 Midhat Pasha succeeded in imposing the payment of tax arrears upon the tribesmen in the south east, and in addition he arranged for the tribes to provide a certain number of recruits for the Ottoman army on a yearly basis (18). By the beginning of the 1890's the influence of the government in south Sinjar started to decrease once again, largely as an indirect result of the general enforcement of the pan-Islamic policy of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid in the province of Mosul. This policy had disastrous effects on the Yazidi community of Iraqi Shaikhan whose most prominent members were compelled to convert to Islam. In contrast, in Sinjar it was an important factor in setting in motion a widespread Yazidi religious revival, which strengthened the position of those Yazidi tribes and tribal aghas who had fiercely opposed any Ottoman attempts to penetrate into the Mountain. The unsuccessful expedition against Sinjar in 1892, led by the Ottoman general 'Umar Wahbi who had previously attacked Shaikhan and

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17. Layard, op.cit., vol.2 p.313.

18. Despatch from Rassam to British Embassy in Istanbul n.5, 31-5-1869, FO 195/949 quoted by Guest, op.cit., p.116.

compelled many Yazidis to convert to Islam, marked a turning point both in Sinjari inter-tribal relations, as will be explained later, and in the limited control over certain tribes that the local officials had achieved over the previous years (19).

The situation obviously deteriorated when WWI broke out and Iraq became a theatre of military operations. The general confusion which accompanied the advance of the British army from the south and the progressive retreat of the Turks allowed the Yazidis to regain full control of Sinjar until the establishment of British administration in 1919.

By and large the Yazidi population of rural Sinjar appears to have been in something of an exceptional position in comparison with other inhabitants of the northern Iraqi Jazirah. However, the Sinjari Yazidis shared a number of features with other heterodox communities like the Druzes, Nusayris and Ismailis who lived in the rural areas of Ottoman Syria. The most important of these were their territorial concentration in sheltered areas, a marked tribal organization and the presence of local religious and political structures which tended to resist the imposition of Ottoman rule. However, varying local conditions were important in diversify the development of community-state

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19. See pp.138-140 for 'Umar Wahbi Pasha's expeditions against the Yazidis and Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid's pan-Islamic policy.



relations among these groups (20).

In their nomadic lifestyle the great Bedouin tribal formations of the northern Jazirah found both their great weakness and their strength vis-à-vis the central government. Partly because of the widespread political and economic instability pastoralism represented a relatively secure way of life for the tribesmen, but the absence of any rigid, coordinated and controlled management of their vital resources made them critically exposed to and affected by changing political, ecological and economic conditions. It was precisely in these circumstances that the government was generally able to interfere in their internal affairs in the course of its efforts to achieve tighter control of tribal lands and populations. The sedentary agriculturalists, especially those settled in the fertile riverain areas, were generally more vulnerable than the nomads since they were less mobile and less militarized. Their very existence depended on the plots of land they cultivated, constrained by the limits of an oasis or by artificial irrigation. Their properties were usually easily accessible to the armies of the pashas and to the bellicosity of nomadic tribesmen. In both cases it appears that the success of any resistance to the penetration of an effective government administration

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20. For example in the second half of the 19th c. the Ottomans granted the Nusayris the right of representation in some councils of the Latakia district. This clearly indicates that close relations were established between the Ottoman authorities and some representatives of the community. D.Douwes, 'Knowledge and oppression: the Nusayriyyah in the late Ottoman period', Proceedings of 'La Shi'a nell'Impero ottomano', Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rome 15-4-1992, pp.162;167. In the case of the Yazidis there is no evidence of their participation in local administration until the period of the Mandate.

depended partly on the extent to which these sedentary and nomadic communities were able to maintain stable control of their people and resources, and to strengthen their mutual socio-economic links.

The Yazidi tribesmen mainly benefitted from the general stability of their sedentary settlements which allowed them to maintain relatively firm control over their lands inside Sinjar. At the same time their social organization, which had retained many tribal features, enabled the population of Sinjar to unite in fairly large groups when military action against the government was required. This was obviously favoured by the fact that generally speaking the male members of the tribes placed much emphasis on the development of their individual military skills. The Yazidis' relatively stable control of their lands and resources meant that the government had little opportunity to intervene in the economy of the tribes, and at least during the last century of Ottoman rule the external boundaries of the Yazidi tribal domains did not undergo substantial changes, although a number of tribes changed their locations inside the Mountain. It is true that the improved military technology of the Ottoman army contributed to increase the capacity of the Turkish battalions to penetrate into areas like Sinjar, and in consequence there was a general impoverishment of those villages most exposed to the looting and killing of the soldiers. However, attempts to penetrate the Yazidi countryside were generally short-lived and the government was never able to deprive the Sinjari villagers of the bare

necessities for existence. The relatively stable and favourable climate and abundant water resources obviously played a major role in the quick recovery of agriculture and stock-farming. Even in times of great political turmoil Sinjar was economically relatively self-sufficient in comparison with surrounding areas, although at the end of WWI the agricultural population of the northern Jazirah and the west bank of the Tigris was reduced to considerable poverty. Military operations and widespread conscription had depopulated vast areas and provoked a drastic diminution in the agricultural production. In southern Sinjar, however, barley and maize were still available and the majority of the labour force had managed to avoid the Ottoman call to arms (21).

By and large the militant clan tradition which had developed in the course of time among the population was strengthened whenever the government intensified its efforts to expand its influence in the territory. At the same time with little or no territorial control on the part of the government there was very little opportunity for the local authorities to undermine the tribal ethos which regulated socio-economic relations between group members and provided a great sense of security to each individual tribesman.

Ottoman land policy had repercussions on the relations among the Sinjari tribesmen rather than substantially

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21. 'Mosul Division Report' by Col. Leachman incl in Monthly Reports of Political Officers Baghdad Vilayat, Dec. 1918, p. 16, IO L/P&S/10/620. Route Report 'Bridge of Victory. Balad to Jabal Sinjar' by Capt. Campbell Munro I.M.S. incl in memo Office Civil Commissioner Baghdad to Arab Bureau Cairo, 23-9-18, IO L/P&S/10/618.

modifying the position of the tribes vis-à-vis the government. In the late Ottoman period most Sinjari Kurds, both Yazidis and Muslims, did not possess the tapu deeds for the land they cultivated, largely because of the general lack of contact between the members of the Yazidi tribes and the officials of the tapu department. The tribesmen, all illiterate and generally refusing contacts outside their kin groups, had no clear idea of the provisions of the Land Code and still tended to consider the exploitation of their lands as a natural right deriving from their tribal membership. However, as has been explained the authorities started distributing title deeds after 1869 albeit in a very confused and haphazard way, especially to those who were in a position to bribe local officials. Those who could afford to bribe were usually rich Mosulawis, local Christian traders or Muslims belonging to the Arab tribes of Sinjar. As a result of this some properties became very fragmented and constituted a source of conflict among the villagers as appears from later developments during the mandate, but there was no wholesale appropriation of agricultural lands by city notables as took place in the Yazidi villages of the Mosul plain (22).

To a certain extent tribal barriers in the Bedouin

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22. As far as the exploitation of tribal lands was concerned this contradiction between old tribal practice and rights of more or less permanent ownership granted by the tapu certificates was a common feature in late Ottoman Iraq, especially in the centre and the south. Farouk-Sluglett/Sluglett, op.cit., pp.493-495. Statements on land conditions in Sinjar are based on Review of Civil Administration of Mesopotamia, 1920, pp.20-21, CO 696/3; memo from Air HQ Baghdad to Counsellor HC, 16-3-1927, ref.I/10/1, AIR 23/160.

Jazirah had proved permeable to state control during the government of Midhat Pasha, given improved military technology and the growing interference of the government in the internal affairs of the tribes. The measures taken in Sinjar had more temporary effects and did not represent a long-term solution to the 'Yazidi problem'. The situation changed radically with the advent of a new administration which was able to establish more direct links with certain influential tribes as well as to exercise more efficient control over the area occupied by the Yazidi community of Sinjar.

### III.3 - SINJARI TRIBAL AFFAIRS

As segmentary structures based on kinship affiliation the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar represented quite distinct and separate units, although, as shown above, the tribes themselves were often very fragmented. The tribal aghas negotiated long-term alliances with other tribal leaders but the stability of these coalitions was greatly affected by the attitude of the chiefs of the bavs (mahqul) who, according to circumstances, could lead the sub-sections of the tribe they controlled to join opposing factions. Segmentation and factionalism among the Sinjari tribes became particularly evident in the development of local controversies which usually strengthened the links existing among tribesmen belonging to relatively small kin-related groups who usually

identified their interests with those of a particular leader. However, despite the general mobility of tribal alliances which created a great deal of political fragmentation in the Mountain, a balanced opposition of power among the various tribes, sections and sub-sections was usually maintained. The resolution of conflicts in fact generally led to a symmetrical redistribution of power within a pluralistic system, either by preserving old loyalties or by creating new ones. This is one of the main reasons why no single united leadership emerged in Sinjar which could control all its Kurdish tribal settlers. Similarly, as far as it is possible to ascertain, no single confederation ever included all the tribes.

At the end of the 19th century it appears that many changes which contributed to the rise to power of certain tribes and tribal leaders and the formation of new tribal coalitions should be attributed to a number of circumstances influenced by the more or less direct intervention of the Ottoman Government.

As mentioned above at the beginning of the 1870's Sinjar was temporarily administered as part of the mutasarrifiyyah of Dair al-Zur and the government had succeeded in establishing a qaimmagam in the town of Balad (23). In this period Turkish officials, especially the qaimmagam Ahmad Beg, approached the chief of the Yazidi tribe of the Musqurah, Sufuq Agha, and appointed him Paramount Shaikh of the Mountain, hoping to make him increasingly linked to the

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23. See pp.123-124/128 footnote 16.

local Ottoman administration. The choice of Sufuq Agha as representative of the government in Sinjar was largely dictated by the reputation the Musqurah leadership enjoyed as the aghas of the tribe, Sufuq in particular was one of the leading actors in Sinjari politics and there were a significant number of Muslim Kurds living integrated into the Musqurah tribe. Sufuq's Paramountship was nonetheless only nominal since his influence did not extend far beyond the domains of his own tribe and he had no effective control over the other Yazidi tribal groups living in the Mountain. However, it seems that for a brief period this enabled the government to collect revenues among the two powerful Habbabat and Mihirkan tribes, as well as among Sufuq's followers in the Musqurah (24). More importantly for future developments in Sinjar during the mandate, Sufuq's new position vis-à-vis the government contributed to strengthen the prestige of the faqir Hamu Shiru who, at approximately the same time as the appointment of Sufuq, was starting to gather small groups of followers from both lay and religious background around himself. Hamu Shiru in fact became the main temporal and spiritual advisor of the Musqurah Paramount and as such he became increasingly involved in Sinjari politics, becoming fully acquainted with the problems involved in dealing with the local Ottoman authorities, the Bedouin chiefs whose tribes moved around Sinjar and the Yazidi leaders who controlled tribal groups settled in the Mountain.

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24. Isma'il b.'Abdi, op.cit., pp.116-117; Damluji, op.cit., pp.240-241;505.

The fact that his political 'career' began under the aegis of Sufuq who was a protégé of the Ottoman authorities is indeed quite ironic given that in the following years and during the mandate Hamu became the fiercest opponent of any Ottoman and Muslim presence in the Mountain.

After the death of Sufuq some time between 1890 and 1892, Hamu Shiru proclaimed himself Paramount of Sinjar without the assent of the local Ottoman authorities. By then his followers had dramatically increased in numbers and they had come to constitute a compact and organized group which started to be referred to as the Fugara' tribe (25). Approximately at the same time Hamu Shiru had gained ascendancy over the town of Balad which was previously controlled by the Yazidi Habbabat whose leaders were supported by the local qaimmaqam, since their tribal chief Muhammad Kahiyah was one of the main allies of the Turks in the Mountain. As well as having a majority of Yazidis the Habbabat tribe also included many Muslims; this Muslim community was strengthened by the presence of some 300 Muslim non-tribal families which formed a compact unit, almost a Muslim enclave. As stated above Balad was also an important centre of Christian settlement and its Christian population was mainly involved in trade. Habbabat chiefs usually fulfilled the primary function of intermediaries among the different groups in the town, their aghas often acting as arbiters in local disputes especially over crucial issues

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25. See pp.109-111. Damluji, op.cit., p.262; Personalities 'Hamu Shiru' in Military Report on Mesopotamia (Iraq). Area 1 Northern Jazirah, p.142, IO L/MIL/17/15/42.



such as the allotment of pastures, agricultural lands and water (26).

Among the Fuqara' the 'creation' and preservation of tribal cohesion very much depended on membership in the faqir, religious group to which all the male members of the tribe belonged. In this context Hamu Shiru represented for each faqir a powerful focus for allegiance to the group given the pivotal role he had played in establishing the Fuqara' as an independent socio-political unit. Hamu Shiru continued to use his religious standing to strengthen his position both among his followers and among the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar even after the Fuqara' had achieved internal unity and cohesion. This was especially so because of renewed Ottoman efforts to convert the Yazidis to Islam as part of a new centralization policy promoted by the Tanzimat Reforms, and also because of the wide diffusion of Pan-Islamic ideas during the reign of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid (1876-1909) which had a considerable impact on the religious feeling of Yazidi inhabitants of the Mountain at the end of the 19th century (27). In the 1880's the Mosulawi authorities had already devised a specific scheme to convert the Yazidis of the Mosul

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26. Lescot, Enquête, p.137; Damluji, op.cit., pp.233-234/240-241.

27. The pan-Islamic policy of the Sultan centred around two main issues: a new conception of the power of the caliphate which had to be extended to all those Muslim living outside the Empire and the creation of stronger links with the Arab provinces which entailed a widespread campaign of conversion among all those non-Muslim subjects who were not members of the Christian and Jewish millahs. See F.Georgeon, 'Le dernier sursant (1878-1908)', in R.Mantran (ed), Histoire de l'Empire Ottoman, Paris 1989, pp.533-537. For earlier stages of the development of Pan-Islamism in the Ottoman Empire see R.H.Davison, Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876, Princeton 1963, pp.274-277.

province to Islam. Conversion to Islam was particularly important to solve the thorny issue of the enrolment of Yazidis in the army given that much of the resistance to the Ottoman call to arms on the part of members of the community stemmed from their religious beliefs (28). It was however the campaign of the Ottoman general 'Umar Wahbi Pasha against Shaikhan in 1892 that had a determining influence on the position of Hamu Shiru in the Mountain since its repercussions were important in changing patterns of relations among the different religious communities of in Sinjar.

'Umar Wahbi's attack against Shaikhan provoked the conversion of the Yazidi Mir Mirza Beg, the highest religious personality of the community. On that occasion the sanctuary of Shaikh 'Adi, the main Yazidi temple which had worked as principal point of reference for the Yazidi believers of Iraq for centuries, was turned into a Qur'anic school. Yazidi refugees from Shaikhan, both commoners and men of religion, fled to Jabal Sinjar in search of shelter and their stories about the atrocities committed by the Muslims contributed to strengthening the religious feeling among the Yazidi population of the Mountain. Vigorous millenarian and anti-Muslim propaganda began to be carried out by two Shaikhanli religious personalities, Küçük Mirza al-Kabari and Küçük

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28. Guest, op.cit., p.127. In 1872 the Yazidi leadership of Shaikhan drafted a petition addressed to the Ottoman Government to inform the authorities of the reasons for the Yazidis' refusal to join the army. The document, known as 'The 1872 Petition', clearly shows the religious nature of the Yazidis' resistance to conscription. See: G.Furlani, Testi religiosi dei Yezidi, Bologna, 1930, pp.92-102; F.Nau/J.Tfindji, 'Recueil de textes et de documents sur les Yézidis', ROC, 10(1915-17), pp.168-171.

Alias Khallu, who tried to mobilize the Yazidi population against the Muslims preaching the advent of a new social order under the aegis of a Yazidi reign of justice. This general state of turmoil prompted the intervention in Sinjar of General 'Umar Wahbi who tried to penetrate into the Yazidi country from the North in 1892. The failure of this military expedition brought widespread popularity to the followers of Hamu who in the meantime had become the focus of anti-Muslim resistance and enabled them to seize a considerable amount of Turkish arms and ammunition which the soldiers had left behind when they were forced to withdraw (29).

As a result of this newly-acquired military strength the Fuqara', aided by large numbers of Yazidis from other tribes, started a widespread campaign of persecution against the Muslims living in Balad and in eastern Sinjar which was facilitated by the difficult position of those Yazidi aghas controlling Muslim tribesmen, whose authority had started to decline over previous years. As explained above the Habbabat leadership had begun to lose ground in Balad as a result of the emergence of the Fuqara', and the Musqurah leaders had become increasingly involved in a bloody feud with the Mihirkhan, the other Yazidi tribe with a large Muslim membership. Just before the arrival of 'Umar Wahbi in 1892

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29. S.Damluji, *op.cit.*, pp.507-508; Père Anastase Marie de Saint Élie, 'Al-YazIdiyyah', *al-Mashriq*, 2(1899), pp.834-835; Ahmad, *op.cit.*, Miami 1975, p.344; Edmonds, *op.cit.*, p.60. 'Umar Wahbi Pasha was the commander of a 'reform force' sent from Istanbul to Mosul to crush tribal rebellions in the province. See Çetinsaya, *op.cit.*, pp.180-182.

the Ottoman authorities of Mosul were forced to intervene in eastern Sinjar to pacify the two tribes. On that occasion the majority of Musqurah and Mihirkan leaders, including the Musqurah Paramount Sufuq, were either killed or taken prisoner (30).

Generally speaking relations between Christians and Yazidis in Balad Sinjar were good especially after the government had started its conversion policy. Many Sinjari Yazidis in fact began to view Christianity as a viable alternative to both persecution and conscription (31). Furthermore the rich trading community of Balad which at that time included almost all the Sinjari Christians was of paramount importance for many Yazidi aghas who lived in the rural areas of the Mountain given that the Christian traders served as the main commercial links between Sinjar and Mosul for the export of pastoral and agricultural products. However, it was at the beginning of WWI that the presence of Christians started to affect significantly the relations between Yazidi and Muslims especially in the town of Balad. In 1915-16 the Turks initiated widespread persecutions against the Christian communities living in Mardin, Nusaybin and Jazirah b.'Umar. Many of those who managed to survive made their way to the Jabal Sinjar hoping to find shelter among the Yazidis. Hamu Shiru became the main promoter of Christian settlement in the Mountain and by 1916 some 900

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30. Isma'il ibn 'Abdi, op.cit., p.117; Ahmad, op.cit., p.80.

31.'Les Jesides' report from the Catholic correspondent from Mesopotamia included in Les Missions Catholiques, 29-6-1879, SAL.

hundred people took permanent residence in Balad and in the village of Bardahali which had by then become the headquarters of the Fugara' tribe (32).

The arrival of the Christian refugees had the immediate effect of increasing the friction between Muslims and Yazidis and very much contributed to create internal discord between tribes like the Habbabat, Musqurah and Mihirkan which accommodated Muslim Kurds. After 1916 the aghas of the Habbabat living in Balad and its neighbourhood became subject to the Fugara' chiefs who started to tighten their links with the semi-nomadic Qirani and Samuqah leaders who controlled groups of tribesmen consisting almost entirely of Yazidis. In the meantime, although the two tribes were still divided by internal factionalism, the majority of the Musqurah and Mihirkhani chiefs had managed to settle their old disputes and had formed a new coalition which soon assumed a very marked anti-Hamu character. This coalition which also included the Muslim tribes of the Mandikan and Abu Mutaywid and the Yazidi Haskan was led by Dawud al-Dawud, the leader of the Mihirkan, a powerful leader whose opposition to Hamu Shiru was to prove vital in checking the ambitions of the Fugara' chief during the mandate (33).

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32. 'Les Chrétiens aux bêtes!', (anonymous handwritten report in four notebooks), cahier n.3, Chapter XV, pp.243-244-245-245bis-245ter, SAL colis n.17; Ismail ibn 'Abdi, op.cit., p.17.

33. Damluji, op.cit., p.513; Ahmad, op.cit., p.82.

#### III.4 - HAMU'S RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBOURING COMMUNITIES

As shown above there existed in Sinjar a number of tribes which had substantial political and socio-economic standing because of the prestige enjoyed by their leaders, their large numbers, and the control the tribesmen had long exercised over lands and resources. The traditional tribal aghas acted primarily in the interests of their kin groups and developed networks of socio-economic and political relations with outsiders only as a reflection of their individual interests in the Mountain. However, after the emergence of the Fuqara' tribe at the end of the 19th century Hamu Shiru established more extended networks of relations outside Sinjar. He then came to acquire a strong influence not only in Sinjari politics but also in the wider contest of the Jazirah despite Hamu's strained relations with the Turkish government since the last decade of the 19th century.

The Fuqara' chief was primarily concerned to build up a stable network of alliances with the most powerful political force in the Jazirah who was still successfully challenging the authority of the government in the area, the Bedouin leadership. Nomads and semi-nomads had populated the Jazirah desert for centuries, migrating periodically north and south in search for pastures and water supplies. Their summer quarters were usually located north of the Yazidi Mountain in the area bordered by the towns of Mosul, Nusaybin and Mardin.

In winter the tribesmen would migrate to the plains of lower Iraq where grazing for flocks was available almost continuously between December and May. The Bedouin tribesmen usually came into contact with those mountain Yazidis settled along the fringes of the Jabal Sinjar but never actually succeeded in penetrating far into the Mountain, or in permanently occupying the traditional Yazidi grazing grounds. Contacts were sporadic but would increase in times of adverse climatic conditions and political turmoil when the Bedouin tribesmen were pushed towards the Yazidi areas in search of loot, pastures, water supplies and political legitimation.

Between the 17th and the 19th centuries the composition and distribution of the tribal population of the Jazirah desert underwent important changes as a result of the arrival of groups of Shammar from Central Arabia. At the beginning of the 19th century the last great migration from Najd pushed the Shammari tribes northwards, towards the territories adjacent to the Jabal Sinjar. In 1805 20,000 Shammar migrated to Iraq and settled in the Jazirah north and south of Sinjar. The Arab Tayy tribe, which had previously controlled much of the area, was compelled to move towards Nusaybin and to accept Shammari overlordship. Minor tribes at that time gravitating around Sinjar, like the Arabized Kurdish Jirjiriyyah and Hassinan, whose members claimed Yazidi origin, the Arab Juhaish and Jubur moved towards the marginal areas north and south of Tall 'Afar, along the River Tigris

(34).

The establishment of the Shammar as lords of the Jazirah contributed to a tighter concentration of the Yazidis in their traditional Sinjari stronghold. Although some Sinjari tribesmen were obliged to pay khuwah, the 'brotherhood' tax, by and large the Shammari chiefs did not succeed in imposing any kind of political rule over the Mountain. In the 18th and early 19th century Yazidi robbers occasionally succeeded in disturbing Shammar control of certain caravan routes, especially between Mosul and Nusaybin, provoking a consequent loss in revenues. In these cases the Shammar would seek the support of the government to try to neutralize the Yazidi plunderers as it happened in 1833, soon before Hafiz Pasha's expedition, when the chief of the Shammar and the governor of Mosul, Yahya Pasha, carried out a joint expedition against Sinjar (35).

At the beginning of the 20th century Hamu's main concern seems to have been the protection of southern Sinjar from the bellicosity of the eastern Shammar. He established good relations with the grandson of the legendary Shammari chief Sufuq, al-'Asi b. Farhan Pasha. al-'Asi had become the leader of the eastern Shammar in 1890 and in 1911 was officially appointed to the Paramountship of his tribe by the Ottoman government. His territorial influence extended from the area around Nusaybin to the lower Jazirah lands south of Sinjar.

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34. R.Montagne, 'Contes poétiques bédouines' BEO, 5(1935), pp.40-42, 49; Nieuwenhuis, op.cit., p.125; Military Report on Mesopotamia Area 1, p.2.

35. Williamson, op.cit., pp.55-56; Nieuwenhis, op.cit., p.128; Sachau, op.cit., pp.303-304.



The seasonal migration routes of his tribes generally run along two lines located east and west of the Mountain. Given the easy access to southern Sinjar from the flatland of the lower Jazirah, it was there that the Yazidi tribesmen came to be particularly affected by the movement of the eastern Shammar. To a certain extent Hamu Shiru benefitted from the close relations existing between al-'Asi and the Turkish authorities since the Pasha of Mosul was at least partly concerned to keep Shammari activities in check in the lands surrounding the Jabal, although this did not prevent the Shammari tribesmen from collecting khuwah among some Yazidi villagers (36). However, the troubled history of the eastern Shammar in the late Ottoman period (partly the result of increasing Ottoman interference) had wide repercussions on the public security of the Mountain since sections hostile to al-'Asi repeatedly attacked and raided Yazidi villages located in the south while it seems that northern Sinjar kept relatively safe from Shammari bellicosity (37).

In the Shimal the population had occasional contacts with members of the Bedouin Tayy whose leader, Shaikh Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman, became the privileged ally of Hamu Shiru, although the Fuqara' had no direct control of the northern district. The Tayy had arrived in the upper Jazirah

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36. Military Report on Mesopotamia Area 1, pp.107/109/143/154. The collection of khuwah in Sinjar continued during the period of the mandate. In 1921 it was delegated to al-'Asi's brother Jarallah. Memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff Intelligence Baghdad, 17-1-27, n.I.M/07.E, AIR 23/153.

37. Williamson, op.cit., pp.134-136. For a general discussion of the Eastern Shammar see ibid., pp.116-119;131-137.

in the middle 17th century as a result of one of the great Shammar migration waves which compelled Tayy tribesmen, once settled around Raqqah and partly engaged in agriculture, to migrate eastwards. Their new area of settlement, which stretched between Mosul, the northern slopes of Sinjar and Mardin, brought a material change in their life-style; from being almost settled agriculturalists they became nomadic herdsmen who devoted themselves exclusively to cattle breeding. The political role of the Tayy had become increasingly important since the whole tribe was unified under the leadership of Shaikh Muhammad who was on relatively good terms with the Shammar al-'Asi. However, Muhammad well understood that the intensification of the rivalries among the eastern Shammar offered him a good opportunity of gaining ascendancy in Jazirah politics (38).

Since the arrival of the Tayy in the northern Jazirah Yazidi villagers belonging to the Haskan and Samuqah tribes had established close links with Tayy tribesmen who would penetrate into the Shimal to share Yazidi grazing grounds during the winter. This favoured contacts between Shaikh Muhammad and the local Musqurah and Haskan aghas although Hamu Shiru was still the main point of reference of Shaikh Muhammad in the Mountain. Yazidi-Tayy friendly relations were mutually beneficial: Tayy leaders saw the possibility of gradually extending their influence southwards and regaining control of the southern lowlands at the expense of the

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38. Military Report on Mesopotamia Area 1, pp.126-127; Montagne, 'Contes poétiques', p.40.

Shammar, given that their tribesmen were allowed to enter Yazidi lands, while the presence of a strong and friendly tribe on the outer limits of north Sinjar protected a number of important Yazidi villages from Bedouin attacks (39). Tayy support was in fact vital against the occasional raids of the Jubur of the Khabur, whose chief, Muslat Pasha, had a long standing feud with Hamu Shiru. The able leadership of Muslat Pasha had contributed to emancipate the tribe from Shammari serfdom; in 1905 they had established themselves as an independent force and had ceased to pay tribute to the Shammar. Although their traditional sphere of influence lay in the Khabur area, on both sides of the river between Tall Kawkab and al-Shaitah, they would occasionally search for loot in Sinjar during their seasonal migrations (40).

The inhabitants of the neighbouring Turkoman settlement of Tall 'Afar were the fiercest enemies of the Sinjari Yazidis at the time of Hamu's rise to power. At least until the 1840s, the inhabitants of Tall 'Afar shared with the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar an almost independent status vis-à-vis the Ottoman government. This seems to have led large sections of the local Turkoman population to associate with bands of Sinjari caravan plunderers in their activities. However, following Hafiz Pasha's expedition against Sinjar in 1837, a government official and a Turkish garrison were established in the town of Tall 'Afar, after which it became

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39. Tribal Personalities 'Muhammad Shaikh of the Tayy'/'Hamu Shiru' Military report on Mesopotamia Area 1, pp.157/159.

40. Military Report on Mesopotamia Area 1, pp.78-79.

a Turkish stronghold. From an administrative point of view Tall 'Afar had been administered as a nahiyyah of the Sinjar qadha at least since the early 1880's (41). The 'Afar leadership, mainly city notables who were also powerful tribal aghas and rich landowners, generally cooperated with the Turkish authorities in the last three decades of Ottoman rule. The extent of the enmity between Sinjaris and 'Afaris is clearly shown by the support given by the majority of the population to the Turkish army during the last Ottoman attack on Sinjar in 1918. On that occasion the resentment focused on the anti-Turkish activities of Hamu who was openly defying the authorities by disturbing the Turkish communication lines north of Sinjar and sheltering Armenian and Kurdish refugees from the Kurdish areas (42).

The presence of the Turkish garrison provided the population of the area with a certain degree of protection against Shammari and Yazidi bellicosity. For this reason other minor tribes gravitating around Tall 'Afar became increasingly linked to the local Turkoman aghas and to the Turkish authorities, in particular the semi-nomadic Arab Juhaish whose tribesmen would settle near the villages

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41. 'Reply of the British and Iraqi Assessors to the invitation of the Commission to make suggestions regarding the alignment of the Frontier in the Sinjar region' in Proceedings of the Syro-Iraqi Frontier Commission, document n.32 presented by the British assessors, p.i, EDM Box IV file 1; Layard, op.cit., 1849, vol.2 p.313; Forbes, op.cit., p.411; H.Southgate, Narrative of a Tour through Armenia Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia, New York 1840, vol.2, p.273.

42. Military Report on Mesopotamia Area 1, pp.134;141/142; G.R.Driver, The Kurdistan and the Kurds, G.S.I Printing Section, Mount Carmel 1919, pp.65-66; Yunis Muhammad 'Abd Allah, Tarikh Tal 'Afar qadiman wa hadithan, Mosul 1967, p.259.

situated along the 'Afar-Sinjar road during the harvest and ploughing season (43). This 'Afar-Juhaish alliance, cemented by the support of the local Ottoman officials, contributed to the creation of bad feelings between Juhaish chiefs and Yazidi aghas. Juhaish hostility was directed particularly against Hamu Shiru who controlled the small Albu Mutaywid tribe whose members constituted a separate section of the Juhaish. Their grazing grounds and villages, located along the road between Tall 'Afar and Sinjar, were subjected to the tyranny of Hamu's followers who would occasionally carry out raids and impose tribute on the population. Only occasionally did the sporadic intervention of the Shammar and Junaish succeed in emancipating the Mutaywid from their servile status (44).

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43. Military Report on Mesopotamia Area 1, p.87-88.

44. Military Report on Mesopotamia Area 1, pp.100-101; Driver, op.cit., p.67.

## CHAPTER IV

THE BRITISH OCCUPATION AND MANDATE:

THE EARLY YEARS, 1918-1925

The last century of Ottoman rule in the Middle East was a period of significant change in which attempts to implement socio-economic and political reforms clashed with the traditional institutions of the Ottoman polity. The Tanzimat edicts of 1839 and 1856 and the promulgation of the constitution of 1876 were the legal expressions of these attempts at reform. These edicts proclaimed equality and security for all Ottoman citizens and introduced new notions of administration and economic development which were to transform relations between the Ottoman state and its subjects. In this context two major factors influenced the Ottomans' policies vis-à-vis the non-Muslim subjects of the Empire: first, the growing influence of the Western Powers, which closely followed developments affecting religious groups, especially the Christians; secondly, the necessity of enforcing the authority of the state among large sections of the population in order to implement a more effective administrative centralization. Understandably, religious diversity represented one of the most powerful deterrents to the unity of the Ottoman Empire as Islam represented the main source of authority and political legitimacy in the Ottoman state.

By stating the equality of all Ottoman subjects regardless of their religious beliefs the Tanzimat reformers adopted a clearly western-inspired approach to religious pluralism which was unknown to the traditional Islamic State.

However, to a certain extent Ottoman policies towards the non-Muslim communities in the second half of the 19th century showed a great deal of continuity with previous practices of government. It is clear that this clashed against the principles which had largely inspired the Ottoman reformers. The new pan-Islamic ideas, which became prominent in the last two decades of the 19th century, tended to reinforce the centrality of Islam in Ottoman society and therefore had a wide impact on those non-Muslim communities which did not enjoy a protected status. Furthermore the various attempts on the part of the Ottoman authorities to remodel the millet system in the last fifty years of Ottoman rule were clearly not consistent with the new principles of religious equality.

In the case of heterodox ghulat groups like the Yazidis who lived tribally organized in rural areas and did not enjoy any status within the Muslim legal tradition, the Ottoman policies of forced conversion and conscription had important long term developments. First of all increasing Ottoman attempts at Islamisation had a major impact on the religious identity of these groups. This resulted in a general strengthening of religious and/or communal feeling which often had important repercussions on the power structures of these rural communities, which were largely dependent on local religious institutions. The formation of the Fuqara' tribe in the Jabal Sinjar whose members belonged to a religious class was primarily a response to the need for religious reform. It also indicated the necessity of creating a strong new political and military leadership among the



community in response to the new policies of the government. Secondly, the growing interference of Great Britain and France in matters concerning minorities through diplomatic and missionary efforts created the bases for closer relations between such groups and the western Powers in the last century of Ottoman rule. This rapprochement is crucial in explaining much of the dynamics of interaction between communities and the new colonial administrations in the post-WWI period. The attention the Iraqi Yazidis received in British diplomatic circles in Istanbul in the 19th century undoubtedly contributed to create a great deal of pro-British feelings among their leaders and determined the unconditional Yazidi support for British colonial rule which lasted from the British occupation of northern Iraq in 1918 until the mid-1920's.

The downfall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918 marked the beginning of direct British colonial rule over Iraq which lasted officially until 1932. The institution of European mandates in the Middle East under the aegis of the League of Nations transformed the nature of the state administration in the area, created new local ruling elites and greatly modified the relations between government and society. The mandate system combined two conflicting ideas of government; it was largely inspired by the principle of self-determination formulated by Woodrow Wilson in the aftermath of the First World War while simultaneously recognising colonial rule as the frame within which the local populations

had to implement statehood. Thus Great Britain, which acted as mandatory power in Iraq since 1920, supervised the formation of a modern nation-state in the area by establishing and supporting new local elites. In 1921 the British established a parliamentary monarchy headed by King Faysal, the son of the Sharif of Mecca and a well known British protégé. Thus colonial and imperial concerns greatly affected the nation-building process in the 1920's and to a lesser extent in the 1930's and 1940's. In the predominantly Sunni Arab controlled political scenario which was set up by the British for nation-building purposes, old religious communities generally experienced a period of transition which often entailed the reformulation of 'new' strategies and identities. De iure religion gradually ceased to be a factor of political discrimination and socio-economic separation in the new political system. De facto membership in a new and egalitarian political community was of course not fully achieved. Long after the termination of the mandate in 1932 Ottoman legacies, old loyalties and British imperial concerns continued to affect intercommunal relations and the relations between old religious communities and the new state, as the case of the Sinjari Yazidis shows. The policies of the mandatory administration also show a great deal of continuity with the previous government practices. During the mandate the British revived the millet system through the institution of Spiritual Councils for Christian and Jews. Furthermore, especially in the countryside, administrative power was usually delegated to the leaders of local Muslim

and non-Muslim communities who had often religious standing. As a result although the social and political meaning of religious affiliation underwent remarkable changes religious solidarity among the non-Muslims grew in strength mainly as a result of British colonial policies. At the same time political and socio-economic divisions among the Muslim community increased in comparison with the late Ottoman period. The development of a Kurdish national movement and the increasing antagonism between Sunni and Shi'i are undoubtedly the most illuminating examples.

The Mosul province was administered by representatives of the Iraqi government who worked under the direct supervision of British officials. The establishment of national boundaries with Turkey and Syria, created a great deal of political and military instability in the area. This instability had a wide impact on the local population and affected considerably the development of community-state relations in the Jabal Sinjar.

When the British arrived in the area in late 1918 the most influent political leaders of the Yazidi community of Jabal Sinjar were Hamu Shiru, leader of the Fuqara' tribe, Shaikh Khidr and Shaikh Khalaf, the two religious leaders who had acquired a prominent political position among the Qiran and Haskan tribes, and the lay agha Dawud al-Dawud who led the Mihirkan group.

#### IV.1 - BRITISH OCCUPATION OF SINJAR AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE SETTLEMENT

Jabal Sinjar was not directly involved in the military operations of WWI in the Mesopotamian provinces of the Ottoman Empire, which began with the landing of the British Indian Expeditionary Force 'D' in Fao at the end of 1914. The British troops, who were shipped to the Persian Gulf from India, gradually occupied Iraq advancing from the south; after the occupation of Baghdad in 1917 and the establishment of a provisional military government the Expeditionary Force headed towards Mosul following the east bank of the Tigris through the towns of Kifri, Tuz and Kirkuk.

In 1917, when British soldiers were still fighting the Turks to open their way to northern Iraq, the strategic importance of the Jabal Sinjar became clear to the British military High Command whose staff was directing the military campaign from Baghdad. The Yazidi Mountain represented an ideal logistical base to launch an attack against the Turkish army from the Nusaybin front if the planned assault on Mosul from Kirkuk failed (1). In this context the High Command in Baghdad made at least two attempts to establish contact with the Sinjari aghas in 1917 and 1918 by sending two Bedouin envoys to the Mountain. A British official also succeed in reaching southern Sinjar where he made enquiries

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1. A.T.Wilson, Loyalties. Mesopotamia 1914-1917, London 1930, p.263.

about the condition of the land and people (2).

The Jabal Sinjar and surrounding areas were still nominally under Turkish control although the majority of the Ottoman troops were engaged on the Kirkuk front. The support of the tribal leadership and population of the northern Jazirah would facilitate the movement of British troops in the area by providing the military High Command with precious information about the activities of both the tribes and the Turkish troops and officials still in the region. It was essential therefore to obtain detailed information about the general feeling among the tribes and the political attitudes of their chiefs. Since the beginning of the war the Yazidis of Sinjar had clearly demonstrated their anti-Turkish proclivities. In 1917 a mixed Yazidi tribal force headed by Hamu Shiru had started to raid Turkish convoys and military posts on the route to Nusaybin creating serious disruption to Turkish communication lines north of the Mountain (3).

During the winter of 1917 the situation in Sinjar was critical. Hamu Shiru, who was organizing the armed resistance against possible Turkish attempts to occupy Sinjar, was also seriously concerned about Bedouin attacks fomented by Turkish agents who were apparently very active in spreading anti-

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2. Memo Chief Political Officer Baghdad to Arab Bureau Cairo, 8-11-1917, n.n., IO L/P&S/10/618; memo office Civil Commissioner to Arab Bureau, 18-11-1917, n.8909, IO L/P&S/10/618; fortnightly report n.8, Feb. 15th to March 1st 1918 incl in Collection of fortnightly reports to Secretary of State for India by Civil Commissioner, p.32, IO L/P&S/10/732; route report 'Bridge of Victory. Balad to Jabal Sinjar' by Capt. A.Campbell Munro incl in memo Office Civil Commissioner to Arab Bureau, 23-9-1918, n.n., IO L/P&S/10/618. On this occasion Capt. Munro did not meet Hamu Shiru.

3. Military Report on Mesopotamia Area 1, p.4.

British propaganda among the tribes. This was especially the case of the followers of the Shammari chief al-'Asi and of Shaikh Muhammad of the Tayy who were encamped north of Sinjar, in the proximity of the military posts the Turks had established around Mardin and Nusaybin. The prevailing atmosphere of uncertainty, especially with regard to the results of the military operations, created a great deal of tension among the inhabitants of Sinjar who, despite their tribal affiliation and the conflicting political attitudes displayed by their leaders in the past, increasingly perceived that only a British military presence in the Mountain could offer protection to their lives and properties. By the end of 1917 the Chief Political Officer in Baghdad had entered negotiations with Hamu Shiru, whose pro-British stance was gathering widespread support among the majority of the tribal leaders of Sinjar. Hamu's pro-British enthusiasm as well as the feeling of isolation and fear widespread among the population is clearly expressed in a letter sent to the Chief Political Officer in Baghdad in November 1917:

'I have received your esteemed letter ... It was read out to the Yazidi chiefs. All present and I also, were [sic] glad and happy that we could, by all possible means, cooperate with you and became subject to you ... Our friends of the Tayy tribe are now in the neighbourhood of Mardin and we wait for them and other tribes to come back in the beginning of winter; meanwhile we cannot operate alone for we fear the Turks, who hate us very much owing to our rebellious attitude towards them ...' (4).

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4. Transl letter Hamu Shiru to Chief Political Officer Baghdad, 5-11-1917, incl in memo Chief Political Officer Baghdad to Arab Bureau Cairo, 8-11-1917, IO L/P&S/10/618. This memo offers the best available documentation

Hamu's fears were amply justified as in the first months of 1918 the Turkish authorities of Mosul asked him to hand over all the Christian refugees whom he had helped to settle in Sinjar two years before, to surrender all the arms in possession of the population and to pay 10 years' taxes in advance together with a war subsidy. When he refused to obey these orders, a Turkish battalion which included veterans from the Caucasian front marched against Sinjar led by the commander Ibrahim Hajj Beg. The Turkish soldiers stopped in Tall 'Afar for two months in order to prepare for the attack against the Sinjaris, helped by local 'Afar tribesmen who provided intelligence about the territory and the location of villages and armed men in the Yazidi stronghold. In the early summer of 1918 the Turks started to besiege the Mountain and in the following six weeks they succeeded in occupying a significant number of villages in the south. The majority of the inhabitants of Balad, Bardahali and of the Samuqah and Qiran strongholds fled to the north where the local population provided shelter for the refugees while supplying those tribesmen still fighting in the south with food and ammunition. The Mihirkani chief Dawud al-Dawud signed a temporary truce with Hamu Shiru and his followers gave a considerable contribution to the relief operations. In July the troops involved in the operations against the Yazidis were suddenly recalled to Kirkuk where the majority of the

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of the British interest in Sinjar during the war as well as information on the situation in place in the Mountain prior the British occupation.

Turkish army was concentrated. After the Turkish troops stationed in the northern Jazirah were ordered to withdraw to Kirkuk, Shammari and Tayy tribesmen started to raid villages inhabited by local sedentary communities and succeeded in looting a number of Yazidi settlements in south Sinjar (5).

The sudden retreat of the Turks urged the Sinjari aghas to intensify their contacts with the British military High Command. The first negotiator on behalf of the Yazidi community was Isma'il Beg Chol, the only member of the Yazidi princely family who lived in Sinjar. According to Isma'il's own account he reached the British army in Samara' and subsequently the military High Command in Baghdad with the approval of all the Sinjari leaders. Although he had started to get involved in Hamu Shiru's anti-Turkish activities since the early 1910's it is likely that he approached the British Military authorities on his own initiative given that there is clear evidence that Isma'il's egocentric character had made him very unpopular among the Yazidi lay aghas. The Chief Political Officer in Baghdad who interviewed him described Isma'il as a 'striking personality' and, unaware of the marginal role he played in Sinjari politics (which was dominated by the chiefs of the Yazidi tribes), he was initially considered a suitable candidate to protect British interests in the Mountain. A few months later, in November

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5. Military Report on Mesopotamia Area 1, pp.141-142; Yunis Muhammad, op.cit., vol.1 pp.259-262; French transl anon., 'Les Yazidis et les Turcs', Dar al-Salam (Baghdad), n.d., incl in memo Consulat de France en Mesopotamie to Ministre des Affaires Étrangères Paris, 28-7-1918, n.143, MAE 11; 'Note sur les Yazidis' by H.Sciard, n.d., MAE 11.



1918, when Sinjar became effectively part of the Occupied Territories after the capture of Mosul, the Isma'il option was abandoned. Hamu Shiru was appointed Hakim of the Mountain, an office which put him in control of both administration and public security for a monthly salary of 600 Rs. (6).

This position was granted to Hamu Shiru as part of a tribal policy which the provisional government had employed over the previous two years in the administrative reorganization of vast rural areas of southern Iraq, which were mainly populated by tribal people. The British had started subsidizing on a more or less regular basis those influential tribal shaikhs whose authority was widely recognised by the tribesmen. It is true that especially in the south of the country in late 19th century the Ottoman government had partly succeeded in undermining the basis of tribal cohesion which centred around the traditional figure of the shaikh (7). Yet, when the British arrived in Iraq the institution of the shaikhdom was very much alive and still provided a means of viable and efficient political and social control over the tribes and tribal confederations.

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6. Isma'il b.'Abdi, op.cit., pp.53-54/59/63-64; Baghdad Vilayat fortnightly report n.16, June 15th-July 1st 1918, IO L/P&S/10/732; Mosul Division Report, by G.E Leachman incl in Monthly Reports of the Political Officers of the Baghdad Vilayat, Nov.1918, pp.63-64, IO L/P&S/10/620; Mosul Division report for 1919, by Col. Nalder, CO 696/2; N.N.E.Bray, A Paladin of Arabia, London 1936, pp.359-360.

7. Fernea discusses in detail the institution of shaikhdom among the al-Shabanah tribe of Southern Iraq and the changes brought about by the arrival of the British. R.A.Fernea, Shaykh and Effendi. Changing Patterns of Authority among the el-Shabana of Southern Iraq, Cambridge (Mass.), 1970, pp.105-117;136-142;150-153.

During the mandate some tribal chiefs became the administrators of their tribes on behalf of the government, received monthly salaries and were held responsible for the behaviour of their followers. As such they could protect the interests of the Government in the areas they controlled, simplifying the task of rural peace-keeping as well as keeping the employment of British personnel outside the main administrative centres to a minimum (8).

Therefore at the very beginning of the extension of the British administration in northern Jazirah Sinjar was placed under a separate tribal jurisdiction modelled on that created for southern Iraq, which allowed Hamu Shiru to control southern Sinjar throughout 1919. He was officially acting on behalf of the government with very little interference on the part of the British authorities in Mosul who were facing the difficult task of establishing some sort of permanent administration for the Kurdish mountain districts of the province. In Balad, Hamu delegated administrative duties to his local protégées; the Turkish qaimmaqam was not replaced by a British Assistant Political Officer, as generally happened in the headquarters of the old Ottoman qadhas, but

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8. For a general reference to the origins of the British tribal policy in Iraq see C.E.Bruce, 'The Sandeman Policy as applied to Tribal Problems of Today', JCRAS, 19(1932), pp.45-67. For its development during the mandate see P.Sluglett, Britain in Iraq 1914-1932, Oxford 1976, pp.239-252; Shakir M.Salim, Marshdwellers of the Euphrates Delta, London 1962, pp.31-37; Fernea, op.cit., pp.136-142; Y.Nakash, The Shi'is of Iraq, Princeton 1994, pp.88-94. Until the end of 1920 there were 96 British Political Officers and Assistant Political Officers all over Iraq who replaced the Turkish qaimmaqams and mudirs in the old Ottoman qadhas and nahiyyahs. By July 1921 however, soon before Faysal was appointed King of Iraq, British administrative officials were replaced by local personnel as they became available. Special Report on the Progress of 'Iraq during the period 1920-1931, HMSO, London 1931, pp.47-48.

temporarily by a Yazidi tribal chief, the Habbabat Husayn Agha b. Kahiyah, while a prominent Christian merchant, Najm 'Abdullah, presided over the Municipal Council. With their support Hamu was able to maintain his headquarters in the village of Bardahali where the majority of his tribal forces was concentrated (9).

Generally speaking no major administrative reorganization of territory was implemented. The villages remained under the control of their old mukhtars, who were usually influential members of the tribes settled in the area. The mukhtars were made responsible for the maintenance of order and the administration of justice and had to assist with the estimation and collection of revenue. They became increasingly linked to the local representatives of the new administration by being obliged both to carry out the instructions of the government in the area they controlled and to make periodic reports on the general situation in their villages. It is thus understandable, at least in the first year of British rule, that Hamu and his protégés were able to control local affairs very much more than they had been able to do in the past by establishing permanent links with certain areas of the countryside (10).

From the beginning of 1919 Hamu Shiru could also count

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9. Mosul Division Report, by Leachman incl in Monthly Reports of Political Officers Baghdad Vilayat, p.17, IO L/P&S/10/620; Isma'il b. 'Abdi, op.cit., p.68-69.

10. In 1919 in the Mosul vilayat the British authorities issued a set of regulations which sanctioned the responsibilities of the mukhtars vis-à-vis the new government. 'Instructions to mukhtars' Appendix III to Mosul Division Report, by Col.Nalder, CO 696/2.

on the support of a group of local levies subsidized by the civil administration who were recruited from among Hamu's followers and practically operated as his personal gendarmes. For some time these Yazidi shabanah, in addition to twelve men already employed as his personal escort, constituted the only gendarmes in Sinjar. In fact the employment of the old Turkish garrison was impossible for security reasons although Turkish gendarmes were still in Sinjar when the British took over the area (11).

However, by March 1920 the number of local levies was reduced and their headquarters transferred to Bardahali. This group of shabanah lost much of its efficacy as a police force and its role became fairly marginal, given that it was confined to the Hakim's headquarters. After that an Arab garrison was established in Balad and in the neighbouring village of 'Ayn Ghazal (12). The replacement of a local Yazidi tribal police force with a group of Arab gendarmes of non-Sinjari origin can be viewed as a first sign of the gradual extension in the Mountain of the presence of the British administration which was gradually starting to employ local Arab personnel. At the beginning of 1920 Sinjar was made dependent on the British Assistant Political Officer based in Tall 'Afar although the Mountain had been virtually

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11. Monthly Reports of Political Officers in the Occupied Territories of Iraq for the month January 1920, p.2, IO L/P&S/10/897, Report on Tall Afar, Jan. 1920, IO L/P&S/10/897; Arab and Kurd Levies Report for 1919 and Police Levies and Gendarmerie incl Iraq Administration Reports 1919, CO 696/2.

12. Levies and Police incl in Monthly Reports of Political Officers of the Occupied territories March 1920, L/P&S/10/897 C.

independent under Hamu's leadership for more than a year (13).

#### IV.2 - TRIBAL DISTURBANCES IN NORTHERN JAZIRAH (1918-1920)

After the retreat of Turkish forces from the Jazirah tribal disturbances occurred increasingly frequently in the areas surrounding Jabal Sinjar. This was a reflection of the great political instability which prevailed throughout Iraq in the early years of British rule. The future of the country was uncertain, the new British administration had not attracted the support of significant strata among the population and substantial areas of the countryside were still outside the control of the government. The extension of foreign rule was generally opposed by religious leaders, especially the powerful Sunni and Shi'i ulama' of southern Iraq and by Arab nationalist elements drawn from city notables, ex-officials who had served in the Turkish administration and intellectuals. This led to the outbreak of the 1920 revolt which mobilized a significant number of the tribal inhabitants of the Iraqi countryside, jeopardizing the

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13. General Circulars-Civil Administration of Iraq, Baghdad, 12-4-1919, pp.4-5, IO L/P&S/10/619; 'Political and Revenue Organisation of the Mosul Division' Appendix II to Mosul Division Report for 1919 by Col.Nalder, CO 696/2; Monthly Reports of Political Officers in the Occupied Territories of Iraq, Jan.1920, p.5, L/P&S/10/897.

whole future of the British presence in the country (14).

In the years 1918-1920 the appeal of Arab nationalism had wide repercussions on the relations between the tribal and sedentary communities of the northern Jazirah and the British whose efforts, as explained above, concentrated on devising more efficient means of control over the inhabitants of the rural areas. Tribesmen did not generally mobilize against the new foreign administration because they were attracted by the idea of Arab unity as they were usually inclined to pursue more particularistic and local goals. However, the nationalist call to arms offered some tribal groups moving in the area the opportunity to resist the consolidation of the British presence in the region. A more organized and efficient foreign administration was likely to increase the burden of taxation, as had happened in southern Iraq where the provisional government had already started to implement a more coherent fiscal policy among the tribes. Moreover it was also liable to exert tighter control on public security with the result of reducing the mobility of great nomadic formations like the Shammar, whose wealth derived mainly from raids and the collection of taxes from goods in transit and of khawah from their sedentary protégés.

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14. Several different interpretations of long and short term causes of the 1920 revolt and the role played by tribes, nationalist elements and men of religion have been documented in various publications. See as main contributions A.Vinogradov, 'The 1920 Revolt in Iraq reconsidered: the role of Tribes in National Politics', IJMES, 3(1972), pp.123-139; P.M.Holt, Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, 1516-1922, London 1960; E.Kedourie, 'Réflexions sur l'histoire du Royaume d'Irak (1921-1958)', Orient, 3(1959), pp.55-79. However, most of the material only concerns southern Iraq.

The nationalist agents operating among the tribes of the Iraqi Jazirah were usually former Ottoman officers of Mesopotamian or Syrian origin who were based in Syria, which was then ruled by a provisional Arab government led by one of the sons of the Sharif of Mecca, Amir Faysal. Their propaganda very much contributed to stir up bad feelings against foreign rule and aimed at establishing a purely Arab administration in Iraq linked closely with Faysal's government in Syria although their activities and relations with Damascus were not always clear. In fact it appears that some of these agents were adventurers who saw in the general situation of turmoil a good opportunity to increase their personal power. They generally appealed to a network of local support both among the tribes and the urban areas which they had already established while serving in the Ottoman army or administration. Between 1919 and 1920 the majority of the activities of the Sharifian nationalists in the northern Jazirah were concentrated in the area between Mosul, Hasakah and Albu Kamal. This very much contributed to increase intrigue, sedition and turmoil among the Bedouin tribes while sedentary communities like the Sinjaris and the Tall 'Afaris were affected by the Sharifian propaganda mainly as an indirect reflection of the impact it had on the nomadic formations (15).

By the end of the war the tribes of northern Jazirah had accumulated large numbers of arms and ammunition left behind

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15. S.H.Longrigg, Iraq, 1900 to 1950, Oxford 1953, pp.119-120; Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia, HMSO, London 1920, p.132.

by the Turkish soldiers during their retreat. Rifles of Turkish provenance were also regularly smuggled across the provisional Turco-Iraqi borders with the connivance of the Bedouin and Kurdish tribes. By 1920 the Yazidis of Sinjar had 2,400 rifles, a considerable number compared with estimates of rifle strength among the eastern Shammar, reported to be about 6,000 (16). In the general state of anarchy which prevailed in the flatland surrounding Sinjar under the arbitrary control of the Shammar, Anaizah, Tayy, Jubur and Juhaish tribesmen represented the main link among the various important commercial and strategical centres of the region; Balad Sinjar and Tall 'Afar, administered by the British as part of the Occupied Territories from Mosul, and Dair al-Zur and Albu Kamal, which were disputed between the Sharifians and the British until 1920 since there was as yet no precise delimitation of the border between Syria and Iraq. Both nationalists and local agitators well understood that, in view of their training and military might, the Bedouins represented the only local force able to challenge the presence of the British and to influence the political attitude of the sedentary communities of the region in favour of the government of Faysal.

Anti-British propaganda started to circulate relatively

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16. Soon after 1920 British estimates of rifle strength among the other tribes of northern Jazirah run as follows:

Tayy	1,065
Tall 'Afaris	960
Mutaywid	250
Juhaish	380
Jubur	1,825

Military report on Mesopotamia Area, pp.36-37.



late among the tribes of Sinjar and came from both the Khabur area and Dair al-Zur. In December 1919 Dair was occupied by nationalist forces under Ramadhan al-Shallash whose links with Faysal were not clear. A local Arab governor replaced the British Political Officer who had been in charge of the administration of the town since February. From Dair the nationalists could also make contact with the Shammar, the Jubur moving in the Khabur area and the Anaizah whose tribesmen usually came to the town to get their food supplies and sell their flocks. In March 1920 the Shammari chief Daham al-Hadi, who controlled those sections of the tribe moving in Syrian territory, and some Juburi leaders were seeking support among other minor tribal groups on behalf of the Sharifians (17). A Sharifian envoy from Dair reached Sinjar in March 1920 together with some Mosulawi members of the nationalist society Jamiyyat al-'Iraq whose agents were working mainly among the Shammar, Tayy and Jubur (18). It is not clear whether the Sharifian movement had established direct contact with the Jamiyyat before reaching Sinjar. However, a major tribal uprising was planned for mid-May and Sinjar was to be the main base of an attack on the left bank of the river Tigris in order to allow the Sharifians to reach the town of Mosul with their tribal supporters. The members

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17. IO L/P&S/10/769 deals extensively with the situation of Dair in 1919. Review of the Civil Administration of Mesopotamia, p.138; Monthly Report of the Political Officers in the Occupied Territories of Iraq Jan.1920, p.1, L/P&S/10/897 A; Monthly report on Tall Afar Division incl in Monthly Reports of Political Officers of the Occupied territories March 1920, L/P&S/10/897 C.

18. Jamiyyat al-'Iraq is the name given to the organization in British reports: it is not clear which of the nationalist associations is meant.

of the Jamiyyat got in touch with the Mihirkani leader Dawud al-Dawud who was known to be the most powerful opponent of the principal British local protégé, Hamu Shiru. Dawud promised his support and undertook to join the rebels in the event of a successful armed insurrection. However, Dawud's backing was not sufficient to guarantee the rebels a reliable logistical base in Sinjar to carry out military operations against Mosul. Dawud's tribal domains were located in the north-east but all the south eastern areas of the Mountain which provided the most viable access to Mosul via Tall 'Afar were inhabited by tribes controlled mostly by Hamu Shiru (19).

A first move towards Mosul was attempted from Tall 'Afar the following June. The fort was attacked by parties of tribesmen apparently led by ex-Ottoman Syrian officials, who murdered the British Assistant Political Officer and seized the town. Although many aspects of the Tall 'Afar rising are still obscure it seems that groups of Shammar, Juhaish, Jubur and Jirjiriyyah participated in the military expedition supported by fairly large numbers of 'Afaris and some local aghas (20).

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19. Police Abstract of Intelligence. Mesopotamian Police, n.13, 27-3-1920, IO L/P&S/10/839; A.T.Wilson, Mesopotamia 1917-1920: A Clash of Loyalties, London 1931, p.112; Report on the Political Situation in Iraq 1918-1920, incl in IO L/MIL/5/799.

20. For an account of the Tall 'Afar coup see Aylmer L.Haldane, The Insurrection in Mesopotamia, London 1922, pp.39-44; Review of Civil Administration of Mesopotamia, pp.138-139 ; statement of Hajj Yunis Agha on the Tall 'Afar rising incl in memo Political Officer Mosul to Civil Commissioner Baghdad, 18-8-1920, n.6014, IO L/P&S/10/833. The Tall 'Afar disturbances occurred in the wider context of the 1920 tribal insurrection which involved one-third of the Iraqi countryside especially in the rural areas of southern and central Iraq. The 1920 thawrah menaced to seriously

In Sinjar only the Arab tribe of the Albu Mutaywid joined the rebels, perhaps instigated by the Junaish of which they constituted a section. Neither Hamu Shiru nor Dawud mobilized their tribal forces and remained in Sinjar awaiting for further developments. Only a small group of followers of one of Hamu's Turkish gendarmes, Jamil Bey, who had long been in touch with Ramadhan al-Shallash fled to Tall 'Afar to help the insurgents. When peace was restored in Tall 'Afar after the intervention of the British Army in late July, Hamu declared that he was ready to cooperate with the government in the neighbourhood of the Mountain to counter any resistance from Arab tribesmen who had participated in the rising. However, he only took up arms against the Albu Mutaywid whose villages were burnt down, their grazing grounds destroyed and whose tribesmen were compelled to swear an oath of allegiance to the Yazidi chief while parties of Shammar, Juhaish, Jirjiriyyah and 'Afaris started to raid Yazidi villages in eastern Sinjar (21).

In August 1920 Sinjar was constituted as an independent gadha and divided into two sub-districts: Sinjar nahiyyah, which included the south of the Mountain, and Shimal nahiyyah, whose headquarters were located in the north-west, in the village of Karsi. The British authorities modified the

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jeopardize the position of Great Britain in the country soon after the assignment of the mandate in San Remo in April 1920. See Longrigg, op.cit., pp.122-126; Vinogradov, op.cit..

21. Mosul Division. Monthly Report June 1920, p.2, IO L/P&S/10/622; Military Report on Mesopotamia Area 1, pp.100/143; Secret despatch GHQ Mesopotamia to War Office, 11-6-1920, IO L/MIL/5/799 and L/P&S/10/756; 'Politique anglaise au Djébel Sindjar' in 'Note sur les Yezidis', SR Haut Commissariat Republique Française en Syrie et Liban, 11-1-1922, BEY 2379.

previous administrative arrangement which made the Mountain dependent on the Assistant Political Officer of Tall 'Afar as a result of a general process of administrative reorganization which was being implemented all over the country. However, the necessity for a separate administration of Sinjar and Tall 'Afar had become evident as a consequence of the 1920 tribal disturbances which had clearly demonstrated the extent to which the Yazidis of Sinjar and the inhabitants of the Turkoman settlement of Tall 'Afar had been affected differently by the establishment of British rule in the area. Furthermore they represented two distinct socio-religious and ethnic units whose relations had been very tense in the last decades of Ottoman rule (22).

The Yazidi tribes of Sinjar were only marginally involved in the Tall 'Afar coup and avoided any major military and logistical commitment either with the rebels or the British during the disturbances. Dawud al-Dawud and the tribal aghas who sided with him against Hamu Shiru did not take advantage of the circumstances to damage the position of the Fuqara' leader either inside Sinjar or vis-à-vis the British authorities by joining the rebels. This was mainly because they were obliged to safeguard their position in the Mountain which could be jeopardized if the Yazidi tribal forces were not united in the case of Bedouin or British retaliation. It was probably also for this reason that Hamu

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22. Military Report on Mesopotamia Area 1, p.9. At the beginning of 1921 the general administrative scheme of Iraq was revised following the previous Turkish organization: the country was divided in 10 liwas, 35 qadhas and 85 nahiyas. Special Report, p.49.

Shiru did not give substantial support to the British. As had often happened prior to the British occupation of Sinjar the threat of external aggression and military occupation had the immediate effect of temporarily softening internal rivalries and partisan feeling.

The downfall of the Arab government in Damascus in July 1920, the retreat of the Sharifian forces from Syria and the establishment of Faysal as King of Iraq in 1921 ushered a new political scenario both in Mesopotamia and in Syria, now permanently occupied by the French after the departure of Faysal. Northern Jazirah and Sinjar then started to be targeted by French propaganda which had a very marked anti-British character.

#### **IV.3 - THE BOUNDARY DISPUTE: ANGLO-FRENCH POLICY IN WESTERN SINJAR (1919-1923)**

In 1919 the whole of Jabal Sinjar was included de-facto in the Mosul vilayat under British administration. Until the establishment of the Mountain as a qadha in August 1920 its Yazidi Hakim acted as the sole local representative of the British and therefore was theoretically put in charge of the supervision of all the tribal lands located inside the Mountain. However, in western Sinjar the administrative arrangements were rather confused, especially in the lands occupied by the semi-nomadic tribes of the Qiran and Samuqah. After 1919 the administration of the western portion of the

Mountain together with the Arab town of Khatuniyyah became the subject of a long lasting dispute between Great Britain and France. The contention was caused by the provisional and arbitrary delimitation of the borders between Syria and Iraq as a result of the post-WWI rearrangement of the former Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. In the northern Jazirah, whose Syrian section was gradually being occupied by the French mandatory authorities, precise administrative boundaries were not actually drawn up until the early 1930's. An analysis of the development of Yazidi tribal affairs during the period of the mandate has to take into account the influence which this border dispute had on the relations between the local representatives of the British and French mandatory governments, which were of course greatly influenced by the post-WWI colonial policy implemented by the two powers in the Middle East.

Attempts to solve the border question in Sinjar came to be part of a general process of demarcation of British and French spheres of influence in the whole area and therefore were substantially influenced by other international developments. Both governments realized that a definitive settlement of the border line in the Mountain had to be implemented as part of an internationally recognised definition of national boundaries in those former Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire which had come under the control of Great Britain and France. It is mainly for this reason that the fixing of the Syro-Iraqi border was not implemented until the early 1930's. However, from the

beginning of the 1920's, the necessity of working out suitable administrative arrangements for western Sinjar became very clear to both local administrations. It was mainly a question of finding a temporary settlement which did take into account British and French interests in the area which, at least until 1925, mainly focussed on containing the expansion of Kemalist Turkey on the northern border of both Syria and Iraq. In this context, this arrangement had to facilitate the control over the Yazidi population and the Bedouin tribes moving around western Sinjar who could become easy targets of Kemalist propaganda.

In October 1920, a few months after the award of the Mandates at San Remo, the British and French governments signed a convention to settle the boundaries between Syria and Lebanon on the one hand, and Mesopotamia and Palestine on the other, which were under French and British control respectively. According to the section dealing with northern Jazirah included in article 1 of the convention, the south-eastern line which crossed the former Turkish vilayats of Diyar Bakr and Mosul bisected the Jabal Sinjar, leaving the west of the Mountain in Syrian territory (23). In practice this agreement did not provide the two mandatory powers with a viable scheme of administration of the Jabal and the town of Albu Kamal, located some 200 km. south-west

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23. Article 1 of the Convention reads as follows: 'Thence (from Roumelan Kewi) a line leaving in the territory under the French mandate the entire basin of the western Khabur and passing in a straight line towards the Euphrates which it crosses at Albu Kamal,...'. The text of the Convention is included in SDN 591 MAE.

of Sinjar in the middle of the Jazirah desert; both were now divided between Syria and Iraq although they had always represented compact socio-economic units. In addition to this the phrasing of the frontier section regarding Sinjar was very vague and did not provide sufficiently clear geographical references to locate the precise portion of the Mountain which was to come under the administration of the Franco-Syrian authorities (24).

Article 2 of the Convention provided for the formation of a commission in charge of tracing the boundary line on the ground within three months from the signature of the agreement, but this was only implemented for that section of the border running from the Mediterranean to Imtan, south of the Jabal Druze (25). The settlement of French and British claims over the Mesopotamian borders, including the section of Sinjar, was postponed as the whole issue was closely linked both to the final delimitation of the border between Syria and Turkey (completed in 1925) and the resolution of the Mosul question, to which the fixing of a permanent boundary between Iraq and Turkey was obviously intimately connected. By 1920 France had surrendered her

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24. Roumelan Kewi mentioned in article 1 was a small village located south-east of Damir Qabu which was provisionally administrated as part of Syria. However, there also existed a Tall Roumelan Kewi located few kilometres far from the village. It is understandable how, according to which Roumelan Kewi was taken into consideration, the position of the border line in the Yazidi Mountain changed.

25. This first section of the Syro-Jordanian border was traced by the Paulet-Newcombe commission and became effective from 1923. 'Frontière entre États sous Mandat Français et États sous Mandat Britannique. Histoire de la délimitation effectuée en application article 2 de la Convention de 23 décembre 1920' incl in MAE 591.



rights to Mosul under the Sykes-Picot agreement, but the French government still maintained vital economic interests in the area; during the San Remo conference, as a compensation for the loss of the Mosul vilayat, the French were given a 23.75% share of the Turkish Petroleum Company which largely controlled the exploitation of the oil resources of Mesopotamia.

The difficulty of any joint administration of Sinjar quickly became evident in Baghdad. The control of the Yazidi tribes, general public security in the area and the protection of vital commercial and strategical posts located in the proximity of the western portion of the Mountain were obviously the main issues. As Sir Henry Dobbs, British High Commissioner in Iraq from 1923 to 1929, remarked in a despatch to the French High Commissioner in Beirut :

'For Your Excellency will, I am sure, admit that there is no more fruitful source of frontier complications and disturbances than a boundary which involves a division of administrative control over a tribal confederation' (26).

In the same correspondence the line which had worked as the de-facto administrative boundary in western Sinjar since 1919 was first mentioned as the most workable permanent border between Syria and Iraq. As indicated by Dobbs the border line which marked the limits of the authority of the Mosul administration had run from Roumelan Kewi to Tall

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26. Despatch from the Residency Baghdad to Fr HC, 31-1-1923, n.1643, p.4, BEY 1518.

Antar, located west of the Khatuniyyah Lake, and thence to a point east of Albu Kamal. It placed the whole of Sinjar under the control of Iraq and the town of Albu Kamal under the jurisdiction of Syria (27). As far as the administration of Albu Kamal was concerned the French-Syrian authorities had inherited it from the previous Sharifian government. In May 1920, before the Anglo-French Convention was signed, representatives of the Damascus government which still controlled the old Turkish mutasarrifiyyah of Dair al-Zur agreed with Col. Leachman, political officer of the Mosul vilayat, to delimit provisional administrative boundaries in the neighbourhood of Albu Kamal, and the town was then handed over to the Sharifians (28).

It was mainly on the basis of the de facto French administration of the town which was never superseded by the provisions of the 1920 Anglo-French Convention that Dobbs advocated a permanent Iraqi presence in western Sinjar. The line he proposed also had the advantage of leaving the entire basin of the river Khabur in Syria. The area represented a natural link between the Bec du Canard region disputed between Syria and Turkey, and the lands of the Syrian Jazirah already occupied by the Franco-Syrian authorities which centred around the main commercial centre of Dair al-Zur.

The French High Commissioner opposed Dobbs' proposal of a temporary fixing of the Sinjari border through informal

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27. Despatch from Dobbs to Fr HC, 31-1-23, n.1643, BEY 1519. For map attached see p.vii map n.3.

28. Text of this provisional agreement incl in BEY 1519.

negotiations between the two governments, as the maintenance of the 1920 Convention line suited wider French plans for territorial exchanges. In the event of a global settlement of the Syro-Iraqi and Syro-Transjordanian borders under the aegis of the League of Nations, France could in fact cede western Sinjar in exchange for important concession in the Transjordan section of the border, especially in the Yarmuk valley (29). In addition to this the idea that west Sinjar might have oil resources was slowly gaining ground in political circles in Beirut especially as a result of a geological survey of Mesopotamia commissioned by the Turkish government and carried out by French experts in 1922 (30). It was commonly, although erroneously believed that the subsoil of west Sinjar and in particular of the Jabal Jaribah represented a continuation of the Mosul oil-fields. In this case the exploitation of Sinjari oil resources would have represented a partial compensation for France for the loss of the majority of Mosul oil revenues (31).

After 1923 the Yazidi villages of western Sinjar inhabited by members of the Samuqah and Qiran, especially Sikaniyyah, Samuqah and Bara, and the town of Khatuniyyah continued to be administered as part of Iraq. The local officials based in Balad collected revenues, as they had done

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29. Despatch Fr HC to Fr Consul in Baghdad, 11-04-1923, MAE 307; Secret corr Delegate of the Fr HC in the State of Aleppo to S.R. Fr HC, 17-03-1923, n.2150/S.R., BEY 1518; Despatch Fr HC to Dobbs, 31-03-1923, n.383/KD, BEY 1518.

30. 'Le Sindjar' SR Euphrate Region, 14-08-1929, n.3.340/DZ, p.6, BEY 1529.

31. Despatch Fr HC to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 25-04-1923, n.n., MAE 307.

since 1919, and regularly summoned the local mukhtars in the headquarters of the gadha in order to supervise local affairs. However, while the frontier settlement remained unclear, no permanent police or military posts could be established west of the 1920 Convention line. This posed several problems for the maintenance of public security in the disputed area and prevented any military or strategic use of western Sinjar as an advance base to control the movements of the Turks along the provisional borders with Syria and Iraq. In 1923 a British proposal to create a Royal Air Force base in Kura Samuqah to control the movements of Turkish troops was rejected by the Franco-Syrian authorities on the grounds that it represented a territorial violation (32). Between June 1922 and August 1923, an Iraqi and a Syrian police post were in turn established in the town of Khatuniyyah and withdrawn as a result of specific requests from the two High Commissioners (33).

The arbitrary character of the Anglo-French administrative settlement in western Sinjar however favoured French manoeuvres in the area which aimed at stirring up anti-British feelings among the Yazidi tribes, especially the Samuqah and Qiran, and the Muslim population of Khatuniyyah. In 1923 the Franco-Syrian authorities of Hasakah attempted to

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32. Despatch Fr HC to Fr Consul Baghdad, 11-04-1923, n.H26, BEY 1518; Despatch Fr HC to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 25-04-1923, MAE 307.

33. Tel Br HC to Br Consul Beirut, 17-7-1925, n.461, AIR 23/259; conf corr Fr HC to Br HC, 29-12-1922, n.1739 KD, MAE 307; desp Br HC to Fr HC, 31-1-1923, n.1643, MAE 307; conf despatch from Residency Baghdad to Fr HC, 3-11-1923, n. S.O/218, BEY 1518.

levy taxes from Samuqah and Khawatinah tribesmen while the Shammari chief Daham al-Hadi and his followers became involved in plans to extend French influence in the Yazidi Mountain. Daham al-Hadi was the favourite grandson of Shaikh al-'Asi and therefore enjoyed widespread popularity among the Shammar. In 1920 he was recognised by the British as paramount Shaikh of the Shammar moving in Iraqi territory but in August 1921, when Faysal became King of Iraq, the paramountship of the eastern Shammar was transferred to his enemy Ajil al-Yawar who had had long standing relations with the King. Subsequently Daham took refuge with the Khurusah clan whose tribal dirah lay across the Syro-Iraqi border and in 1923 he started to be subsidized by the French in order to patrol the Syrian section of the Mosul Dair al-Zur road. As soon as Daham gained control of the area lying between western Sinjar and Hasakah the Franco-Syrian authorities proposed that he should get in touch with groups of Yazidi tribesmen to raise a contingent of levies to be included in a future tribal force subsidized by the French which he himself would lead. Furthermore the French hoped that the Shammari chief would approach Hamu Shiru and convince him to side with Daham against the British in view of the old friendship which linked the Yazidi Hakim to Daham's grandfather al-'Asi. However, Daham did not prove to be trustworthy: he concentrated his efforts on his enemy Ajil rather than complying with French instructions regarding

Sinjar (34).

#### IV.4 - THE TURKISH THREAT: BRITISH ATTEMPTS TO CREATE A PERMANENT YAZIDI FIGHTING FORCE

As explained above Anglo-French policy in western Sinjar in the first years of the Mandate had been substantially affected by a possible Turkish military penetration into northern Iraq which continued at least until 1926. After 1921 the new Turkish government led by Mustafa Kemal tried to extend its influence in the Mosul vilayat, the object of a continuing dispute between Great Britain and Turkey, by attempting a gradual military advance across the provisional northern border of Iraq supported by quick incursions of bands of irregulars in Iraqi territory, mainly recruited among the Kurdish tribes (35).

Between 1921 and 1926 the Kemalists made several attempts to make contact with the Yazidis of Sinjar in order to gather the support of some local chiefs. The establishment of some sort of control over the Mountain would have eventually allowed the Turks to use it as a base for further penetration into central Iraq and therefore their interest in Sinjar was mainly dictated by strategic and military

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34. Williamson, *op.cit.*, pp.159-164. Extr administrative report Mosul Liwa for period ending 20th April 1923, AIR 23/258; memo SSO Mosul to Air HQ Baghdad, 10-2-1923, n.984, AIR 23/258.

35. For general discussion on the first years of Kemalist rule in Turkey see B.Lewis, *Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Oxford 1961, pp.234-274. For the Mosul boundary dispute see Sluglett, *op.cit.*, pp.114-125;

considerations. As early as August 1921 rumours of a Turkish military move towards Sinjar prompted Hamu Shiru to urge the British authorities of Mosul to consider the possibility of supplying the Sinjari tribes with arms and ammunition. This fear was justified both by the presence of Turkish agitators in a number of Yazidi villages of southern Sinjar, masquerading as Christian refugees from Mardin who claimed to have escaped from Turkish persecution, and by rumours of concentrations of Turkish troops and followers of Shaikh Sanusi in the Nusaybin area (36).

The Muslim religious leader Shaikh Ahmad al-Sanusi had recently been employed by the Kemalists as an instrument of anti-British propaganda among the Kurdish tribes of the Mardin district and the Bedouin of the northern Jazirah. Although the political attitude of the Bedouin chiefs was very little influenced by religion, the diffusion of pan-Islamic ideas on the part of a respected religious leader had a certain impact on the tribesmen and contributed to a create widespread feelings of hostility to the presence of Great Britain and France in the area and opposition to their local supporters (37). Sanusi preachings represented a source of major concern for Hamu Shiru because of the impact they could have had on the Muslim population of Sinjar and on his

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36. Tel 18th Division to GHQ, n.X620, 6-8-21, AIR 23/256; handwritten rep from British informant, n.d., AIR 23/256; intell rep n.19, Secretariat Br HC for Mesopotamia, 5-8-21, IO L/P&S/10/962.

37. Desp Br HC to Secretary of State for Colonies, 18-8-22, n.C.O./451, AIR 23/257; extracts General Reports Br Embassy Constantinople from 3-4-23 to 18-4-23, AIR 23/258; Tribal Personalities, 'Sheikh Ahmad al-Senussi' in Military Report Area 1 Northern Jazirah, pp.151-152.

good relations with the Shammar chief al-'Asi and Shaikh Muhammad of the Tayy who were in close touch with the Turkish authorities and Sanusi's envoys in Nusaybin. First of all the presence of friendly Tayy and Shammari tribesmen on the outer edges of the Mountain was essential to protect the Yazidi villages from Bedouin raids. Secondly the Yazidi Hakim of Sinjar needed the support of the two Bedouin leaders in order to prevent Dawud al-Dawud, whose headquarters were located in proximity of Shammari and Tayy grazing grounds, from being affected by the Turkish propaganda which circulated among the tribesmen (38).

The circulation of pro-Turkish feelings among the Yazidi villagers, together with the growing interest of the French government in western Sinjar, also started to alarm the British administration given that friction between some Yazidi leaders of Sinjar, including Hamu Shiru, and the local representatives of the Iraqi government was becoming increasingly evident (39). In this context in 1923 the British mandatory authorities ventilated the idea of raising a contingent of Yazidi tribal levies led by British officers in order to establish closer relations with the local tribes and to facilitate the defence of the Jabal in case of a Turkish military advance. This proposal was probably made as part of a wider scheme devised by the RAF Command which was in charge of internal security and of the defence of the

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38. Secret rep SSO Baghdad to Air HQ, 14-5-23, M/29, AIR 23/258; rep SSO Mosul to Air HQ, 1-6-23, n.113, AIR 23/258.

39. See section IV.5 for the development of tribal affairs in Sinjar from 1921 to 1924.



national borders of the country during the mandate. This scheme was based on the creation of a Central Tribal Force constituted mainly of Bedouin tribesmen which had to serve as additional fighting unit operating on the west bank of the Tigris in order to prevent the infiltration of bands of Turkish irregulars across the Samara'-Mosul line of communication and to protect the border with Syria (40). A more detailed project for the formation of a Yazidi tribal levy was put forward by the RAF in late 1925: the Yazidi force had to be raised on a tribal basis with the cooperation of Hamu Shiru, Shaikh Khidr and Shaikh Khalaf under the command of a British officer serving in the Iraqi army who was to be assisted by two Iraqi colleagues. The approximate number proposed was one hundred men who were to receive monthly payments through their tribal chiefs (41).

Both in 1923 and in 1925 the project was not implemented although since 1920 the employment of Yazidi tribesmen in levy units had featured in the correspondence between the RAF command and the local British officials (42). First of

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40. Handwritten corr British informer to Air intell, 1923, AIR 23/258; tel Adm Mosul to Br HC, 15-2-1923, n.A 113, AIR 23/258; 'Employment of Irregular Forces in event of Hostilities with Turkey' incl in AIR 23/423 (1925-1926). This Bedouin Central Tribal Force was constituted in 1925. M.A.Tarbush, The Role of the Military in Politics. A case study of Iraq to 1941, London 1982, p.86.

41. 'Outline of scheme for raising Yazidi force' incl in AIR 23/423; tel Aviation Baghdad to SSO Mosul, 21-10-1925, n.I./626, AIR 23/423.

42. Until 1934 there was no 'universal' conscription in Iraq whose internal and external defence during the mandate was entirely controlled by the RAF and the Assyrian Levies mainly recruited from the minority communities. Available sources concerning the Assyrian Levies do not mention any significant presence of Yazidi recruits: in 1925 only four Yazidis were reported to be serving in levy battalions. Report on the Administration of Iraq 1925, p.18, CO 730/107/2. The two projects

all the Yazidis appeared to be much more effective if employed as irregulars because, of their fighting characteristics which made them very suitable for carrying out quick raids in small parties. Secondly it appeared very clearly that they had to form a separate unit permanently based in Sinjar given that their employment outside the Mountain seemed unlikely since Yazidi tribesmen generally refused prolonged absence from their womenfolk and villages. Thirdly raising a permanent Yazidi tribal force presented the British with additional complications concerning the crucial issue of the presence of Iraqi officials which encountered fierce opposition on the part of tribesmen and tribal leaders traditionally reluctant to deal with Muslims (43). By and large the only armed forces permanently based in the Mountain remained the local garrison which consisted of 30 gendarmes until 1925, employed as a fighting force when necessary.

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concerning the formation of a permanent Yazidi tribal force were both conceived in view of its future integration in the Iraqi army which started to be constituted in 1920-1921 under the aegis of the British mandatory authorities. This explains the reason why the presence of Iraqi officers was advocated. Details concerning the British military presence in Iraq during the mandate and the constitution of the Iraqi army are provided by Special Report, pp.39/47-48; Sluglett, op.cit., pp.142-147/159-170; Tarbush, op.cit., pp.74-77/86-91.

43. 'Arab and Kurd Levies Report 1919', CO 696/2; tel Adm Mosul to Br HC, 15-2-1923, n.A 113, AIR 23/258; secr memo SSO Mosul to AIR HQ Baghdad, 23-10-1925, n.J/1, AIR 23/423; secr corr Air HQ Baghdad to SSO Mosul, 26-10-1925, n.n., AIR 23/423; secr corr SSO Mosul to Air HQ Baghdad, 28-10-1925, n.J/2, AIR 23/423.

#### IV.5 - PRELUDE TO INTERTRIBAL STRIFE

After the Jabal Sinjar was constituted as an independent gadha in August 1920 the town of Balad became the permanent headquarters of an Iraqi qaimmaqam. This official, together with a mudir who was posted to the Shimal nahiyyah, depended on the administration of Mosul which had been headed by an Iraqi mutasarrif who replaced the local British Political Officer in the autumn of 1921 (44). The presence of a representative of the Iraqi administration in the capital of the Mountain had wide repercussions on the relations among the various communities living in Balad (Muslim, Yazidis and Christians) and came to affect substantially the position of Hamu Shiru who continued to be subsidized by the government as Hakim of Sinjar.

The first qaimmaqam of Sinjar was Yusuf Rassam, member of a prestigious Chaldean Mosulawi family who in the past had entertained close relations with Great Britain (45).

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44. Following the National Government Proclamation of July 1921 issued soon after the creation of the Kingdom of Iraq, the British Political Officers and Assistant Political Officers, who had administered the country during the period of the military administration, were progressively substituted by local personnel. Until 1927 the powers and duties of the Iraqi mutasarrifs and qaimmaqams were regulated by the Turkish vilayat Law which granted to them executive powers for what concerned the general administration of the districts. Part of the British officials who had previously occupied executive posts became Divisional Advisers to the Mutasarrif or Assistants to the Divisional Advisers. In early 1923 the designation was changed in that of Administrative Inspectors who were placed under the British Adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior. Special Report, pp.49-53.

45. In the mid-19th century Christian Antun Rassam served as British vice-Consul in Mosul and his brother Hormuzd participated in the expeditions of the archaeologist Henry Layard. They both became involved in the missionary activities of the Church of England in northern Iraq. See J.F.Coakley, The Church of the East and the Church of England, Oxford

Rassam was probably chosen to fill the post by the British authorities of Mosul on the basis of two important considerations. First of all, given the unclear position of Hamu Shiru under the new administrative arrangement, the choice of a Christian official whose family was linked to Great Britain was likely to be more acceptable to the Fuqara' leader than the appointment of a Muslim. Secondly, it was well known that the majority of the Sinjari Yazidis would have bitterly resented a Muslim administration which tribesmen and tribal leaders still continued to identify with the old Ottoman rule. As soon as the British army occupied the Mosul vilayat a number of Yazidi lay and religious leaders of Sinjar and Shaikhan had presented the military authorities with a joint declaration on behalf of their people:

'Of our own free will and with all our hearts we hereby declare that, in order to assure our existence, we desire to be subjects of Great Britain. We will never agree to have an Arab government over us. ...' (46).

However, Yusuf Rassam did not fulfil either the expectations of the British or those of the local population. During his term of duty in Sinjar, which lasted approximately one and half years, he proved unable to play an effective intermediary role between the two main tribal contenders of the Mountain, Hamu Shiru and Dawud al-Dawud, thus

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1992, pp.20-34;37-41;44-46;67-68.

46. Self-Determination in Iraq, Office of the Civil Commissioner, 1919, p.27.

contributing to disseminate trouble and dissent throughout Sinjar. In the first months after Rassam's appointment, after Hamu Shiru had refused several times to report to gadha headquarters, the qaimmaqam attempted to gain the support and recognition of the Fuqara' chief by siding with him against Dawud. Rassam was perhaps also trying to organise a consensus among the powerful Christian community of Balad Sinjar whose members, closely linked to the Fuqara', represented his natural allies (47). Yet he had to come to terms with a local "Muslim league" which was supported by the Iraqi authorities of Mosul. The league was headed by the mudir al-mal Ajmad Effendi al-'Umari, a member of Rassam's administrative staff, who bitterly criticized the acting qaimmaqam for his pro-Hamu standing. Ajmad Effendi was spreading very effective anti-Christian propaganda both among the Muslim population of Balad in general and among the police force, which was entirely constituted of Muslims of non-Sinjari origin (48). In this context in early 1922 Rassam started making overtures to Dawud al-Dawud promising that he would try to transfer Hamu's subsidy to him. In July perhaps interpreting this as a first indication of a future dismissal of Hamu Shiru from his office of Hakim of the

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47. Despatch Fr Consulate Mosul to Fr Consul in Mesopotamia, 19-7-1922, n.n., BEY 2360.

48. Report on Sinjar by Joseph B. Khayyat representative of the Syrian Catholic Archbishop in Mosul (typescript, 8pp., end of 1922 c.a), p.4, AIR 23/257. After 1921 each qaimmaqam, as chief executive official of the gadha, presided over a local administrative Council which included a mudir al-mal (revenue official), a ma'mur tapu (land registry official) and a katib tahrirat (correspondence clerk) together with four non-official members. Special Report, p.52.

Mountain, Dawud quickly mobilized his tribal forces against the Fuqara'. The prospect of an armed confrontation between the two parties urged the mutasarriif of Mosul to summon the two Yazidi chiefs and Rassam to Mosul in August. The Christian qaimmaqam was dismissed and replaced by his Muslim colleague from Tall 'Afar, Ibrahim Effendi (49).

Over the following year relations between Hamu and Dawud continued to be strained and opposition to the Fuqara' chief on the part of both the Muslim league and the new qaimmaqam grew in strength. The unstable position of the Yazidi Hakim vis-à-vis the Iraqi authorities, who detained him for three months in Mosul in the winter of 1923, contributed to accentuate his notoriously despotic attitude towards other Yazidi aghas and some lesser chiefs belonging to his tribe (50). Sometime before the dismissal of Rassam he deposed the chief of the Musqurah tribe Husayn Barajas, who was one of the main allies of Dawud, and in 1923 a group of Fuqara' leaders started to voice their discontent from the headquarters of the tribe in Bardahali (51).

However, it was among the Christian community of Balad that Hamu's popularity started to decrease dramatically. This was certainly a consequence of his inability to prevent the quick diffusion of anti-Christian propaganda in the town on

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49. Corr Fr Consular representative Mosul to Fr Consul in Mesopotamia, 19-7-1922, n.n., BEY 2360; corr Fr consular representative Mosul to Fr Consul Mesopotamia, 25-7-1922, n.n., BEY 1523.

50. Corr Fr Consular representative Mosul to Fr Consul Mesopotamia, 9-9-1924, n.67, MAE 22.

51. Memo SSO Mosul to Air HQ, 10-2-1923, n.984, AIR 23/258.

the part of the Muslim league. Yet, more importantly, it came as a result of the attraction the Syrian Jazirah, where the French were planning to create permanent Christian settlements, started to exercise over the Christians living in the Mountain. In 1923 rumours of a French project to settle Christian refugees from Mardin in the Khabur area had a wide impact among those Christians who had arrived in Sinjar in 1915-1916 and very much contributed to increase the prestige of France among the local Christians long settled in the Mountain who started to look at Syria as a possible new homeland (52). The growing influence of the Muslim administration, which tended to favour the local Muslim trading class, also jeopardized the economic interests of the Christian traders and merchants based in Balad. Among those who started to increase their contacts with the Syrian market town of Hasakah at the beginning of 1923 was Najm 'Abdullah, the most powerful merchant of the Mountain, who usually controlled the camel transport for Sinjari products. He engaged in a profitable wheat and flour trade with Hasakah with the help of the Bedouin Jubur tribe (53).

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52. Memo SSO Mosul to Air HQ, 10-2-1923, n.984, AIR 23/258.

53. Memo SSO Mosul to Air HQ, 2-6-1923, n.113, AIR 23/258; tel. Special Branch Mosul to Police HQ, 25-4-1923, n. S.B./39, AIR 23/258.

#### IV.6 - THE 1925 DISTURBANCES

Late in 1924 the presence of a Muslim qaimmaqam and a local 'Muslim league', whose activities in the previous years had started to have significant repercussions on the relations between Hamu Shiru and Dawud al-Dawud, began to affect matters in the rural areas of Sinjar. In 1925 the tribal situation became very chaotic and from the first time since the last Ottoman expedition against Sinjar in 1918 the government was compelled to intervene militarily.

Generally speaking in the first years of the mandate the tribal alliances in the Mountain had not changed substantially in comparison with the last two decades of Ottoman rule. Hamu was still supported by large sections of the Qirani and Samuqah leadership while Dawud al-Dawud still entertained close relations with the Haskani and Musqurah aghas of the Shimal. Only the Habbabat chiefs who lived in Balad Sinjar under the control of the Fuqara' had severed their relations with the Hakim and had started to make overtures to Dawud al-Dawud at the beginning of the 1920's.

By and large those Yazidi aghas who controlled tribal areas located outside the main administrative centres of Balad and Karsi, headquarters of the Shimal nahiyah, were pursuing their own policies among the tribesmen under their authority without any major interference on the part of the local administration. Although two permanent police posts had been established in the Mountain (in Balad and Mamisi, the latter located near Karsi) the gendarmes were seldom able to



penetrate into the countryside, especially to those villages located in the narrow valleys of northern Sinjar. Furthermore, since 1919 the administration of the villages had been delegated to the old mukhtars who were usually powerful local tribal chiefs. Therefore the local administration was able to keep contact with the Yazidi chiefs largely through periodical summons to the gadha headquarters (54). It often occurred that during their staying in Balad, some aghas would be forcibly removed from the Mountain and detained in Mosul for varying periods of time if considered dangerous for the public security.

In June 1924 Dawud al-Dawud and Khalaf al-Haskani were detained in Mosul on the grounds that their activities in northern Sinjar were fomenting sedition among the tribes. When they were allowed to go back to the Mountain after a couple of months they started to plan to take revenge against the gaimmaqam and started to approach Hamu Shiru. The prospect of the formation of a Shiru-Dawud coalition urged Ibrahim Effendi to summon the Mihirkani chief in an attempt to persuade him to abandon the project (55). Following the obstinate refusal of Dawud to report to the gadha headquarters, the mutasarriif approached the Administrative Inspector of Mosul demanding the assistance of RAF planes to force Dawud to comply with the instructions of the government. On 6 September a detachment of police was sent to

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54. See p.158.

55. Report SSO Mosul to Air HQ Baghdad, 26-8-1924, n.1522, AIR 23/261; secr memo Adm Mosul to Int, 30-8-1924, n.S/326.

Dawud's residence at Zarwan after the British authorities had made clear that no aerial action could be taken unless the local police force had proved incapable of dealing with the situation (56).

The despatch of policemen against Dawud had the immediate effect of mobilizing all the enemies of the Hakim who started to help the Mihirkan. In Balad, 'Atu and Matu, the two most prominent Habbabat chiefs, lit fires to inform the population of Zarwan that the policemen were approaching the village; Murad Yusuf, the main opponent of Hamu Shiru among the Fuqara', Husayn Barajas and Shaikh Khidr of the Qiran incited their followers to support the Mihirkan (57). As a result of this the policemen were not able to force their way into Mihirkani lands and at the end of September Dawud was still in Zarwan waiting for further developments (58). By the end of October however the Iraqi authorities had summoned all the most prominent Yazidi chiefs, including Dawud al-Dawud, to Mosul where the mutasarrif tried to negotiate a temporary truce between Dawud and Hamu, who in the meantime had started to mobilize his followers against those tribesmen and tribal leaders who had supported the Mihirkan during the September disturbances

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56. Adm Mosul to Adv Int, report week ending 6-9-1924 , n.n., AIR 23/261.

57. Transl letter Commandant of Police Mosul to mutasarrif, 8-9-1924, n.64/1, AIR 23/261.

58. Secr memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff Int Baghdad incl report ending period 30-9-1924, n.J/17, AIR 23/261.

(59).

In the following months tension between the two parties escalated and gradually began to involve the most important tribes of Sinjar, especially the Haskan and Qiran. The internal situation of the Haskan was widely affected by the disputes between Shaikh Khalaf and the 'legitimate' agha of the tribe Kimmo 'Emoka who was seeking to regain his position as paramount chief (60). Khalaf could count on the support of Dawud and Muhammad Tayy who was camped on Khalaf's lands in north-western Sinjar in January 1925 with 100 families. Consequently Kimmo 'Emoka and his followers turned to Hamu Shiru hoping to mobilize the Fuqara' on their side. In December minor fighting occurred in Sinuni where Khalaf and Kimmo both lived: Dawud and Husayn Barajas sent groups of armed tribesmen to help Khalaf and his supporters. At the same time Hamu Shiru sent an ultimatum to Dawud and started to organize a tribal force against him. In January the local authorities unsuccessfully attempted to summon the two chiefs to Mosul (61).

By mid-March northern Sinjar was in turmoil and the hostilities started to affect the southern district, especially the villages of Sikaniyyah, Majnuniyyah and Wardiyyah where a feud between Shaikh Khidr and a minor agha

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59. Report international political and tribal news SSO Mosul to Air Staff Int, 20-10-1924, J/56, AIR 23/261; periodical report ending 28-10-1924, SSO Mosul to Air Staff Int, n.n., AIR 23/143.

60. See p.104.

61. Conf memo mutasarrif to Int, 27-12-1924, n.10465, AIR 23/143; conf memo mutasarrif to Int, 24-12-1924, n.10432, AIR 23/143; Rep SSO Mosul ending period 29-12-1924, n.n., AIR 23/143.

of the tribe, Bakr Husayn, which had started in the spring of 1924, provoked armed clashes among the followers of the two leaders. Although Khudaidah, one of the sons of Hamu Shiru, had assured the British authorities that the Fuqara' would not interfere in Qirani affairs, Hamu Shiru intervened on the side of the inhabitants of Majnuniyyah who supported Bakr Husayn. As had happened with the Haskan, Shaikh Khidr asked for Dawud al-Dawud's help (62). At the beginning of April it was obvious that the chiefs of the Shimal were getting ready to launch an attack against Jaddalah where Shiru had concentrated his tribal forces. In fact Dawud had started to withdraw towards Mihirkan with his armed tribesmen, a village located in a more protected area of his domains, while Khalaf had negotiated a temporary truce with Kimmo 'Emoka (63). The conflict threatened to extend to the whole of southern Sinjar given that the majority of minor leaders settled in the area were soon likely to join one of the two factions as a means to protect their groups from possible attacks.

The deployment of the Royal Air Force in the areas where clashes had occurred had been delayed on the basis of two main considerations (64). First of all a number of the

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62. Tel Adm Mosul to Int, 19-3-1925, n.C/457, AIR 23/143; memo SSO Mosul to Air HQ Baghdad, 23-3-1925, n.n., AIR 23/143; memo Adm Mosul to Adv Int, 25-3-1925, n.C/503, AIR 23/143; rep SSO Mosul to Air Staff Int, 4-7-1925, n./1815, AIR 23/145.

63. Rep SSO Mosul to Air HQ Baghdad period ending 6-4-1925, n./1693, AIR 23/279; tel Adm Mosul to Int, 13-4-1925, n.C/627, AIR 23/143.

64. Air control had been inaugurated in Iraq in October 1922 and the Air Ministry remained responsible for the external and internal defence of the country until the termination of the mandate in 1932. Between 1922 and 1925 various operations were carried out in the rural areas where the employment of the Air Force proved to be extremely effective in reducing

villages involved in the disturbances lay west of the Franco-British Convention line and were therefore theoretically under Syrian control. Secondly, punishment of the insurgents would have had serious political repercussions since it could be used by the Turkish government as evidence that the Yazidis of Sinjar refused to recognise the authority of the Iraqi government at a time when the League of Nation was deciding the final delimitation of the Turco-Iraqi border in the Mosul vilayat (65).

In mid-April however the situation seemed to have become so critical that RAF planes started to drop warnings on some villages after the British High Commissioner had received assurances from the French authorities in Beirut that British military intervention in western Sinjar would have not been a source of 'misunderstanding' between the two governments. The French consented provided that any action would not prejudice their position in the area and would not lead to the establishment of permanent British military posts

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the tribes to obedience and in establishing a direct administration in remote parts of the country. The tactics employed by the RAF usually consisted first of dropping messages on the villages, usually giving a six hours' warning to their inhabitants, which were followed by bombing if the locals still refused to comply with the instructions. See D.Omissi, 'Iraq and the Survival of the RAF, 1920-1925' in Air Power and Colonial Control. The Royal Air Force 1919-1939, Manchester 1990, pp.18-38 and Sluglett, Britain in Iraq, pp.262-270.

65. The Mosul boundary Commission visited Sinjar in late January 1925 and interviewed all the main tribal chiefs who expressed their desire to remain in Iraq. However it seems that Dawud al-Dawud had previously carried out a great deal of pro-Turkish propaganda. Secret memo SSO Mosul to Air HQ Baghdad, 23-2-1925, N/1670, AIR 23/279.

(66).

As a result of the first dropping of messages on the villages of Mihirkan, Zarwan and Majnuniyyah on 16 April, the northern chiefs gathered at Sikaniyyah and suspended their operations against Shiru. From Mihirkan Dawud informed the authorities in Balad that he would not obey the summons, and on the following day additional warnings were dropped on the villages of Mihirkan and Zarwan which were heavily bombed on 18 of April. Some Mihirkani tribesmen shot down a British plane, rifle fire being the only active measure the locals were able to take against the destructive effects of air attack (67). While aerial action was taken against Dawud, Shaikh Khidr and Shaikh Khalaf started attacking Hamu in Jaddalah from Sikaniyyah and Sinuni which were located west of the 1920 Convention line. On 19 April RAF planes bombed Sikaniyyah and Taraf and managed to disperse the tribal force attacking Jaddalah (68). Husayn Barajas and Shaikh Khidr immediately surrendered but Dawud remained in Mihirkan, which

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66. Tel Br HC to Br Consul Beirut, 16-4-1925, n.138/s, AIR 23/144; tel Br Consul Beirut to Br HC, 17-4-1925, n.7, AIR 23/144; corr Fr HC to Br Consul Beirut, 22-4-1925, n.2189/KD, AIR 23/144.

67. Corr Police Mosul to Int, 16-4-1925, n.S.B.M.68, AIR 23/144; tel Aereosix Mosul to Aviation Baghdad, 16-4-1925, ref. O/163, AIR 23/144; tel SSO Mosul to Aviation Baghdad, 16-4-1925, ref. Y.3444, AIR 23/144; tel Aircraft 6 Squadron to Aviation Baghdad, 17-4-1925, n.n., AIR 23/144; tel Aerosix to Tall Shu'ar to Aviation, 18-4-1925, ref. DSC/18/4, AIR 23/144; tel Aerosix Mosul to Aviation Baghdad, 18-4-1925, ref. O/172, AIR 23/144. For a general discussion on the response of the natives to RAF air policing see Omissi, op.cit., pp.107-133.

68. Corr Adm Mosul to Int, 18-4-1925, n. C.45, AIR 23/144; tel Adm Mosul to Int, 19-4-1925, ref. HL/17, AIR 23/144.

was bombed again on 24 April, and Khalaf fled to the north (69).

By the beginning of May all the chiefs except Dawud had accepted the terms of the government which started imposing heavy fines upon them (70). The bombings had proved to be extremely effective in securing the cooperation of the tribesmen who immediately deserted their chiefs and fled to more secure areas of the Mountain.

#### IV.7 - THE AFTERMATH

The measures taken by the Iraqi government and the British authorities after the termination of hostilities aimed at restoring order and preventing further outbreak of tribal warfare. The 1925 events had primarily shown that neither the Yazidi Hakim nor the local police were able to control public security effectively. Consequently it became clear that it was necessary to adopt a lenient policy towards the rebellious aghas, at least those who controlled the most numerous and militarily strong groups of tribesmen, in order to gain their support and eventually make use of their authority in order to reduce the trouble-making potential of the tribes.

The first step was to settle the disputes among the

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69. Tels SSO Mosul to Aviation, 20-4-1925/21-4-1925/24-4-1925, Y3459/Y3460/Y3476, AIR 23/144.

70. Tel SSO Mosul to Aviation, 3-5-1925, Y3516, AIR 23/144.

tribal sections directly involved in the fighting who claimed the restitution of looted cattle and compensation for their damaged properties. However, by the end of May the representatives of the Yazidi parties, with the exception of Dawud al-Dawud, who was still hiding in a cave near Mihirkan, had several times failed to elect a majlis to take charge of the arbitration and had asked the Administrative Inspector to supervise the settlement (71). By the first week of June a satisfactory agreement was reached among the claimants; chiefs like Shaikh Khalaf, Kimmo 'Emoka, Shaikh Khidr, Hamu Shiru and Husayn Barajas recognised each other's authority and received vague reassurances from the government concerning the support the authorities were prepared to grant them in the future (72).

Fines were imposed on the chiefs who had sided with Dawud and they were also asked to surrender the majority of the rifles owned by their followers together with the payment of considerable sums of money (73). The inhabitants of Mihirkan and Zarwan were heavily penalized in an attempt to force them to hand Dawud al-Dawud over to the authorities. At the beginning of May they were asked to pay Rs.5000 within 4 days if they failed to convince Dawud to report to Balad. Although they were eventually not able to collect the money requested by the government, Dawud surrendered in July. He

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71. Rep Adm Mosul to Int, 21-5-1925, n.C/1046, AIR 23/144.

72. Rep SSO Mosul, 8-6-1925, n./1770, AIR 23/144.

73. Shaikh Khalaf had to hand in 30 rifles and Rs 1000, Shaikh Khidr and Husayn Barajas 20 rifles and Rs 100. Secr memo Adm Mosul to Int, 2-5-1925, n.C/816, AIR 23/144.



was taken to Mosul where he was detained for a couple of weeks and then exiled to Nasiriyyah where he remained until 1928 (74).

The 1925 disturbances had convinced the authorities that the cooperation of the local leaders had become essential to control the dangerous tribal areas of the Mountain. This is perhaps the main reason why only Dawud al-Dawud, who had clearly shown that he was not prepared to come to terms with the government, was removed from Sinjar, while Shaikh Khalaf, Shaikh Khidr and Husayn Barajas began to have closer contacts with the authorities. There is another important factor which explains the newly acquired role of these chiefs vis-à-vis the administration. Although they had played a considerable role in local policy in the late Ottoman period, they had very seldom become important enough to be called upon to defend the vital interests of the Ottoman governors. In the first half of the 1920's the support of these Yazidi leaders became essential for the policy of the new Iraqi State which aimed to keep the Jabal within its future boundaries. The unclear frontier settlement with both Turkey and Syria had the effect of favouring a great deal of anti-Iraqi and anti-British propaganda among those tribes like the Haskan, Samuqah and Qiran who lived close to the provisional borders.

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74. Secr memo Adm Mosul to Int, 2-5-1925, n.C/816, AIR 23/144; periodical rep SSO Mosul period ending 23-7-1925, n.n., AIR 23/145.

#### IV.8 - SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE REVOLT

The 1925 disturbances had clearly shown both the British and Iraqi administrations the extent to which Hamu Shiru had become unpopular both among large sections of the local leadership and the population. Under these circumstances he was in no position of exerting effective control on the tribes on behalf of the government as the British had expected when he started to be subsidized as Hakim of Sinjar in 1919. Apart from the repercussions of the activities of the Iraqi officials which had in part contributed to the development of dissent and conflicts among the population, the tribes of Sinjar were in any case politically fragmented. This fragmentation which, as mentioned above, constituted one of the most significant features of the Yazidi tribalism in the Mountain, was a legacy of the Ottoman period and during the mandate prevented the creation of a paramountship which would unite all the tribes under a single leader.

As the disturbances developed it became evident that the resentment of the villagers was channelled gainst the Fuqara' chief rather than against the local authorities. In a report sent to the mutasarrif of Mosul during the first outbreak of hostilities at the end of 1924 the Commandant of police remarked:

'It is however suspected that many of the followers of such chiefs as are friendly to Dawud did not join him for his sake

but for his hatred to Hamu Shiru.' (75).

However the Yazidi tribesmen did not yet have a clear concept of the presence and authority of the government, although it is quite evident that awareness of the necessity to resist the imposition of external rule, especially Muslim rule, was still an important part of their tribal ethos. In the first period of the mandate the new government was still very much perceived by the Yazidi population living outside the administrative centres as an extraneous power demanding taxation and conscription but not yet viewed as an important actor in the development or solution of tribal conflicts. Dawud al-Dawud himself perhaps gave the best example of this attitude in a letter sent to the mutasarraf and the Administrative Inspector at the end of 1924. In an attempt to avoid the punishment of the authorities he stated: 'I am aware I have done nothing against the government ... Neither I am indebted for kodah nor for other tax ...' (76).

In this context the 1925 disturbances cannot be considered as the byproduct of a popular movement reacting against the administration, as the development of the hostilities would indicate. It is however true that the local and interfactional character of the revolt were very much emphasized in the accounts of the 1924 and 1925 events which come mainly from British or Iraqi government sources. In the

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75. Transl secret corr Commandant of police Mosul to mutasarraf, 8-9-1924, n.64/1, AIR 23/261.

76. Transl letter Dawud to mutasarraf and Adm Mosul, n.d., n.n., AIR 23/261.

same documents, the extent of the military operations was rather suspiciously minimized. This was probably the result of wider political concerns on the part of both administrations. In fact military action against the Yazidis was likely to have negative repercussions on the feeling of other minorities living in northern Iraq, especially the Kurds, against whom aerial action was being taken in a number of villages located south of Sulaymaniyyah following the murder of three members of the Mesopotamian Police in mid-April 1925. Furthermore, as pointed out above, military action could be used by the Turkish government as an argument to prove the anti-Iraqi proclivities of the Yazidis at a crucial juncture over the Mosul dispute.

In Great Britain the Colonial Office was reluctant to present the public with detailed reports of the aerial action undertaken in Sinjar. A short and vague account of the operations was handed over to the press although the Daily Express published a full account of the events from its correspondent in Iraq (77).

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77. Tel Br HC to Secretary of State for Colonies, 22-4-1925, FO 371/10833 E 2455. 'Air Force raid in Mesopotamia. Three machines down, incendiary bombs on a tribe', Daily Express, 20-4-1925. Between 1923 and 1924 RAF operations in Iraq encountered much criticism in the Beaverbrook and Harmsworth newspapers and raised a number of Parliamentary Questions which criticized the practice of bombing the local population. Sluglett, op.cit., p.264.

CHAPTER V

THE LATTER YEARS OF THE BRITISH

MANDATE: 1925-1932

V.1 - YAZIDIS AND BEDOUINS IN SINJAR: BORDER  
DISTURBANCES (1925-1928)

One of the most important results of the creation of national frontiers crossing the northern Jazirah plateau, albeit provisionally, was the division of lands traditionally shared by members of various nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes between new national or State administrations. As shown above this was also true in the case of some Sinjari tribes occupying the western portion of the Mountain. The tribal lands of the Haskan and Qiran were bisected by the provisional frontier which coincided with the 1920 Convention line. The position of this frontier was uncertain but, assuming that it was a straight line from Roumelan Kewi to Albu Kamal as always indicated in official sources, it cut the Haskani and Qirani territories in two, in the north somewhere between the villages of Khana Sur and Sinuni and in the south between Jaddalah and Majnuniyyah (1).

In the second half of the 1920's some groups of Sinjari villagers and tent-dwellers were increasingly affected by this rather arbitrary division of the tribal lands around the Mountain which had the effect of favouring the cherished

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1. The few maps available which show the frontier line in the Sinjar section of the border, generally indicate this. See *Frontière entre Syrie et Irak*, Carte n.3, Zone d'habitat et de parcours (hiver), 1930 c.a, EDM Box V file 4 and map annexed to despatch Br HC to Fr HC, n.1634, 31-1-23, BEY 1519 (p.vii map n.3).

Bedouin activity of raiding and looting sedentary settlements. In general, relations between sedentaries and nomads deteriorated not only in Sinjar but also in other regions located along the Syrian-Iraqi border. An artificial boundary placed in the middle of lands usually considered as common property by members of the same tribe offered the tribesmen almost endless opportunities of avoiding the imposition of the authority of one of the two administrations by moving into 'their own' tribal territories located on the other side of the provisional frontier.

Until 1925 the Anglo-Turkish dispute over the Mosul vilayat had largely dominated Anglo-French policy towards Sinjar which was strategically located in the proximity of the provisional Turkish frontiers. Once internationally recognised borders were drawn in Mosul province, Bedouin control, especially as it affected the protection of the settled and semi-settled communities in the northern Jazirah which included the Sinjari Yazidis, became a matter of major concern for the Syrian and Iraqi governments.

As early as 1918 the Chief Political Officer in Baghdad was aware of the problems the control of the Bedouin tribes along the provisional Syro-Mesopotamian borders might pose for the future administration of the Jazirah. He also stressed the importance of not allowing any new boundary arrangements to disrupt the delicate socio-economic balance which had existed for centuries between Bedouin groups and settled communities. He envisaged two possible solutions:

'...to treat the tribal country as no-man's land and to draw the boundaries at the limits of the cultivated areas ... This solution is not satisfactory because it does not regulate the relations between the settled country and the tribes economically dependent on it ... The other solution is to treat tribes economically dependent on a settled state as belonging politically to that state and to secure the recognition of this by neighbouring states, while recognising in turn their sovereignty over the tribes that look towards them. This makes it superfluous to have a frontier, the boundaries of each state being defined as including not certain territories but certain tribes...in favour of this solution it may be pointed that the natural boundaries are apt to lie, not at the meeting point of settled and tribal country but along these lines on the midst of tribal country that divide the tribes looking towards one settled area from those looking towards another ...' (2).

In the course of the British mandate all attempts to regulate relations between border tribes, the two governments and the sedentary communities usually followed the general lines of the second of these solutions. Tribes could not be considered as political entities separate from the rest of the population since their economy was largely based on the relations between tribesmen and settled agriculturalists. Dependence on certain market centres, which usually represented a common point of reference for the whole tribe, was normally taken as the main criterion in establishing whether a tribe came under Syrian or Iraqi jurisdiction. However, it was obvious that tribal lands, although centering around Syrian or Iraqi markets, often extended beyond the borders which had been hurriedly drawn after the end of WWI. It has also to be pointed out that in the mid-1920's the first solution, which provided for the creation of tribal

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2. Secret memo on the future frontiers of Mesopotamia incl in tels n.10852 and 10853 Chief PO Baghdad to India Office, 11-12-1918, IO L/P&S/10/769.



enclaves along the provisional border, did not suit either Syrian or Iraqi interests. Particularly in the northern section of the border, which included the Jabal Sinjar, the creation of a 'no-men's land' would have facilitated Turkish intrigue among the tribal population.

The control the Syrian government exercised over the Bedouin tribes moving in Syrian territory north and west of Sinjar was very loose, especially in the tribal lands between the Yazidi Mountain and Nusaybin. This was mainly due to Franco-Turkish disputes over the Bec du Canard area which had not yet allowed the establishment of a stable military presence which would be able to control the movements and migration of tribes who had frequent relations with the Sinjari Yazidis. Furthermore tribal unrest was also favoured by the fact that the majority of the police forces in the area east of the Euphrates included tribal levies still under the command of Bedouin chiefs, especially the Shammar. After 1925 the Iraqi government was in a better position to control its Bedouin tribes moving around Sinjar. From the two main centres of settlement located in the northern Jazirah plateau, communications with Mosul were satisfactory, at least in comparison with the other side of the border, since there were telephone facilities at Balad Sinjar and Tall 'Afar. North of the Mountain there were permanent Iraqi police posts at Tall Hujanah, Tall 'Uwainat and Tall Abu Zahir, although telephone communications with Mosul were

possible only from Zummar (3).

However, by and large, no definitive steps were taken until the mid-1930's to solve the problem of Bedouin control mainly because a definitive solution required a clear definition of the frontier line. Before the final delimitation of the Syro-Iraqi border in 1932 the measures taken often had a very local character and were prompted by prolonged outburst of tribal bellicosity which involved Syrian tribes and Iraqi settled communities or viceversa.

After May 1925 Bedouin raids into Sinjar became a matter of major concern both for the Iraqi government and the local population. Shammari tribesmen based in Iraq, mainly followers of 'Ajil al-Yawar who ruled the 'Abdah clan, started looting Haskani villages in north-west Sinjar. Shammari inter tribal rivalries had worsened after 1922 and in the course of the following decade the history of the Shammar moving around Sinjar was marked by a bitter hostility between 'Ajil al-Yawar and his enemy Daham al-Hadi, chief of the Shammar Khurusah under Syrian jurisdiction (4). Haskani tribesmen, especially those led by the tribal chief Shaikh Khalaf, were particularly affected by the attacks of 'Ajil's followers (5). The situation worsened in October

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3. Secr memo Adm Mosul to Adv Int, 8-7-1927, n.c/2638, AIR 23/93; 'Tribal Raids', secr memo SSO Mosul, 7-1-1927, n.I.M./07.A, AIR 23/289.

4. Williamson, op.cit., pp.160-178.

5. Extr from memo Adm Mosul to Int, 16-8-1925, n.C/2552, AIR 23/145; secret memo SSO Mosul to Air Intelligence, 20-9-25, n./1932, AIR 23/145; tel SSO Mosul to Air HQ, 11-2-26, n.n., AIR 23/147. For the history of the Shammar Khursah see: 'Notice de Tribu. Les Chammar Khorsa (ou Chammar des

1926 when groups of Tayy tribesmen belonging to the Jawalah section of the tribe, whose tribal lands were now almost entirely located in Syria, in the area between the Jabal Sinjar and the Jabal 'Abd al-'Aziz, repeatedly attacked western Sinjar. Looting intensified in the following two months, the majority of thefts being from the tents and among the flocks of Yazidis grazing on the northern slopes of the Jabal near the villages of Karsi and Juhbal. These tribesmen belonged to the Haskani section led by Shaikh Khalaf whose headquarters was located in the area (6). Bedouin raids continued throughout 1927. In January 1300 sheep were looted from Sinjar by followers of Daham al-Hadi who withdrew into Syrian territory after the raids between Tall Antar and Albu Kamal. In February Syrian Shammar from the Amshat and Faddagha sections attacked a sheep-counting party in Sinjar which included some Yazidis. During the raid the nephew of the Amshat chief Mishal al-Faris was killed and Mishal started planning several expedition to Sinjar to take revenge against the Yazidis (7).

The frequency of Bedouin incursions into Sinjar was

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Frontières)' by Lieut. Leroy Contrôle Bedouin Deir al-Zur, 28-2-1934, BEY 1363.

6. Tel Adm Mosul to Adv Int, 1-10-1926, n.4682, AIR 23/151. Two lists of transgressions committed by the Tayy against the Yazidis of Sinjar between Febr. and Dec. 1926 are included in corr Adm Mosul to Delegue' Adjoint Dair al-Zur, 2-1-27, n.SF/C/1, AIR 23/152.

7. Tel Adm Mosul to Br HC, 12-1-1927, n.136, AIR 23/289; tel Br HC to Consul General Beirut, 23-2-1927, n.110, CO 730/108/7; tel Adm Mosul to Int, 9-5-1927, n.C/1497 incl in secret memo SSO Mosul to Air Intelligence, 10-5-1927, n.I.M./05.b, AIR 23/91; tel Adm Mosul to Br HC, 8-12-1927, n.GRC/2796, AIR 23/155; Confidential memo Adm Mosul to Adv Int, 24-1-1928, n.GRC/138, AIR 23/155.

symptomatic of a widespread increase in tribal warfare in the Jazirah, especially along the borders between Syria and Iraq. Internal rivalries among the Shammar played a considerable role since their disputes involved not only members of the tribe but also the majority of other Bedouin groups linked to them by more or less stable political alliances. Furthermore, especially in 1926-1927, animal fodder was in short supply in the flatland of the Jazirah plateau. The situation was particularly bad in 1926 because of widespread damage to crops and grazing grounds inflicted by locusts. Tayy and Shammari tribesmen were compelled to migrate northwards, towards the hilly districts of Nusaybin, Jazirah b.'Umar, Jabal Tur and Sinjar where damage to cultivation had been more limited. Despite a number of measures taken by the government to alleviate this calamity the scarcity of fodder still represented a source of conflict between the Bedouins and the Sinjari tribes in the course of the following two years as shown by the frequent Bedouin intrusions into the Yazidi grazing grounds. The inhabitants of the West suffered heavy economic losses: animals were carried away by the looters, while crops and the majority of the agricultural produce stored on the threshing floors were destroyed (8).

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8. During 1925 the damage inflicted by locusts both on pasturage and crops was severe. South of the line Mardin, Viranshahir, Jabal Tur and Jazirah 40% of the fodder was destroyed while south of Sharqat the situation was critical given that fodder was no longer available. Tel SSO Mosul to Aviation Baghdad, 28-8-1925, n.I/72, AIR 23/145; SSO Mosul rep, 31-8-1925, n.1839, AIR 23/281. Conf despatch Residency to Br Ambassador Constantinople, 30-7-25, n.S.O.1877, AIR 23/145; intell rep SSO Mosul, 31-5-1928, n.I.M./1, AIR 23/290.

Tense relations with the Bedouin provoked a general attitude of distrust towards the Iraqi government among those groups of Yazidi villagers particularly affected by the hostility of the nomads. In Shimal nahiyyah the population, embittered by the shortage of food and the general state of insecurity, were angry at the inability of the new administration and the local police force either to protect their properties or to use its authority to ensure the restitution of their stolen animals.

In fact the security forces could seldom intervene effectively. First of all gendarmes were not allowed to carry out their policing duties west of the 1920 convention line unless they had the permission of the Franco-Syrian authorities, let alone establish permanent military posts. Similarly in Shimal nahiyyah any action on the part of the RAF, which had proved most effective in stopping tribal warfare in mountainous areas in the past, was very likely to provoke complaints from Beirut which considered any Iraqi military presence west of the line as a territorial violation. Hence any action taken by the government without French approval was of very limited effect given that the disputed area in western Sinjar where British forces had no access constituted more than one third of the entire Mountain. Even in cases when an agreement was reached between the two authorities, military operations were often delayed with a consequent prolongation and extension of hostilities.

The Tayy affair in 1926 is a case in point. When Jawalah

Tayy tribesmen started to loot Haskani villages in October 1926 some sections of the tribe were camped in the proximity of the provisional frontier, north and south of the villages of Khana Sur and Sinuni. From the headquarters of Shimal nahiyyah in the village of Karsi Iraqi gendarmes attempted to send police detachments to the Tayy camps some 10-15km. from the administrative centre. However, the local authorities soon realized that it would be very difficult to evacuate Tayy tribesmen from Sinjar without the backing both of aircraft and, ideally, additional police forces approaching the Tayy camps from the west. The employment of both would have obviously entailed the cooperation of the Franco-Syrian authorities at least in the sense of obtaining official authorization from Beirut to carry out military operations west of the Convention line (9) .

Members of the administration and the RAF Command in charge of defence had two different points of view which started to be expressed in December 1926. Largely to avoid further French involvement in Yazidi affairs both the Administrative Inspector of Mosul and the Adviser to the Interior in Baghdad were in favour of an aerial demonstration only along the provisional border. In fact French intrigues among both the Yazidis and the Jawalah tribes were widely rumoured in Mosul and often suggested by various sources as the major cause of the troubles in Sinjar. Air HQ in Baghdad, more experienced in dealing with such matters on the spot,

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9. Tel Adm Mosul to Int, 21-12-1926, n.6379, AIR 23/152, AIR 23/288; tel from SSO Mosul to Aviation Baghdad, 21-12-1926, n.I/523, AIR 23/288; secret memo from Br HC to Air HQ, 23-12-1926, n.G.O.1339, AIR 23/91.

were firmly in favour of a full-scale aerial demonstration as the only means of accomplishing the operation successfully. Considerations of public security prevailed and by the end of December the French High Commissioner agreed to allow British planes to fly over western Sinjar provided that their presence was strictly limited to aerial display and was not part of a plan to establish a permanent Iraqi military post (10). By 10 January all the Jawalah Tayy were compelled to leave Sinjar following warnings dropped on their camps from RAF aircrafts announcing the imminent bombing of the area. However, the same warnings contained instructions for the immediate summons of all Tayy chiefs to Mosul which occasioned an immediate protest from the local authorities of the Syrian Jazirah who considered it a violation of their right to deal with Jawalah affairs since the Jawalah were Syrian subjects (11).

However the Tayy affair had the immediate effect of convincing the local administrations of northern Jazirah both in Dair al-Zur and Mosul that any satisfactory solution to the tribal disturbances across the border, both in the

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10. Secret memo from Br HC to Air HQ, 23-12-26, n.G.O.1339, AIR 23/91; secret memo from Air HQ to Counsellor HC, 24-12-1926, ref:-I/4, AIR 23/91; tel Br HC to Br Consul Beirut, 26-12-1926, n.274/s, CO 730/108/7; Corr Br Consul Beirut to French HC, 28-12-1926, n.n., BEY 1518; despatch from Fr HC to Br Consul Beirut, 29-12-26, n.7462, BEY 1518/MAE 307; despatch from Fr HC to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 6-1-1927, n.n., MAE 307; tel Br HC to Adm Mosul, 31-12-1926, n.658, AIR 23/152. The same reservations were put forward in 1925 when a similar request was made by the British HC during Dawud's revolt. See pp.192-193.

11. Tel Aereosix Mosul to Aviation Baghdad, 10-1-1927, n.A/136, AIR 23/152; despatch from Fr HC to Br HC, 25-1-1927, n.119 K.D., MAE 307, AIR 23/153; conf corr Br HC to Fr HC, 9-2-1927, n.S.O.310, BEY 1518, MAE 307; despatch from Fr HC to Br HC, 25-2-1927, n.259/K.D., AIR 23/154.

Mountain and the Albu Kamal area, necessitated closer liaison between the local Syrian and Iraqi authorities. The exchange of intelligence was crucial since it would favour the more efficient control of tribal movements, and a joint effort in the settlement of existing claims between the tribes involved in the hostilities. Indeed the settlement of such claims became one of the principal item on the agenda of the Syrian and the Iraqi governments at the beginning of 1927 (12).

As in the case of the Yazidi tribesmen the inability of local officials to provide for the restitution of property, which occurred more frequently when the looters came from Syria, represented another major source of resentment against the new administration. Since the beginning of the mandate, whenever raids intensified, it had become increasingly difficult for tribesmen to settle their disputes with non-Sinjaris by themselves, given that alliances and relations among the tribes had become more complicated and confused as a result of growing British, French and Turkish intervention in local tribal politics. Therefore they often applied to the Iraqi qaimmaqam in Balad, hoping that the new government would provide assistance in recovering their properties. However, at least until the beginning of 1927, officials in Sinjar were not in a position to guarantee the restitution of loot to the claimants or to mediate a peaceful solution of

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12. Tel Br HC to Br Consul Beirut, 13-12-1926, n.636, AIR 23/152; corr Br Consul Beirut to Fr HC, 14-12-1926, n.n., BEY 1518. From November 1926 the Administrative Inspector of Mosul started notifying the claims of the Iraqi tribes to the Delegeue' Adjoint of Dair al-Zur, corr Adm Mosul to Deleguè Dair, 16/17-11-1926, n.5564, Air 23/152; corr Adm Mosul to Deleguè, 2-1-1927, n.SF/C/1, AIR 23/152.



the disputes. They could not negotiate directly with the Syrian tribes since tribesmen would withdraw into Syrian territory after their raids. The only alternative was to seek the support of their Syrian administrative counterparts and to work with them to pacify the contenders. For various political reasons both the Syrian and Iraqi government had discouraged this liaison since over the previous few years it was likely to have repercussions on the delicate issue of the delimitation of their respective spheres of influence in the border area.

By the end of 1926 however the situation had changed. During the year many complaints had been made against the Tayy in the HQ of the Sinjar qadha by Yazidi aghas, especially Haskani. As had happened in the past, the mutasarraf of Mosul ordered his local officials to give verbal instructions to the claimants to apply directly to the Jawalah chiefs for the restitution of their properties. In January 1927 the qaimmaqam of Sinjar sent Shaikh Khalaf Haskani to Muhammad Tayy to negotiate the restitution of sheep looted from both Haskan and Albu Mutaywid tribesmen. Khalaf's mission was partially successful most probably because the administrative official threatened the Tayy chief with further punitive aerial action if he did not comply (13). However, raids had increased to exceptional levels and the lack of proper extra-tribal mediation seemed likely

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13. Conf memo Adm Mosul to Secretariat Br HC, 12-1-1927, n.C/146, AIR 23/153. The translation of a letter from Shaikh Muhammad Tayy to the qaimmaqam of Sinjar, n.d., incl in AIR 23/153 is possibly the answer of Muhammad which followed Khalaf's mission.

to pave the way for widespread future conflicts and feuds among the tribes. Even in cases where both parties could reach an acceptable agreement without the intervention of officials in Balad, contacts between Bedouin and Yazidis could represent a source of trouble for the government since the tribes were very much exposed to the infiltration of spies and agitators if not kept in check by the authorities.

In the last days of December 1926, when RAF intervention west of the convention line had been agreed on, the necessity of closer cooperation between Dair al-Zur and Mosul over Bedouin control was strongly advocated. Although the ongoing Tayy affair in Sinjar played quite a decisive role, tribal disturbances were also very frequent south of the Mountain, especially in the Albu Kamal area. A conference was held at Dair between 18 and 20 January 1927 with the participation of Iraqi and Syrian representatives for the purpose of organizing a commission to settle any standing claims between tribes and sedentary communities of the Mosul and Dair provinces with particular emphasis on solving matters concerning the Tayy, the Yazidis and the Jubur. For the Yazidis the proposal was that:

'In order to settle the outstanding disputes of the Yazidis and other sedentary tribes the conference decides that it would be necessary to arrange for the principals concerned on each side to meet together with mutually appointed arbitrators at Hassatche or Sinjar...' (14).

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14. From procès verbale of the Dair conference incl in AIR 23/153; secret memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff Intell Baghdad, 22-1-1927, n. I.M./07, AIR 23/153.

The idea of a settlement under the supervision of the local mandatory authorities on both sides (which is evident from the decisions of the Dair conference), echoed the practice of the Tribal Criminal and Civil Dispute Regulation which was by then widely employed in the rural areas of Iraq. Disputes occurring between tribes under Iraqi jurisdiction were usually settled under the guidance of the local British representative. The presence of British and French officials during the settlement of the claims was also specifically mentioned in article 3 of a Provisional Agreement for the Regulation of Relations among Frontier Tribes. This agreement was drafted in the first months of 1926 by the Residency in Baghdad and a representative of the Syrian Government, Lieut.-Col. Vincent (15).

The Dair al-Zur conference represented an important starting point for the discussion and resolution of relations between Bedouin tribes and settled communities in the Jazirah, since it was a first sign of mutual commitment on the part of the two administrations in order to find solutions to this problem. In the specific case of the Yazidi community of Sinjar it temporarily allowed the Iraqi

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15. This agreement was modelled on the recent treaty Iraq had signed with Najd. An account of the proposals and considerations of the two HCs which led to its formulation together with details on the Vincent mission to Baghdad are included in: secret corr Fr HC to Br HC, 21-3-1926, n.n., MAE 307; secret corr Br HC to Fr HC, 1-4-1926, n.S.O.571, MAE 307; Rapport du Lieut.-Col. Vincent to Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris, 5-4-1926, n.n., MAE 307. The latter also includes the French text of the provisional agreement (Annexe n.13). English version in AIR 23/289. Informal meetings between local Syrian and Iraqi officials had occurred before the Dair conference, between 1923 and 1927. Occasional references to these are to be found in CO 730/108/7.

government to exert a tighter control over Yazidi tribal affairs. However, the Dair conference had no far-reaching effects in the sense that it did not create any permanent organization to deal with tribal disputes. This is evident from events which took place two years later, in February 1929, when raids on Sinjar intensified once again and the settlement of tribal claims between Yazidis and various Bedouin tribes (Jubur of the Khabur, Baqqarah, Tayy and Sharabiyyin) became urgent. As had happened in 1927, offenders and offended were summoned and their claims settled by a temporary mixed commission constituted for the occasion. It was only in 1934, two years after the termination of the mandate, that definite steps were taken to create permanent committees for the solution of tribal disputes involving Sinjari tribesmen. This committee was chaired by the qaimmaqam of Sinjar and the French intelligence Officer of the Syrian town of Hasakah (16).

Another problem which the administration had to face in the Mountain was the control of Bedouin tribes under Syrian jurisdiction (like the Jubur and the Shammar led by 'Ajil al-Yawar) whose tribesmen had clashed with Yazidi villagers. Generally speaking disputes between rival Shammar factions in

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16. Procès verbaux des séances - Conférence de Hassetche du 17 au 25 février 1929 incl in BEY 1559 (11th and 17th sessions of 22nd and 25th February, pp.20/29). The conference was primarily summoned to settle matters related to widi and wasja taxation. The Iraqi party included Major Wilson (Administrative Inspector of Mosul), 'Abdullah b. Awsana (mutasarraf), 'Ajil al-Yawar, Shaikh Faysal al-Farhan (Shammar), Khudaida Hamu Shiru (son of the Fuqara' chief), Shaikh Khidr Qirani. The proceedings of the 11th session (claims between Yazidi and Jubur) are also incl in secr memo SSO Mosul to Air HQ Hinaidi, 16-3-1929, n.I.M./36, AIR 23/156.

western Sinjar contributed substantially to increase a general feeling of distrust against the government and had encouraged certain Yazidi tribal chiefs to approach the French authorities in Hasakah. Since the end of 1925, as stated earlier, followers of the Shammari chief 'Ajil al-Yawar had been amongst the main offenders in western Sinjar. 'Ajil al-Yawar was a well-known protégé of the Iraqi government who was extremely influential, especially among government representatives in Mosul. It was mainly for this reason that the authorities in Sinjar avoided taking any effective measures against his tribesmen, fearing that his complaints to Mosul might damage the position of some Arab officials in Balad. After September 1925 regular contacts were established between some chiefs of the Shimal, including the same Shaikh Khalaf and some Musqurah aghas, and the Shammari chief Daham al-Hadi with whom Shaikh Khalaf had been feuding since 1922. This obviously also meant a rapprochement with the Franco-Syrian authorities in Hasakah with whom Daham had been on friendly terms after the Syrian government had reinstalled him as paramount shaikh of the Syrian Shammar in 1925 (17).

In the villages of southern Sinjar along the al-Tawq chain the Yazidi villagers were far better protected than the Shimalis. In March 1926 tribesmen were apprehensive of being

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17. In 1922 Daham interfered in Tayy affairs supporting Naif, the rival of Shaikh Muhammad Tayy. Muhammad temporarily sought shelter in Sinjar among the section of the Haskan led by Khalaf. After this episode relations between the Haskani chief and Daham became very tense. Conf memo Adm Mosul to Adv Int, 17-9-1925, AIR 23/145. Extr intell report Adm Mosul to Adv Int, 15-9-1925, n./3181, AIR 23/145; secret memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff Intell Baghdad, 20-1-1925, n./1976, AIR 23/146.

attacked by followers of Daham al-Hadi who had already succeeded in penetrating into some villages inhabited by the Qiran. Daham's action against the Yazidis of south Sinjar seems to have been directly related to the long standing feud between the Jubur, now temporarily on Daham's side, and the Fuqara', Albu Mutaywid and Juhaish. The leaders of these three tribes together with the Qiranis asked for the support of Ajil who in the meantime had begun to receive British military support in return for cooperating with the authorities to halt tribal raids. Thus the inhabitants of south Sinjar, unlike those in the north-west, avoided major Bedouin attacks from the Syrian Shammar since they benefitted from the presence of British forces in the plains south of Sinjar where RAF aircrafts were backing the followers of Ajil. Daham was defeated in a major battle at al-Badi in April 1926 and after that he was compelled to withdraw his tribal forces to Syrian territory (18).

## V.2 - CONTACTS WITH THE KURDISH NATIONAL MOVEMENT

The end of the Ottoman Empire had created new national barriers among the Yazidi communities scattered in Kurdistan. These artificial boundaries did not have any immediately disruptive effects upon the close relations which had linked the various Yazidi groups for at least six centuries,

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18. Tel SSO Mosul to Aviation Baghdad, 13-3-26, n.I/179, AIR 23/147; secret corr SSO Mosul to Aviation Baghdad, 31-3-26, Y/4614, AIR 23/147. Williamson, op.cit., pp.167-168.

relations which were generally of religious character. This was especially the case between the Sinjaris and the Yazidi communities of eastern Turkey, especially those geographically close to the Mountain. Apart from occasional visits by groups of tribesmen who had relatives across the border, the most frequent visitors from Sinjar were Yazidi men of religion. They would usually tour the Yazidi villages to keep in touch with the local Yazidi priesthood, to collect alms from the laity and to enlarge their personal following which, as stated above, could be recruited from outside the area where an individual priest lived.

In the 1920's the Turkish and Iraqi governments took a close interest in these visits on both sides of the frontier, mainly because of the widespread atmosphere of suspicion and treachery among the Kurdish tribes settled along the Turco-Iraqi border. At the end of 1925 the Turkish authorities started to take stricter measures against Kurdish visitors from Iraq, largely as a result of the tribal uprising led by the Kurdish leader Shaikh Sa'id of Palu which occasioned widespread anti-government feelings among the tribes. Contacts with Iraqi Kurds were considered extremely dangerous since these were thought to be one of the means through which the British administration in Iraq attempted to spread anti-Turkish propaganda among the Kurdish communities settled in the proximity of the border, fomenting the newly-born Kurdish nationalist cause in the tribal milieu (19).

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19. The main contributions to the study of the 1925 rebellion are: R.Olson, The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Shaikh Said Rebellion, 1880-1925, Austin 1989; R.Olson/W.F.Tucker 'The Shaikh Sait

In October 1925 the Sinjari Shaikh Barakat b. Shaikh Nadir started a religious tour of Yazidi villages in the Viranshair area together with other five Yazidi priests: they were all seized by the Turkish authorities and imprisoned in Severek. In the same month five Yazidi gawwals left Sinjar to collect alms among the Yazidis living among the Milli tribe in Turkish territory for the shrines of Shaikh 'Adi located in Shaikhan. They were also imprisoned by the Turkish authorities and subsequently tried (20).

Ideas of Kurdish national identity were still in a very early stage of development even among those Kurdish tribes who had been approached by nationalist elements. In the case of the Sinjari Yazidis their relative isolation, their distinctive religious identity and lack of contact with a more urban Kurdish milieu before 1926 had prevented any particular attachment to the nationalist cause, on the part of both men of religion and tribal aghas. After 1926 pan-Kurdish propaganda arrived in Sinjar mainly as a consequence of the development of tribal affairs beyond the Turkish border, especially in Jabal Tur.

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Rebellion in Turkey', Die Welt des Islams, 18(1977)NS, pp.195-211; Van Bruinessen, op.cit., pp.265-299; idem 'Popular Islam, Kurdish Nationalism and Rural Revolt: the rebellion of Shaikh Said in Turkey (1925)' in Janos M. Bak/G. Benecke (eds), Religion and Rural Revolt, Manchester 1984, pp.281-295. Olson, basing his assumption on AIR 23 records, denies any major British involvement in the development of Kurdish anti-governmental resistance in eastern Turkey in the mid-1920's.

20. Memo SSO Mosul to Air HQ Baghdad, 12-10-1925, n./1961, AIR 23/146; extract from Frontier intell report from Adm Mosul, 12-10-1925, AIR 23/146. The Milli was a mixed tribal confederation which in 1919 consisted of 28 sub-tribes. They moved around a wide area in Turkey located west of the Jabal Tur. Yazidi sections were the Dannadiyyah (100 families) and the Khaldan (80-90 families with Sunni leadership). Driver, Kurdistan and the Kurds, pp.27-28.



The Yazidis of Sinjar had long been in touch with the Yazidi villages of the Jabal Tur, which were easily accessible from the Mountain. The Jabal Tur, or Tur 'Abidin as it was usually called by its Arab Christian settlers, was a plateau located between Mardin and Jazirah b. 'Umar. At the beginning of the 20th century most of the Yazidis of the Jabal were grouped in mixed tribes which included Christians and Sunni Kurds. The presence of Yazidi tribesmen was substantial among the Durkan (120 Yazidi and Muslim families), the Dasikan (900 Yazidi, Muslim and Christian families), the Alian (1200 families of Yazidis, Christians and Muslims) and the Havarkan, an important tribal confederation whose leadership was Yazidi and which was to play a substantial role in the Kurdish affairs of the Jazirah after 1925. To a certain extent the activities, movements and political attitude of the Havarkani aghas came to affect the Mountain (21).

The Havarkan was an heterogeneous tribe which included Christians, Yazidis and Muslims and numbered approximately 1800 families distributed in 150 villages centred around the capital of the Jabal, Midyat. In the second half of the 19th

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21. The Christian inhabitants of the Jabal Tur were mainly Jacobites. Their number had decreased considerably after the Kurdish persecutions carried out by the Turkish authorities during the very last years of Ottoman rule. Those who were able to escape settled mainly in the Syrian border towns of Hasakah and Qamishli. For the period under consideration no precise figures are available for the Yazidi community. However, in the 1920's two thirds of the population of Jabal Tur was Kurdish and a survey carried out in 1919 shows that the majority of the 7500 Yazidis living in the Diyar Bakr district were concentrated around the local capital, Midyat. Chevallier, *op.cit.*, pp. 286-295; M.Sykes, 'Kurdish tribes of the Ottoman Empire', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 38(1908), p.476; Driver, *op.cit.*, p.67.

century the Yazidi section of the Mala 'Uthman under the leadership of Hasan Agha achieved supremacy over a considerable number of Havarkan tribesmen. Taking advantage of the military operations of WWI in the Jabal, Hasan Agha's greatnephew Hajo III seized the town of Midyat and unified the whole tribe which was subsequently joined by a considerable number of Christians seeking protection from Kurdish persecution (22).

Hajo Agha started to correspond with some Sinjari tribal chiefs in November 1925 when he was apparently still on good terms with the Turkish authorities of Jabal Tur. A year before he had been involved in a government project to raise an irregular tribal force at Midyat composed of bands of 250-300 people. Subsequently he was elected Paramount Shaikh of the Jabal, subsidized by the Turkish government, and his tribe was exempted from the payment of the rifle levy which had represented one of the major causes of friction with the local authorities (23). In the first stage of his interest in Sinjar it is not entirely clear whether he acted primarily as an intermediary of the Turks. In November 1925 he invited two Sinjari chiefs whose identity is unknown to Midyat and convinced them to sign a petition prepared by Turkish officials, probably against the British and Iraqi

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22. Van Bruinessen, op.cit., pp.101-103; Driver, op.cit., p.41. Van Bruinessen makes interesting remarks on the political organization of the Havarkan, especially on the relative mobility of the power of its leadership. See Van Bruinessen, op.cit., p.105.

23. Secr rep British Liason Officer Bey to Air Staff Int Palestine, 19-11-1924, ref. B.L./S/10, AIR 23/85; memo SSO Mosul, 9-12-1925, n./2043, AIR 23/146.

governments (24). However, from his correspondence with Shaikh Khalaf Haskani and the Musqurah agha Husayn Barajas it is evident that he was trying to sound out the attitude of the Yazidi leaders of Sinjar towards the Iraqi government and even offered his military support in the event of a tribal insurrection. Yet it is in the context of his rebellion against the Turkish government, which would break out a few months later around Midyat, that his interest in the political attitude of his Sinjari co-religionists has to be situated. It is interesting to note that the response of Shaikh Khalaf was very cautious although there is clear evidence that he had been corresponding with the Turks for quite a while (25).

Naif Beg of the Miran tribe, another Kurdish chief who had been involved in the activities of Hajo Agha since 1925, reported to the British authorities in Mosul that the Turks in Jazirah b. 'Umar had long been actively involved in spreading anti-British propaganda among the Sinjari tribes. Naif, who had worked among the Jazirah and Demir Qabu tribes as an emissary of the Turkish government since early 1923, was probably chosen by the Turks to deal with the Sinjari tribes because his summer camp was usually located across the

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24. Memo SSO Mosul 9-12-1925, n./2043, AIR 23/146; letters from Hajo Agha to Shaikh Khalaf, Husayn Barajas and Ibrahim Qulu incl in memo SSO Mosul to Int, 18-1-1926, n.9/b/916, AIR 23/146.

25. Hajo was probably trying to demonstrate his loyalty to the Turkish government and at the same time to secure possible future military and logistic support in Sinjar which could assist his future plans against the government. This political acumen seems to have marked Hajo's career both as a tribal leader and subsequently as a Kurdish nationalist activist as remarked by Van Bruinessen when discussing Hajo's attitude during Shaikh's Sa'id rebellion. See Van Bruinessen, *op.cit.*, pp.103-104.

Turkish border, in Iraqi territory west of the Wadi Suwaidah. In addition his contacts with the Sinjaris would have been facilitated by the fact that his family had been Yazidis until his grandfather converted to Islam. Naif made clear to the British authorities that Khalaf al-Haskani was the main object of Turkish interest in Sinjar while Hamu Shiru was still well known to be a firm supporter of the British and therefore was not even considered by the Turks as a possible ally (26).

Hajo's uprising in the Jabal Tur started in March 1926 and it was directed against the Turkish government. His rebellion did not have the political impact of the uprising of Shaikh Sa'id since it covered a very limited area, involved less tribal forces than those mobilized by the Shaikh of Palu and was short-lived, lasting only ten days. Eventually the Turkish army forced him to cross the border and retreat into Syria (27). French intelligence sources reported various attempts to send some auxiliary tribal forces from Sinjar, probably on the part of some Yazidi aghas of the Shimal. However, no major group of Yazidi tribesmen seems to have left the Mountain for Turkey during the rebellion (28).

Hajo's settlement in the French Jazirah marked a turning

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26. Secret Memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff Int Air HQ, 1-3-1926, n.9/b/085, AIR 23/284; Edmonds' Tour notes - Syrian Frontier (1930's), EDM Box IX, file 5.

27. Information on the rebellion is included in AIR 23/289. See also Van Bruinessen, *op.cit.*, p.104; C.Kutschéra, Le Mouvement National Kurde, Paris 1979, p.100.

28. Bullétin de Reinsegnement mars 1926, p.4, MAE 23.

point in the history of the transhumant Kurdish tribes in the area. On one hand, encouraged by Hajo's successful settlement in Syria, a significant number of Kurdish tribesmen who used to live beyond the Turkish border, started increasingly to look towards the Syrian Jazirah as their new homeland. On the other hand Hajo could initiate more coherent organized resistance against the Turkish government from Syria as well as to become a nationalist activist in the tribal milieu, not only among his followers but also among other Kurdish tribal groups. Hajo eventually settled in the region of Kubur al-Bid where the Syrian authorities allotted him land on which he and his tribesmen finally settled. He now began to carry out periodic raids against Turkish posts located along the border and to spread nationalist ideas among the Syrian, Turkish and Iraqi Kurdish tribes (29). As a British officer reported in May 1928:

'The Officer (French, based in Qamishli) gave me the impression that the attempted coordination of the various tribal shaikhs whether in Syria, Iraq or Turkey was undertaken more and more in Kurdish circles...' (30).

and:

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29. Information about Hajo's life and activities in Syria are included in conf correspondence Hajo Agha Havarkan to Fr HC, 23-5-1931, BEY 1572. Hajo was also receiving a monthly subsidy from the Syrian authorities of 200 gold liras, fortnightly report period ending April 9th 1932, SSO Mosul, ref. I/M/23, AIR 23/95. As early as June 1926 the Havarkani chief had already started planning a widespread pan-Kurdish propaganda among the Iraqi tribes as it appears from despatch of Hajo Havarki to Dr. Shukri Muhammad (Kurdish Committee of Baghdad), 21-6-1926, annexe to Bulletin de Reinseignements 15 juillet 1926, MAE 23. 'Kurdish Intelligence' (fortnight report period ending 28-2-1927) SSO Mosul, n.I.M./03.A, AIR 23/289.

30. Secr report Major British Liason Officer in Beirut to RAF HQ Transjordan and Palestine, 6-5-1928, serial n.10, ref. B/L/S/10, AIR 23/92.

'Hadjo Agha is in close touch with the internal organization of the nationalist movement and has a channel of communication with tribal leaders...' (31).

It was in this way that Kurdish nationalist propaganda started to arrive in Sinjar, directly or indirectly promoted by the activities of the Yazidi Havarkani chief.

As a consequence of the harsh measures taken by the Turks in the Jabal Tur, refugees from the area started to flock into Sinjar. These refugees had mixed tribal backgrounds and included Yazidis, Muslim Kurds and Christians. A few Christian families were soon allowed to settle around Balad. The settlement of Christian expatriates from Turkey was once again strongly encouraged by Hamu Shiru who considered it as a good opportunity to increase the number of his followers in the Mountain, given the strong political and social links he had established with the local Christian community (32). The situation was more complicated in the case of the Kurds who were not particularly welcome in Sinjar mainly because their settlement could provoke a negative reaction on the part of the Turkish government, given that the Kurdish question represented a thorny issue in the relations between Turkey and Iraq especially after the rebellion of Shaikh Sa'id. As early as December 1925 a prominent Kurdish Yazidi chieftain

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31. 'Kurdish Intelligence' fortnightly report SSO Mosul period ending 28-2-1927, n.I.M./O3.A, AIR 23/289.

32. Secr memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff Intell, 12-4-1926, n.10/a/186, AIR 23/148.

of the Havarkan tribe, Shamsadin Agha, who was the most loyal supporter of Hajo Agha and had acted as his lieutenant during the rebellion, had already paid a visit to the Sinjari Yazidis and had asked to settle in the Mountain with 60 families. Although he was apparently held in great esteem by the local Yazidi leadership, his settlement was discouraged by the Iraqi authorities on the advice of the British Administrative Inspector in Mosul (33). After 1926 Shamsadin Agha was forced to follow Hajo in Syria but he continued to press for permission to settle permanently in Sinjar, appealing to his Yazidi identity, commonly shared with the Sinjari tribesmen: 'Being Yazidis we cannot live on the plains and desire to come to the mountains'. He asked both Hamu Shiru and Shaikh Khalaf to intercede with the Iraqi government but in 1928 went back to the Jabal Tur followed by the section of the Havarkan he led, the Chalkan (34). For his part Hajo Agha was refused access to Iraq soon after he had escaped from Turkey, mainly because of his previous contacts with some Sinjari aghas on behalf of the Turks which were well known to the authorities of Balad and Mosul (35).

In November 1926 another Havarkani chief who led the Umaryan section of the confederation settled in Sinjar with

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33. Report SSO Mosul, 26-10-1925, n./1990, AIR 23/146; 'Note on Shamsdin Agha', n.d.(1927 c.a), AIR 23/154.

34. Quote from letter Shamsadin Agha to Hamu Shiru and Shaikh Khalaf, n.d., incl in conf memo from Adm Mosul, 27-9-1926. n. C/4558, AIR 23/90; secret memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell Baghdad, 16-6-1926, n.10/a/306, AIR 23/149; report SSO Mosul, 18-7-1928, n.I.M./1, AIR 23/290.

35. Bullétin du Reinsegnement avril 1926, p.1, MAE 23.

his relatives for a couple of months after he had applied to the French authorities in the Jazirah for permission to settle permanently in Syria. At the same time one of his relatives from Diyar Bakr, Ibrahim Agha b. Isma'il Agha, resided temporarily in Sinjar with his followers but finally obtained some lands in the Tannuriyyah area, in Syrian territory. The migration of small groups of Kurdish tribesmen continued over the following two years. In July 1928 20 families of Yazidis living in the Viranshahir area arrived in Sinjar (36).

This influx of refugees did not bring about any significant changes in Sinjar. Their number was limited and the majority of them considered the Mountain only as an temporary halting place on their way to Syria, since the local Yazidi leadership, tribesmen and tribal chiefs were aware that resources and agricultural space were limited in Sinjar. In practice the only agricultural lands available were those already occupied by the local population and the permanent settlement of other tribal groups would have engendered a great deal of social conflict. In contrast the upper Syrian Jazirah was opening up as a new settlement area for those Kurdish tribes which had started to leave Turkey after the uprising of Shaikh Sa'id. The progressive extension of the Franco-Syrian administration into the Khabur and Jagh-jagh area, the development of the new Syrian posts of Hasakah

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36. Memo Adm Mosul to secretariat Br HC, 30-11-1926, n.5900, AIR 23/151; report SSO Mosul, 20-12-1926, n.I/M/734, AIR 23/288; memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell, 2-2-1927, n.I.M./03.B, AIR 23/289; report SSO Mosul, 26-7-1928, n.I.M./1, AIR 23/290.



and Qamishli together with embryonic governmental plans for agricultural development and settlement of the existing tribes facilitated the distribution of arable lands to the newcomers, as had happened in the case of Hajo Agha (37).

The permanent settlement of a great number of Kurdish tribes also created stable conditions for cooperation between some Kurdish tribal chiefs and the Kurdo-Armenian nationalist movement which started to expand rapidly in Syria after 1926. Hajo Agha became actively involved in the activities of the Khoybun, the Kurdo-Armenian nationalist society founded in Aleppo in 1927 and chaired by Jaladet 'Ali Badr Khan, a descendant of the last Kurdish prince of Jazirah who had been defeated by the Ottomans in 1844 (38).

As a reflection of these new developments in the Kurdish tribal milieu beyond the provisional Syro-Iraqi border, Sinjar began to be affected by Kurdish-Armenian nationalist propaganda and some Yazidis started to consider Syria as a possible destination for future settlement in case their

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37. About the Franco-Syrian occupation of upper Jazirah and the tribal policy implemented by the government until 1932 see: L.Dillerman, 'Les Français en Haute-Djazirah (1919-1939)', Revue Française d'Histoire d'Outre-Mer, 66(1979), pp.33-58; Montagne, 'Quelques aspects du peuplement de la Haute-Djeziré', pp.53-66.

38. About the Khoybun: despatch Chef de Poste de Djerablous to Chef Sûreté Vilayat d'Alep, 25-8-1931, BEY 571; 'Note Confidentielle au sujet de l'activité Kurde', Sûreté Générale du Vilayet d'Alep, 14-8-1931, n.3266/S.G., BEY 571; 'Activité Kurde' report Sûreté Générale Kamechlie to Sûreté General Alep, 17-9-1931, n.777/S.G.K., BEY 571; 'Note sur le Mouvement Kurde', Sûreté Générale Beyruth, 4-1-1931, BEY 972; 'Notes on the Kurdish and Armenian question' by Mr. Protch Chef de la Sûreté of Aleppo (1928 c.a), AIR 23/414; 'Note on Jaladet Bedr Khan' incl in memo Air HQ Baghdad to Oriental Secretary Br HC, 5-7-1928, n.I./407, AIR 23/413.

relations with the Iraqi government deteriorated. Although the Iraqi government started to apply severe restrictions on the issue of visas for any Kurds and Armenians from Syria suspected of being connected to the movement, nationalist activists paid secret visits to Sinjar (39). The first nationalist to visit the Mountain was Shaikh Sa'id's brother, Shaikh Mahdi, who had participated in the 1925 rebellion and had subsequently supported Hajo Agha in his anti-Turkish activities. After 1926 he settled in Syrian territory, in the village of Dujir located along the Mosul-Nusaybin road, kept his contacts with the Havarkan leader and had become an active member of Khoybun. In June 1926 he visited Isma'il Beg Chol, the representative of the Yazidi princely family residing in Sinjar, Hamu Shiru, his son Khudaida and Shaikh Khalaf Haskani. His only comment on the attitude of the local leadership was that: 'I have observed no national feeling amongst the Yazidis' (40).

A year later Vahan Papazian, a member of the Central Committee of the Armenian Dashnak party who resided in Aleppo and apparently one of the main promoters of the Khoybun, started to tour the Mosul province in search of a suitable location for new Armenian settlements in Iraq. It is very likely that he was also trying to promote a Kurdo-Armenian

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39. Tel Br HC to Br Consul Aleppo, 23-6-1928, n.104/B, AIR 23/413; secr memo secretariat Br HC to Iraqi Ministry Foreign Affairs, 15-7-1928, n.S.O.1587, AIR 23/413.

40. Letter from Shaikh Mahdi to Amin Effendi b. Hassan Effendi of Rowanduz incl in memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell Air HQ Baghdad, 7-7-1926, n.9/b/333, AIR 23/411.

alliance among the Iraqi tribes (41). The Armenian nationalist movement based in Syria had recently started to promote nationalist propaganda among the Kurdish tribes of the Jazirah (especially the Dakuri, Milli, Pinar Ali and Marsini settled around Qamishli), trying to win the tribesmen to the Kurdo-Armenian cause. Somewhat overoptimistically, the Yazidis were included among those Kurdish tribesmen who might easily be persuaded to join the movement (42).

Papazian became convinced that Sinjar could become an ideal homeland for the Armenian refugees. The reputation Hamu Shiru enjoyed as protector and supporter of the Christians and Armenians, especially since he had sheltered many of them during WWI, and the fact that Sinjar was the only sedentary Kurdish enclave in the Iraqi Jazirah surely contributed to this. In Papazian's plan the first Armenian settlement would consist of 600 families, increasing to 1000 in the following year. Hamu Shiru declared that he was ready to welcome the Armenians provided they were settled in the village of Khana Sur close to his headquarters in Jaddalah. There are no

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41. French and British intelligence sources indicate Papazian as one of the founders of the Khoybun although Kutschéra disagrees on this point. See Kutschéra, op.cit., Paris 1979, p.91.

42. The following conversation between an Armenian agent and a Kurdish tribesman, reported by an Armenian nationalist as being the standard reaction of the Kurds to Armenian propaganda, indicates that a specific interest was placed in the Yazidis:

(K=Kurd, A=Armenian agent)

A: What is the difference between you and the Armenians?

K: Religion.

A: What about nationality?

K: None. As Kurds, Armenians and Yazidis are of the same origin, viz. Armenians. Transl of a letter found on Aris Ohannes Mour incl in memo Iraqi Police Criminal Investigation Dept to Adv Int, 30-5-1927, n.S.B./574, AIR 23/389.

further reports on this and it is probable that the plan was never implemented because of the opposition of the Iraqi authorities (43).

The relations Hamu entertained with the Kurdish members of Khoybun were rather strained, especially with Hajo Agha. Following a major reorganization of the society at the end of the 1920's, Hajo Agha had become a permanent member of the Hasakah section and therefore operated very close to Sinjar. He sent a Khoybun delegation to the Mountain in 1931 to try to get the support of Hamu but without success (44). However, it seems that the Khoybun had kept in touch with Isma'il Beg Chol who made no secret of his links with the organization as far as the British authorities were concerned. Isma'il was not only corresponding regularly with Khoybun members in Syria but was receiving propaganda from the branch of the society established in Sulaymaniyyah. In 1929 he even got in touch with the Yazidi Mir of Shaikhan trying to win his support on behalf of the Syrian based nationalist movement (45). In October 1930 a Khoybun

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43. Secr memo Air HQ Baghdad to SSO Mosul, 11-6-1927, n.I/462/12, AIR 23/389; secr memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell, 13-6-1927, n.I.M./08.H, AIR 23/389; secr memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell, 30-6-1927, n.I.M./08.H, AIR 23/389; secr memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell, 30-7-1927, n.I.M./08.H, AIR 23/389.

44. In 1929 the Central Committee of the organization was transferred to Beirut. Besides Hasakah, there existed other sections of the Khoybun in Damascus and Aleppo. 'Activité Kurde' report from Sûreté Generale Qamishli to Sûreté General Aleppo, 17-9-1931, n.777/S.G.K., p.12, BEY 571.

45. Letter Isma'il Beg Chol to Adm Mosul, 17-2-1930, incl in secr memo from SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell Hinaidi, 26-2-1930, ref. I/M/42/B, AIR 23/416. Isma'il also sent material he was receiving from the Khoybun to the British authorities in Mosul incl in memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell Hinaidi, 3-2-1930, n.I/M/42, AIR 23/416; transl letter from Karam Ali Badr Khan and Khalil Rami Badr Khan to Isma'il, Beirut 5-4-1929, AIR

informant reported that Khudaida Hamu Shiru, Shaikh Khidr Qiran, Shaikh Khalaf Haskan, Husayn Barajas and two 'Ali-Ilahi chiefs of Balad were permanent members of the society in Sinjar . However, no practical support was ever given by the Yazidi aghas to the activities of the organization which in Sinjar were directed towards involving the Yazidi tribesmen in disruptive activities across the Turkish-Iraqi border in support of the anti-government actions of those Kurdish tribes still living in eastern Turkey (46).

As far as the influence of specifically Iraqi Kurdish nationalist activities among the Sinjari Yazidis is concerned, there is no evidence of the involvement of any of the Yazidi leaders of Sinjar either in the movement led by Shaikh Mahmud or in those moderate Kurdish nationalist circles which supported the creation of a semi-autonomous Kurdish province within Iraq (47). In 1929 six Kurdish deputies submitted a memorial to the Prime Minister in which

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23/157. Iraqi branches of the Khoybun were established in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyyah, Zakhu and Rawanduz. Isma'il's contacts with the Khoybun continued until the end of the British mandate. In 1932 he received from Kamaran 'Ali Badr Khan, brother of Djeladet chairman of the society, the draft of a petition to be addressed by the Yazidis of Sinjar to the League of Nations in connection to the border dispute. In the document the Sinjari Yazidis asked the frontier commission to be included in Syria on the grounds that the Iraqi government opposed the national and economical development of the Kurds. However, the petition was never presented to the League. 'Translation of a Turkish madhbatta', 22-4-1932, encl to conf suppl D to note n.18, 1-5-1932, incl in docs Syro-Iraqi border commission by British and Iraqi assessors, EDM Box IV file 1.

46. Secr corr SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell Hinaidi, 29-10-1930, ref. I/M/33, AIR 23/418.

47. The development of the Kurdish National Movement in Iraq between 1928 and 1932 with particular emphasis of the influence of the Syrian Khoybun and the activities of various Kurdish associations of moderate views is well documented in files AIR 23/413-414-415-418-419.

they put forward a project for the formation of a Kurdish liwa which did not include the Sinjar gadha (48). However the ideas of the Iraqi Kurdish nationalists concerning Sinjar and its Kurdish Yazidi inhabitants were rather confused. Two months later a new Kurdish society was set up in Baghdad called 'The Society for the Independence of Kurdistan'; in one of its proclamations to the Kurdish population it stated explicitly that Kurdistan would include the Yazidi communities of Sinjar . A similarly vague appeal calling for the inclusion of the Sinjaris in a semi-autonomous Kurdish state within the kingdom of Iraq also appears in a 1931 proclamation, probably written by Shaikh Ahmad of Barzan (49).

As early as 1919 Major Noel, the British envoy to Shaikh Mahmud, then regarded as the future king of Kurdistan, wrote:

'the question of its future ruler (i.e. of Kurdistan) is here to be solved... Mahmud has clearly no following in Northern Kurdistan ... It is said that the Yazidis of Sinjar might adhere to his cause: but they are backward and ignorant and their vote could not be expected to have much influence in a ballot in Kurdistan...' (50).

The support the Sinjari Yazidis could have held out to

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48. This Kurdish liwa would have included the gadhas of Aqrah, Dohuk, Zibar, Amadiyyah and Zakhu. The project was apparently promoted by Isma'il Bey Rowanduzi, Kurdish deputy for the Arbil district. Conf corr SSO Arbil to Air Staff intell Baghdad, 31-3-1929, n.IA/27/11, AIR 23/414; typewritten report, n.d., 4 pp. incl in AIR 23/416. See also Sluglett, op.cit., pp.186-187.

49. Transl of Kurdish proclamation incl in memo from SSO Arbil to Air Staff intell Hinaidi, 8-5-1929, n.1 A/10, AIR 23/415; transl Shaikh Barzan's appeal incl in BEY 570.

50. Driver, op.cit., p.101.

a specifically Iraqi Kurdish national movement was not of great significance for the local nationalist activists and it was perhaps for this reason that the nationalists had not shown much interest in the political attitude of the Yazidi aghas of the Mountain since Noel's time. First, Sinjar was quite isolated from the Kurdish provinces and therefore its inclusion in an autonomous Kurdish liwa would have been very difficult to implement. Secondly sophisticated ideas of political decentralization and administrative autonomy like those circulating predominantly in Iraq at that time were mainly the product of the urban Kurdish intelligentsia and attracted relatively little support from illiterate tribesmen. To be effective a pan-Kurdish message among the Yazidi tribes would have had to have adapted itself to more local interests. Furthermore it could not appeal to Islam as one of the sources of communal identity, as had happened in the case of pan-Kurdish propaganda promoted by various Naqshbandi and Qadiri shaikhs (51).

In a sense the activities of the Khoybun society responded more sensitively to this, primarily because the organization employed tribal leaders, including Yazidis, as its emissaries in Sinjar, chiefs who had often entertained relations with the Yazidis before becoming involved in the movement or at least whose reputation was well established among the Sinjari leadership. The activities of the Khoybun

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51. The most illuminating examples are provided by Shaikh 'Ubaydallah of Nehri (d. 1883) and Shaikh Sa'id of Palu (d.1925) both Naqshabandis who led two major Kurdish rebellions against the Ottoman and Turkish government. The overtones of the two uprisings were undoubtedly 'pan-Kurdish'. Olson op.cit., pp.1-25; 91-127.

chiefs in Sinjar were also coordinated with those of the Franco-Syrian authorities who were supporting them, as well as encouraging the settlement of Kurds in the Syrian Jazirah. This was a possibility which some Sinjari tribesmen began to consider when they realized that the British would soon leave the country and that Sinjar would come under a purely Muslim administration.

### V.3 - THE JADDALAH LAND DISPUTE

After the British occupation of the Mountain the southern village of Jaddalah located in the lands traditionally occupied by the Qiran tribe became the permanent settlement of a number of groups of Fuqara' tribesmen led by Khudaida, one of the sons of Hamu Shiru.

At the end of the Ottoman period the village was inhabited by members of the Arab Muslim tribe of the Khawatina who had begun to migrate to Sinjar in the early 1880's. The Khawatina were originally settled in the Arab village of Khatuniyyah located on the north-western corner of Sinjar in Bedouin territory, and had started to penetrate into the Mountain following the permanent settlement in Jaddalah of one of their tribal leaders, Juwair, who was in charge of some Yazidi flocks in the neighbourhood of the village. In approximately the same period other Khawatina tribesmen occupied the neighbouring Yazidi settlement of Wardiyyah half of whose population at the beginning of the



1930's was still Khawatina, the rest being mostly Qirani Yazidis (52).

In the forty years preceding the arrival of the British those Khawatina who had settled in Sinjar obtained from the Turks the title deeds for almost all the arable lands of Jaddalah, whose former Yazidi cultivators had exploited without no official recognition from the Turkish government. This was facilitated by the fact that, as has been pointed out above, very few Yazidi tribesmen in Sinjar had registered the lands they cultivated in their own names. In the course of time land holdings in Jaddalah became very fragmented partly because the land was divided among the heirs of the original Muslim tapu owners and partly because some of it was acquired by Muslim notables residing in Balad or in Mosul (53).

At the beginning of the Great War a substantial number of Muslim cultivators still settled in Khatuniyyah who were frightened by the possible repercussions of the military operations in the northern Jazirah plains joined their fellow tribesmen in the Yazidi Mountain, thus increasing the Muslim population of both Jaddalah and Wardiyyah. When the British arrived in 1919 Colonel Leachman, the first Political Officer of Mosul, gave the village of Jaddalah to Hamu Shiru as a reward for the support he had given against the Turks and

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52. Secr memo SSO Baghdad to Air Staff intell, 16-4-1926, n.D/21, AIR 23/148; memo Air HQ Baghdad to Br HC, 16-3-1927, ref. n.I/10/1, p.1, AIR 23/160. See also p.46.

53. Secr memo SSO Baghdad to Air Staff intell, 23-3-1927, I/Bd/21, p.2, AIR 23/160.

also in order to secure the loyalty of the most powerful tribe of Sinjar to the newly established British administration. The Khawatina tribesmen were then forced to leave their lands: some of them went back to the tribe's headquarters in Khatuniyyah while others were temporarily resettled in neighbouring villages where they lived alongside with the local Yazidi population (54). At this point the rich village of Jaddalah, plentifully irrigated by the Jaddalah river and with extended cultivation of wheat, barley and cotton, started becoming one of the strongholds of the Fuqara' tribe as the permanent residence of Khudaida Hamu Shiru who was to take over the leadership of the tribe from his father as well as the office of Paramount of Sinjar in 1933.

The Khawatina tribesmen who had chosen to stay in Sinjar obviously felt much more than those who decided to go back to Khatuniyyah that their eviction from Jaddalah represented a violation of the rights they had acquired over time on the village. In fact they were confronted daily with the presence and at times the arrogance of the Fuqara' tribesmen. Until 1923, however, they did not submit any official claim to the government supposedly because they were scared of the reaction of the Yazidis. In the first years of the British occupation Hamu Shiru was at the apex of his power and influence in Sinjar and the local British authorities, although based in Tall 'Afar, were still in a leading position in matters concerning administration and control of

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54. Secr memo Adm Mosul to SSO Mosul, 8-5-1926, n.C/1874, AIR 23/149.

tribal affairs. It was only after 1926 that 'Askar Khatuni, the chief of the Sinjari Khawatina, started to intensify his efforts to regain his possessions in Jaddalah from the village of Tall Qasab where he was residing temporarily. In his legal action against the government he was certainly encouraged by the gradual establishment of a local Muslim administration and the growing political and economic importance of the Muslim community of Sinjar.

The dispute over the ownership of the village of Jaddalah had not been settled by the time that the British mandate terminated in 1932 but it came to assume great significance in the relations between Muslims and Yazidis living in Sinjar and between the Yazidi community and the Iraqi government (55). In the Mountain it contributed to strengthen a general anti-Muslim feeling among the Yazidi settlers who started to perceive the increasing danger of a process of government-supported Muslim colonization. As far as the Iraqi administration was concerned the Jaddalah affair provided the authorities with a framework within which all future land disputes between Muslims and Yazidis, which became very frequent after the termination of the mandate, would be dealt with. In other words the development of the Jaddalah case, as later events show, constituted the base of

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55. In 1942 tapu certificates for Jaddalah had not yet been issued although there is clear evidence that the village was still occupied by the Fuqara' tribe. Conf corr Pol Adv Kirkuk to Ass Pol Adv Mosul, 22-1-1942, n.C/1/g/749, FO 624/29/325.

the future land policy of the government in Sinjar (56). As it developed in the last years of the British occupation of Iraq the Jaddalah affair also gives an interesting insight into the attitude the local mandatory authorities adopted vis-à-vis their Yazidi protégés at a time when Iraqi officials were progressively taking over the administration of the Mountain.

'Askar started his first court case against Hamu in 1923. The Khawatina leader and other members of his tribe who had lived in Jaddalah before 1919 were awarded the ownership of the village by the Court of First Instance in Sinjar. However, in the same year the Court of Appeal in Baghdad rescinded the previous judgement and asked all claimants to present their claims separately, given the fragmentation of the property in question. This seems to have temporarily stopped the legal action of the Khawatina against Hamu Shiru until the end of 1925 when each tapu owner presented his claim before the judges who confirmed their previous verdict in favour of the Muslims. 'Askar Khatuni was encouraged to reopen the land dispute by the former Muslim qaimmaqam of Sinjar, Ibrahim Beg, with whom he still entertained close relations despite the fact that the latter had been

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56. This policy was based on land exchanges between the claimants. The Yazidis were generally allowed to keep their villages inside Sinjar while the Muslims were given miri lands not occupied by Yazidis. However while tapu deeds were usually issued in favour of Muslim tribesmen the Yazidis had to wait until the land settlement was implemented to gain full ownership of the lands although they were considered to have effective tasarruf on them. In 1940 the village of 'Ayn al-Hasan in south-east Sinjar was registered in the name of 'Askar Khatuni while no tapu deeds were issued for Jaddalah. Secr corr Adv Int to Pol Adv Kirkuk, 19-4-1942, P.S.529, FO 624/29/325.

transferred to the Kut liwa as acting mutasarrif. He gave 'Askar and his tribesmen substantial financial support for the payment of court expenses which the Khawatina could not afford given their relative poverty. In return he probably hoped to receive a share in the land since there was a good chance that 'Askar would win the case (57). As a matter of fact 'Askar and the other claimants were able to produce both the certificates of ownership they had obtained from the Turks and the receipts for the payments of the tithes which the Ottomans had levied on the agricultural produce. For the second time since the dispute was placed before the court Hamu appealed, but in March 1927 the Court of Cassation at Baghdad confirmed the 1923 verdict in favour of 'Askar (58).

Although Jaddalah was legally restored to its former occupants the Fuqara' did not abandon their properties. This did not happen because of the resistance put up by the Yazidis, as it might have been expected, but as a result of the decision of the Iraqi authorities, largely supported by the British, not to enforce the verdict of the court. From a political point of view the victory of the Muslim Khawatina against the Yazidi Fuqara' increased the popularity of the Iraqi administration among the Muslim population of the area by enhancing the image of a new government who fostered the

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57. Secr memo Air HQ Baghdad to Br HC, 18-3-1927, ref.I/10/1, AIR 23/160. Land cases between Muslims and Yazidis were discussed in the local civil court which observed the Ottoman Code of Civil Procedure.

58. Secr memo SSO Baghdad to Air Staff intell, 23-3-1927, I/Bd/21, AIR 23/160.

interests of the Muslim community. However, considerations of realpolitik suggested that a forced evacuation of the Yazidis from Jaddalah represented a real danger both for the internal security of the Mountain, given the reaction which it could have triggered off among the Yazidi population, and for the maintenance of a loyal and compact fighting unit in case of disturbances along the borders with both Turkey and Syria which would not be feasible if large sections of the Yazidi tribes were harbouring grudges against the Iraqi administration (59). The situation was further complicated by the fact that Jaddalah was located west of the 1920 Convention line and therefore still disputed between Iraq and Syria. The support of the Yazidis who constituted the majority of the population of the area was essential to secure the inclusion of the whole Mountain within the future national boundaries of Iraq. It had been well known in political circles since the late 1920's that the border line was going to be delimited by international agreement under the aegis of the League of Nations which would take the wishes of the local population into account. It was mainly for these reasons that the Interior Ministry in Baghdad thought it advisable to maintain the status quo in Jaddalah. This decision was supported by the British authorities who suggested to the mutasarrif of Mosul that in case 'Askar became a source of trouble he could be kept away from Sinjar under the notorious sections 40(d) and 36 of the Tribal,

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59. Conf memo Adm Mosul to Adv Int, 10-5-1927, n.C/1546, AIR 23/160; tels Adm Mosul to Br HC, 25-26/7/1927, n.C/2967, AIR 23/160; memo Air HQ Baghdad to Br HC, 16-3-1927, ref.n.I/10/1, pp.2-3, AIR 23/160.

Civil and Criminal Dispute Regulation which gave local political officers the authority to banish tribal chiefs and entire tribes from their home areas for security reasons (60).

The forced removal of Muslim chiefs and tribesmen from Sinjar, albeit temporary, seemed to be however too harsh a measure, quite apart from its being in clear contradiction of the decision of the court. After 1928 when the complaints of 'Askar became more and more insistent the government started to consider the possibility of compensating him for the loss of Jaddalah. In 1930 the mutasarrif of Mosul proposed to allot 'Askar and his people the Sinjari village of 'Ayn al-Hasan whose lands were owned by the state (miri) in Ottoman times. This proposal was soon dismissed since Khudaida bitterly refused to pay the Khawatina the money which the government had decided to charge him as compensation for the difference in the cash value of the villages of Jaddalah and 'Ayn al-Hasan. This was unacceptable for two reasons: firstly it recognised the Muslims as owners of the lands where Khudaida and his tribesmen were settled and secondly it added further expenses for the Fuqara' who had already spent large sums of money in pursuing the court case. In September of the same year Khudaida even threatened the local authorities that he would order his people to begin a mass migration to Syria (61).

In 1927 the British High Commissioner had already made

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60. Memo Air HQ Baghdad to SSO Mosul, 17-4-1927, ref.I/10/1/2, AIR 23/160.

61. Secr corr SSO Mosul to Adm Mosul, 30-9-1930, ref.I/M/44, AIR 23/158.

clear to the Iraqi government that no British military support would be given in event of disturbances arising from the Jaddalah land dispute. Without the support of RAF airplanes there was little chance of dealing effectively with an armed uprising of the Sinjari tribes. As expressed by a British informant this declaration of intent was made with the express purpose of making the Iraqi Government 'buy out' 'Askar when he came to realize that 'judgement in his favour will not result in his actually obtaining possession' (62).

In the years of the dispute the Fuqara' leadership placed much emphasis on the financial losses of Hamu's family: as early as 1926 Khudaida declared to the British authorities that Hamu Shiru had already spent Rs.8000 for court expenses. It is very likely that Khudaida had overestimated the figure on that occasion in an attempt to have Hamu's subsidy increased since it had been greatly reduced at the end of 1925. However, it is true that the Jaddalah affair caused a great diminution on the monetary resources of the Fuqara' which they had begun to accumulate at the beginning of the Mandate (63).

The dispute over the ownership of the village also set in motion a widespread debate among the Yazidi tribes whose leadership, despite their often difficult relations with the

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62. Secr memo Air HQ Baghdad to SSO Mosul, 17-4-1927, ref I/10/1/2, AIR 23/160. Quote from p.2.

63. Secr corr SSO Baghdad to Air Staff intell, 16-4-1926, D/21, p.2, AIR 23/148. Until December 1925 Hamu received Rs.300 p.m. from the government. Its allowance was subsequently reduced to Rs.240 p.m.. Report SSO Mosul to Air HQ Baghdad, 29-12-1925, n./2067, AIR 23/146.



Fuqara', generally supported Hamu's land claims. In fact all the Yazidis became more aware of the risk involved in not having officially recognised rights to landed property in Sinjar. Thus after 1928 land registration featured prominently on the agenda of the Yazidi leaders who repeatedly made formal requests to the authorities to obtain title deeds for the plot of lands their families had occupied for centuries. At least until 1932, however, as happened in the case of Jaddalah, the Iraqi government did not fulfill Yazidi wishes except in cases where the claimants were able to pay cash for their lands. Tapu deeds were therefore issued only exceptionally when wealthy tribal chiefs were involved in the disputes. This was the case of Shaikh Khalaf al-Haskani who in 1930 had the village of Juhbal, on which he already exercised virtual tasarruf, alienated to him against payment of badl mithl. This also happened to Khudaida Hamu Shiru who purchased the village of Wardiyyah from the government in 1928 (64).

#### V.4 - DISSATISFACTION TOWARDS THE IRAQI ADMINISTRATION

At the beginning of 1931 the tribal leadership of the Sinjari Yazidis showed its growing discontent towards the

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64. Secr memo SSO Mosul to Air HQ, 27-7-1928, n.I/M/10, AIR 23/156; handwritten notes SSO 1 incl in AIR 23/156 n.d (Aug 1928 c.a); corr Adv Int to Br Embassy Baghdad, 19-4-1942, n.538, FO 624/29/325; 'Disposal of government Land by sale on Badl Mithl' incl. in CO 730/135/2.

policies implemented by the Iraqi government in the administration of the Mountain. These complaints were the result of a situation which had started to develop before 1925 and had become more pronounced in the last years of the mandate. By and large the policy was determined by the growing influence of the local non-tribal Muslim community and its allies, especially in the town of Balad, and by the increasing authority and despotic attitude of a number of Iraqi officials posted to the Jabal on a more or less permanent basis.

The British authorities of Mosul were still closely following Sinjari affairs but, especially after 1929, they were no longer in a position of being able to act independently without the assent of their Iraqi counterparts. This was a result of the decree of Naji al-Suwaidi's cabinet in November 1929 according to which reports and correspondence from the British Administrative Inspectors to the High Commissioner had to be scrutinized by the local mutasarrifs. Hence the Yazidis of Sinjar, like other minority groups living in northern Iraq, could no longer put forward their claims directly to the mandatory authorities without any interference on the part of the local Iraqi administration (65).

As clearly expressed by the majority of Yazidi tribal chiefs, one of the major problems was the decreasing authority of the Christians employed by the government in the

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65. 'Decline of British Administrative Authority', memo League of Nations to CO, 21-7-1930, p.14, CO 730/152/3.

administration of the Mountain, who in the previous years had been inclined to foster the interests of the local Yazidi community. There was no question of proposing the appointment of Yazidi officials since no Yazidis with the necessary qualifications and experience were available, primarily because of the strict ban on Yazidi education which had long been sanctioned by religious tradition and scrupulously enforced by the Yazidi religious classes. As the most viable and obvious alternative the Yazidis generally welcomed Christian officials, as it is well documented for the first period of the mandate (66). In 1927 the Muslim qaimmaqam of Sinjar, Ibrahim Beg, was dismissed because he was accused of illegal appropriation of land which belonged to the municipality of Balad. The Muslim ra'is al-baladiyyah Hajj 'Abdullah was also charged with complicity in the affair. The former qaimmaqam Yusuf Rassam was then reappointed in Sinjar and administered the Mountain until March 1929 when another Christian, Sulayman Juwaida who had served as chief of the administration in the Shaikhan gadha, replaced him (67). Since then it had become customary for the local authorities in Mosul to delegate the administration of Sinjar to

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66. See pp.182-183. Only very few Yazidi adults were able to read and write and these were mostly shaikhs belonging to the family of Shaikh al-Hasan and Isma'il Beg Chol who became the main promoter of Yazidi education. Government schools were opened in Sinjar during the mandate. In 1918 Col. Leachman opened a school in Sinjar which was apparently attended by very few Yazidi children, the majority being Christian or Muslim. In March 1920 35 pupils attended the school. E.S.Drower, 'The Peacock Angel in the Spring', JRCAS, 27(1940), pp.402-403; Monthly Report on Tall Afar Division incl. in Monthly Reports of the Political Officers of the Occupied Territories March 1920, IO L/P&S/10/897 C.

67. Secr memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff Baghdad, 12-7-1927, n.I.M./07.E, AIR 23/154; rep SSO Mosul, 18-3-1929, n.I.M./1, AIR 23/157.

officials who had served in the Yazidi district of Shaikhan. The Iraqi government was clearly attempting to promote a joint administration of all the Iraqi Yazidis and to extend the influence of the Yazidi Mir of Shaikhan among the tribal leaders in Sinjar. After 1925 the Mir had increasingly closer relations with the local Muslim officials both in Shaikhan and in Mosul and had become the main instrument of the pro-Muslim policy implemented by the government in the two Yazidi districts of Iraq (68). When Sulayman Juwaida was appointed to Sinjar, a Muslim official, Dawud Effendi al-Yawar who had been qaimmaqam of Basra, was put in charge of the administration of the Shaikhan area for the first time since the British occupation of northern Iraq.

Sulayman Juwaida administered the Yazidi Mountain until 1932 but in 1931, following widespread anti-Christian feeling among the Muslim population of Sinjar, he was transferred to the Shimal as mudir nahiyyah to the great disappointment of Hamu Shiru and his allies. Hamu Shiru was sufficiently provoked to declare that he and his supporters were determined to defend Sulayman's life and position by force of arms (69). The creation of a permanent Christian qaimmaqamate in the Mountain was very strongly advocated not only by the Yazidis but also by the British and the international community as a future guarantee of the rights of its Yazidi inhabitants. In May 1931 the draft proposed by

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68. See pp.263-265.

69. Report on the situation in Sinjar by Yusuf Malek, member of the Assyrian Church, 22-7-1931, p.5, BEY 611.

the chairman of the League of Nations to the Colonial Office suggesting the broad outlines of the declaration which the representative of Iraq should present for Iraqi's admission to the League, which was to make specific mention of the rights of the non-Muslim minorities in northern Iraq (70).

At the end of the 1920's the Yazidis wanted to be represented on the Municipal Council of Balad Sinjar, whose importance as an economic and political point of reference for the inhabitants of the countryside was increasing. The majlis baladiyyah was constituted entirely of Muslims which did not reflect the religious composition of the inhabitants of the town and its neighbourhood since the Yazidis and Christians settled in the town constituted 32,7% of the population (71).

Demands for Yazidi participation in the Council of Balad and for a more substantial Christian presence in the local administration reflected an increasing need for protection from abuses perpetrated by some Muslim officials, magistrates of the local court, members of the police force and the mudir al-mal. In November 1930 all the Yazidi leaders appealed to

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70. Draft incl in corr Gilbert Murray to CO, 21-5-1931, n.G12427, CO 730/162/7.

71. At the beginning of the 1930's the population of Balad Sinjar consisted of 1950 Sunni Muslims, 476 Shia Muslims, 660 Christians and Armenians, 485 Yazidis and 15 Jews. 'Balad Sinjar' supplement B to note 18, 22-4-1932, incl in doc.s Syro-Iraqi border commission by British and Iraqi assessors, EDM Box IV file 1. According to the 1927 Provincial Administration Law non-Muslims were guaranteed participation in the local administration in districts where they represented a considerable share of the population. In 1931 only two Yazidi were serving on a district council in the Mosul liwa, most probably in the Shaikhan qadha. Special Report, pp.280-281.

the majils baladiyyah whose members were obliged to draft a petition to the government protesting against the behaviour of various government employees (72). The Jaddalah land dispute had contributed to strengthen a general mistrust towards the Iraqi judicial system, and in April 1931 this led some tribal leaders of Sinjar to seek the support of the High Commissioner for the establishment of a Yazidi religious court. Although court cases involving Muslims and Yazidis were frequent they were usually heard in the local civil court whose Muslim judge was often accused of prejudice against Yazidi claimants (73). The Yazidis also felt hostile towards towards the local gendarmerie some of whom were held responsible for the attempted murder of the Christian gaimmaqam and the mudir of the Shimal nahiyyah. When several shots were fired at their houses during the night in April 1931 fear and apprehension quickly spread among the local Yazidi and Christian population in Sinjar and the Christian communities of Mosul were alerted (74). Another thorny issue between the Yazidis and the government was the new regulation concerning the estimating and the payment of taxes which provoked widespread dissatisfaction among the rural communities of Sinjar. After 1925 taxation on

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72. Report SSO Mosul, 24-11-1930, I/M/44, AIR 23/159.

73. SSO Mosul to Squadron leader G.Reed, 18-5-1931, FH/DO/26, AIR 23/159. In mandatory Iraq the sharia courts still regulated the administration of the personal status of the Muslims while there were separate religious courts for the Christian and Jews as part of the Spiritual Councils which were modelled on the Ottoman millet system. See Special Report, pp.76-79.

74. Report SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell Hinaidi, 13-4-1931, n.I/M/36, AIR 23/159; extr intell rep n.9, 29-4-1931, CO 730/162/7.

agricultural produce and animals had to be paid in cash whereas previously revenues had been collected in kind following Ottoman practice. Although agricultural output was fairly consistent and Sinjari products were also exported outside the Mountain, cash reserves were very limited since the external trade was controlled by Christian or Muslim intermediaries who usually purchased agricultural produce from the tribesmen in exchange for foodstuffs or commodities not available in Sinjar. In 1925, soon after the new regulations were enforced, the Yazidis of northern Sinjar started to avoid the tax-collectors. In the late 1920's the situation worsened because the method of estimation of the crops gradually changed. The old system of determining the share due to the government by inspecting the crops either in the fields or after the harvest was replaced by a standard assesment of agricultural production calculated on the basis of the extent of the cultivated land and the numbers of ploughs owned by the cultivators. The demands of the government did not take into account the fluctuation in production which could vary greatly from year to year according to climatic and ecological conditions. Moreover, the assesments became increasingly dependent on the local qaimmaqam who tended to overestimate the productivity of the lands to increase the amount of revenue collected in order to gain credit with the government (75). Although the application of the new regulations was gradual and not

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75. Memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell Baghdad, 12-8-1925, n./1870, AIR 23/145; memo about taxation in the Mosul liwa incl in CO/730/162/7.

uniform Hamu Shiru informed the High Commissioner in 1931 that many abuses had already been perpetrated in Sinjar and that the local authorities had often required the payment of revenues in advance from the peasants before the crops were harvested (76).

Although dissatisfaction was almost unanimous, there was as yet no united front against the government embracing all prominent Yazidi tribal leaders. Internal divisions and disagreements still continued along lines similar to those existing before the revolt of Dawud al-Dawud in 1925, especially on the part of the Habbabat chiefs who were long-standing enemies of Hamu Shiru. With the departure of Dawud they had become the leaders of the pro-Muslim Yazidi coalition, anti-Christian and closely linked to the local Muslim community. They maintained this position even after the Mihirkani chief was allowed to go back to Sinjar at the end of 1928.

As early as 1927 Khudaida Hamu Shiru, who was gradually taking his elderly father's place at the head of the Fuqara', accused 'Atu and Matu, the two most prominent Habbabat chiefs, of plotting against Yazidi unity by conspiring with the qaimmaqam Ibrahim Beg and the ra'is baladiyyah Hajj 'Abdullah. Even when the Christian Yusuf Rassam took the place of Ibrahim Beg, the activities of the two 'dissident' Yazidi leaders continued although they were not supported by the newly-appointed qaimmaqam. In 1928 they started a 'policy

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76. Report on the situation in Sinjar by Yusuf Malek, 22-7-1931, p.6, BEY 611.



of terror' against the Sinjari Christians associated with Hamu Shiru and his allies, who still included Shaikh Khalaf Haskani and Shaikh Qidr of the Qiran tribe. This policy was inaugurated by the assassination of a Christian member of the majlis al-idarah, Basil Abrat, a close friend of the Fuqara' chief (77). When Dawud arrived in Sinjar in the same year he began to give his support to 'Atu and Matu. The Mihirkani chief could not regain control of his tribal forces since he was forced by the local authorities to live in Balad closely watched by Shaikh Khalaf who was made responsible for his behaviour. At the end of February 1929 Hadi b. Dawud, one of his sons, attacked Shaikh Khalaf's headquarters in the village of Juhbal. Khalaf immediately asked Hamu Shiru to help him to retaliate against the villages of the raiders. Following the advice of his son Khudaida whose political acumen is emphasized by all contemporary observers, the Fuqara' leader refused to do so precisely in order not to become involved in a dispute which threatened to jeopardize public security in the Mountain and be detrimental to the interests of his tribe. At the end of March the Administrative Inspector and the mutasarrif of Mosul rushed to Sinjar to restore peace between the two parties. They also promised the Yazidi leaders that outstanding claims would be carefully examined by a tribal majlis supervised by a British official. A proposal for the settlement of Dawud outside Sinjar was also discussed, since in the long run his presence

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77. Letter from Khudaida Hamu Shiru to SSO Mosul, 5-7-1927, AIR 23/154; intell report SSO Mosul, 20-8-1928, n.I.M./1, AIR 23/156; intell report SSO Mosul, 6-9-1928, n.I.M./1, AIR 23/156.

in the Mountain was likely to convince Shiru to abandon his conciliatory attitude. The Administrative Inspector insisted on settling Dawud in the Shaikhan gadha on lands belonging to the Yazidi Mir, possibly in the mixed Muslim-Yazidi village of 'Ayn Sifni (78).

In the same month 'Atu and Matu of the Habbabat met the Yazidi Mir hoping to convince him to support them in their struggle against the Fuqara' (79). After this first visit of the Mir to Sinjar the princely family started to become increasingly involved in Sinjari affairs. On the other hand the Sinjari tribal leadership began to play a determining role in a series of events occurring in Shaikhan which threatened the Mirship and the very existence and autonomy of the Yazidi religious establishment, which had acted as a point of reference for centuries for all the Yazidi believers living in the Mountain.

#### V.5 - THE YAZIDI MIR OF SHAIKHAN

The Yazidi mir of Shaikhan was the religious chief of the Yazidi communities of Iraq. As far as his temporal power was concerned there is no clear indication that the political influence of the Emirate extended beyond Shaikhan, north of Mosul, where the mir and his family resided. As becomes clear

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78. Trib Intell SSO Mosul, 10-1-1929, n.n., AIR 23/156; report SSO Mosul, 28-2-1929, n.I.M./1, AIR 23/156; rep SSO Mosul, 19-4-1929, n.I.M./10, AIR 23/157; conf memo Adm Mosul to Adv Int, 30-4-1929, n.S/179, AIR 23/157.

79. Report SSO Mosul, 20-3-1929, n.I.M./1, AIR 23/157.

from the end of the 19th century the Sinjari Yazidis, although recognising the spiritual authority of the Mir, had developed local political structures which had no direct links with the Emirate of Shaikhan. It is true that political power in the Jabal Sinjar had become increasingly identified with religious authority in the second half of the 19th c. However, the local religious classes had not relied on the support of the Emirate to gain political prominence in tribal milieu. Although it is not clear whether the Sinjari community had been under some sort of direct control on the part of the Mir in the past, in the last decades of Ottoman rule the negative impact of the Pan-Islamic policies of the government on the religious establishment of Shaikhan must have accentuated the separation between the two communities.

Under the British mandate the Mir of the Yazidis was Sa'id Beg Chol, who held this office from 1913 to 1944 although his mother Mayan Khatun acted as regent while he was a minor (80). In the Yazidi religious tradition the mir was considered the representative on earth of the main Yazidi deity, Malak Ta'us or the Peacock Angel, and therefore his person was invested with a supernatural halo of sanctity and inviolability. Various beliefs which had wide circulation among the Yazidi commoners associated the mir and his close relatives with Shaikh 'Adi b. Musafir (1075-1162 c.a), the saintly founder of Yazidism, and Yazid b. Mu'awiyah, the

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80. Mir or mira is the Kurdish form of the Arabic amir (ruler) which was also the title given to powerful Kurdish tribal chiefs. The same word was also employed by the Christian Nestorians to designate the saints, bishops and patriarchs of their church in its Syriac form mar. Mar Sham'un was also the name given to the head of the Nestorian church.

Umayyad caliph (680-683) to whom the members of the sect pay particular veneration. Both were considered to be the ancestors of the Yazidi princely family although there is no evidence to substantiate this claim (81).

The Mir's religious authority was widely recognised by all Yazidi believers. However, he was able to exert his political influence only over a restricted group of Yazidi commoners living in Shaikhan with whom he seems to have established feudal relations. Luke remarked in 1925:

'[The Mir's castle in Ba'adri] stands assertively on the top of a small plateau or hill, while the houses of the village, each one surmounted by its stork's nest, crouch obediently at the bottom, some hundred feet below. The relative position of castle and village symbolize not inaccurately the relations which existed between the Mir and his people.' (82).

The Yazidi Emirate was essentially a religious institution in which the mir theoretically had supreme religious authority. However, the modalities of transmission of the mirship would indicate that a mir's election and the preservation of his position was largely dependent on the consensus of a close circle of people belonging to his family who often relied on members of the religious classes. As primogeniture did not always represent the basis of

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81. During the early Abbasid period the mountainous areas of northern Iraq sheltered many supporters of the Umayyad family and consequently there developed a strong pro-Umayyad movement which can explain the semi-divinization of the Caliph Yazid on the part of the followers of Shaikh 'Adi. M.Guidi, 'Origine dei Yazidi e storia religiosa dell'Islam e del dualismo', *RSO*, 13(1931-32), p.266-300.

82. H.C.Luke, *Mosul and its Minorities*, London 1925, p.30.

succession to the Emirate the relatives of the mir decided between the candidature of rival claimants (83). In theory only the mir, when still alive, could select his successor chosen from the most suitable male candidates from his family but in practice the consensus of all the princely family played a determining role. The history of the princely family in the eight generations which preceded the ascension to power of Mir Sa'id Beg bears witness to this. Yazidi mirs seldom died in their beds and internal rivalries often prevented the successors they had designated from taking over after their death (84). In January 1913 a missionary of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian mission, commenting on the death of the Yazidi Mir 'Ali Beg, observed:

'This appears to be the ordinary end for the leaders of these marvellous people ... The latest Mira ['Ali Beg] always slept surrounded by sentries, and any visitor was most carefully scrutinized before he was allowed to be alone with him.'(85).

The long tradition of internal strife and dissent among the relatives of the mir indicates that the mir's

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83. It seems that in the 17th century rights to the mirship, which had belonged to some members of the family of Shaikh Hasan al-Basri, were suddenly transferred to the family of Abu Bakr. The mir then began to be selected from a particular group called Chol whose first representative was Shaikh Muhammad al-Kurdi al-Arbili, a name which suggests non-Shaikhanli origin. When the British arrived the Chol family still ruled the Yazidi community, which they continue to do until the present day.

84. Edmonds gives a fairly detailed account of the internal strife among the Chol family which had continued for centuries. Edmonds, A Pilgrimage to Lalesh, pp.28-30.

85. Quarterly Report of the Assyrian Mission, 90(Jan.1913), p.1190, LPL.

family represented the core of the power structure of the Yazidi religious institution. However it is true that the local religious classes, especially the Shaikhs, played an important political role in the Emirate as they often interfered in the power struggle by granting their support to different factions.

The Ottoman government attempted several times to interfere in the election of the new mir in order to gain control of the political core of the community. The history of the rise to power of Mir Sa'id Beg is a case in point. When his father 'Ali Beg son of Husayn Beg was murdered in mysterious circumstances, probably with the complicity of Sa'id's mother Mayan Khatun, Ali's brother Isma'il Beg Chol put forward his claims to the mirship by maintaining that the new Mir was too young to hold the office. The widow was able to protect the interests of her son by using her influence over the Yazidi commoners among whom she was able to gather widespread support. A large number of Yazidi laymen from both Shaikhan and Sinjar together with prominent members of the religious classes, tribal chiefs, notables and village mukhtars petitioned the Ottoman government in favour of Sa'id Beg. The Ottomans then gave Mayan the custody of the young Mir until he had reached adulthood and threatened Isma'il with expulsion from the Mosul province if he did not give up his claim to the mirship. As a result of this Sa'id became the new Mir of the Yazidis and Isma'il made his way to Jabal

Sinjar where he settled during the mandate (86). However, although the Mir's dependence on the central government grew in strength in the last years of Ottoman rule, this did not mean that the Yazidi communities of Iraq became increasingly under the control of the central administration. In fact the lack of subordinate Yazidi religious institutions outside Shaikhan directly dependent upon the Emirate favoured independent political developments in the periphery of the core of the religious community. The example of the Jabal Sinjar is undoubtedly the most illuminating.

#### V.6 - ECONOMIC RESOURCES OF THE MIR

The Yazidi communities of Iraq assured the continuation of the Emirate by means of economic support. In this sense the Emirate did not differ greatly from the old millets as it was a self-funding religious institution supported by the donations of the believers. However, there was no communal management of the economic resources of the Yazidi Emirate as the mir was the sole administrator of a considerable amount of wealth which derived mainly from the collection of alms from the lay population (87). It is true that the

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86. Letter Yusuf Rassam to Colonel Lyon, 1944 c.a, p.1, EDM Box XIX file 5. A detailed full account of the murder of 'Ali Beg is to be found in Guest, The Yazidis: A Study in Survival, pp.166-168.

87. The following discussion is mainly based on reports of observers who lived among the Yazidis in the 1920's and 1930's. Information provided do not necessarily imply that the situation described is also applicable to earlier periods. Unfortunately very little information on the socio-economic structure of the Yazidi mirship before the arrival of the British

princely bayt al-mal contributed to the upkeep of the two main Yazidi sanctuaries located in the Lalish valley, the tomb of Shaikh 'Adi b. Musafir and that of Shaikh Shams al-Din, but its primary function was to support the family of the mir whose holy status prevented its members from engaging in worldly occupations.

At least until the mid-1940's the Yazidi bayt al-mal was controlled entirely by the mir and there were no clear regulations for the precise share to be allocated to each family group. The autocratic economic power of the mir accounts for much of the opposition from his relatives and it also offered the government an opportunity to interfere in Yazidi affairs by supporting the claims of relatives who had been denied access to their share. It was only after Sa'id Beg's death in 1945 that his son Tahsin stipulated that one third of the income of the bayt al-mal should be distributed among the other princes, one third employed for the upkeep of Shaikh 'Adi and the last third should be left in the hands of his grandmother Mayan Khatun who was acting as regent (88). The case of Isma'il Beg Chol would also confirm that at the beginning of the 20th century there was no custom sanctioning the precise division of the revenues among the close relatives of the mir. On the arrival of the British Isma'il attempted unsuccessfully to get their support to replace Sa'id Beg, as had happened when his brother 'Ali

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has survived. However, it seems that in 1875 the Ottoman government sent a Turkish officer to Ba'adri in order to supervise the financial affairs of the Yazidi Mir. Damluji, op.cit., pp.24-25.

88. Ahmad, op.cit., p.325.



died. The British authorities decided to allot Isma'il a fixed percentage of the princely revenues which he had not received because of his strained relations with the Mir. Between 1919 and 1924 Sa'id was compelled by the British authorities in Mosul to give Ismail and his family Rs.3000 per year which were taken from the collection of alms. This was conceived primarily as a temporary measure and was an attempt to bring about a more conciliatory attitude on the part of Isma'il towards Mir Sa'id and the authorities. Isma'il's long-standing claims to the mirship and the fact that he had decided to take up permanent residence in Sinjar had created a great deal of friction among the Yazidis settled in the Mosul province especially between the Sinjar and Shaikhan groups. Isma'il's allowance had been granted mainly through British support. When the Iraqi authorities started to acquire greater influence in Mosul and to favour Sa'id Beg, Isma'il's subsidy gradually diminished. In 1924 the government ordered the Mir to reduce Isma'il's allowance to Rs.2400 and in 1926 to Rs.1000. In 1931, given the chaotic situation in the financial affairs of the Yazidis, Isma'il's subsidy was stopped altogether (89).

As the mir was considered the representative on earth of the Peacock Angel his power was embodied in the sacred image of Malak Ta'us, a bronze effigy of a peacock of which there were several copies. The Yazidis claimed that these were not

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89. Secr report SSO Mosul to Air Staff Intell Baghdad, 10-4-1926, n.9/b/178, AIR 23/148; secr memo Adm Mosul to SSO Mosul, 8-5-1926, n.C/1874, AIR 23/149; secr report SSO Mosul to Air Staff Intell Hinaidi period ending 14-3-1932, n.5/M/23, AIR 23/159.

idols but symbols which the true spirit of Malak Taus could enter whenever it was called (90). The authority of the mir vis-à-vis the Yazidi believers was legitimized by the possession of these sanajiq (sing. sanjaq, standard), as the bronze images of the peacock were called, and donations to these images constituted his main source of revenue. In fact the sanajiq were regularly exhibited in all the areas inhabited by members of the Yazidi community as far as Russian Caucasus, the most recent Yazidi settlement outside Iraq. The collection of alms for the mir was controlled by some members of a Yazidi religious class, the qawwal (91). In the 1920's there were seven sanajiq in Shaikhan which were kept in the mir's palace at Ba'adri but it seems that only three of them were actually employed in the collection of religious alms. These were the Ta'us 'Bizrab' which toured the Shaikhan district three times a year, the Ta'us 'Anzal', usually brought out twice a year to collect alms in Jabal Sinjar and among the Yazidi tribes of Rashakan, Huwari and Masaki living in the districts of Silafani and Zummar, and a third sanjaq which in theory had to cover all the other Yazidi districts but in practice could only reach Syria and some areas of eastern Turkey (92). The fact

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90. R.H.W Empson, The Cult of the Peacock Angel, London 1928, p.141.

91. The ceremony of the arrival of the qawwals with the sanajiq in the Yazidi villages and the way in which alms were collected is well described in Ahmad, op.cit., pp.233-235.

92. The existence of other sanajiq is reported by various sources. However, it is most likely that seven peacock images had been employed in the past for the collection of the princely revenues given that they were usually associated to the seven shaikhly families. Edmonds, op.cit., p.39; letter Yusuf Rassam to Colonel Lyon, 1944 c.a, p.1, EDM Box XIX, file 5.

that collections could only be carried out in these three areas was probably a result of the restrictions on travel after WWI especially in Turkey and Iran where other Yazidis lived. In fact both the Turkish and Iranian governments closely watched the movement of Kurds across the borders, trying to prevent contacts between the various communities. Each of the other four sanajiq which remained in the mir's headquarters in Ba'adri had been employed in the past in areas like Diyarbakir, Mardin, the Caucasus and Western Iran.

Hence after the arrival of the British the income of the princely bayt al-mal was considerably reduced and in the last years of the British mandate this contributed, as will be explained later, to accentuate the economical dependence of the mir on the (Muslim) Iraqi authorities in Mosul. Sinjar therefore became vital for the mir's treasury and increasingly became its major source of revenues as it was the richest and most populated Yazidi district still toured by the standards (93). Similarly the offerings of the pilgrims who visited the shrines of Shaikh 'Adi and Shaikh Shams al-Din in Lalish, which ranked second in importance as source of income for the family of the mir, decreased during the period under consideration. This was especially the case for the autumn festival, the main Yazidi religious gathering held in the Lalish valley in October in which in theory all pious Yazidis had to participate. After the fall of the

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93. The anthropologist Henry Field states that in 1924 Rs 14,000 were collected from the Mountain. H.Field/J.B.Glubb, The Yezidis, Sulubba and other tribes of Iraq and adjacent regions, Menasha 1943, p.7.

Ottoman Empire attendance at the festival decreased considerably especially on the part of those pilgrims who lived outside Iraq, with a consequent loss of revenues to the princely family.

The Mir farmed out the collection of alms to the highest bidders among the religious classes on a more or less regular basis. In the period under consideration it is not clear whether all the revenues collected by the standards were paid directly into the mir's bayt al-mal. A contemporary informer stated that alms collected by the standard which toured Aleppo supported the Fakhr al-Din family of shaikhs. This could partly explain why the association between the seven standards and the seven families of shaikhs had survived so strongly over time (94). However in the Shaikhan Memorial, a written exposé presented to the British and the Iraqi authorities in 1931 by the chiefs of the Yazidi religious classes which gave broad outlines of the distribution of the alms among the Yazidi clergy, it is explicitly stated that shaykhs 'live on the tithes from their own client disciples' without mentioning any contribution from the revenues collected by the sanajiq (95). Anyway it appears that the mir was in the position of benefitting from the collection of the religious tithes even in cases when they were allotted to a particular family of shaikhs. In fact qawwals could only be appointed by the mir who rented out the rights of exhibiting the standards to the highest

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94. Edmonds, op.cit., p.39.

95. Edmonds, op.cit., p.26.

bidder. Under this arrangement he would receive a lump sum of money in advance in exchange for the preference given to a particular member of the group (96).

Understandably the choice of the qawwals was very important since they were the main link through which the mir maintained and strengthened his religious authority and popularity among those Yazidi communities settled outside Shaikhan. The qawwals not only acted as emissaries for religious purposes contributing to reinforce the cult of the peacock angel but also carried out propaganda in favour of the mir. It seems that since the ascent to power of Mir Sa'id Beg a growing importance had been attached to literacy which later became an essential qualification for having access to the qawwalship. Qawwals infact were one of the few Yazidi religious groups whose membership became progressively less restricted. First given their scarce numbers they were allowed to marry commoners and secondly the recent emphasis placed on literacy determined different criteria of selection based not on kin ties but on an individual's piety and intellectual qualities. However it is true that the son of a qawwal had more chances of receiving an adequate training from his father since there were no special institutions where future qawwals could be instructed (97).

The mir usually farmed out the rights of collection of the alms from the pilgrims at the shrine of Shaikh 'Adi to a faqir belonging to the Ubakr family. The offerings coming

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96. Ahmad, op.cit., p.322-323.

97. Ahmad, op.cit., p.342; Edmonds, op.cit., p.6;35.

from this sanctuary represented the second major source of income for the princely family. The designated faqir assumed the office of mutawalli, which also put him in charge of the upkeep of the shrine. The tenure of this office was very stable since until 1931 it was held for approximately 30 years by Faqir Hasan and then passed on to his elder brother Husayn for a further eight years (98). The last of the three main sources of revenues for the mir was the shrine of Shams al-Din located very close to that of 'Adi in the holy valley of Lalish, and for this the mir received bids from all representatives of the Yazidi priesthood without any particular restriction on class. As an indication of their value the mutawalli of Shaikh 'Adi paid the Mir Sa'id Beg Rs.8000 in 1927 while Rs.5000 came from Shaikh Shams for the right of collecting the contributions and fees of the pilgrims in the same year (99). The Yazidi mir also benefitted from the appointment of the Baba Shaikh, the head of all Yazidi shaikhs who resided in the Shaikhanli village of Esiyan. At the end of the 1920's the Baba Shaikh had to pay Rs.8,000 annually to the Yazidi prince in order to retain his office (100). The mir had also the customary right to inherit the properties of those Yazidis who died without

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98. Edmonds, op.cit., pp.37-38.

99. Edmonds, op.cit., p.38; MacLeod, The Yazidis or 'Devil-Worshippers' of Assyria, p.63.

100. Mac Leod, op.cit., p.50. The Baba Shaikh ranked second in importance in the religious hierarchy after the mir.

legitimate heirs (101). He would also receive the dowry of all orphan girls with no close relatives which could vary from Rs.225 to Rs.450 according to the status and wealth of the bride (102). The mir also possessed some immovable properties in the Shaikhan district: the castle of Ba'adri, his official residence, and some landed estates in the neighbourhood, although these did not seem to provide a major source of revenue in comparison with the income which derived from the sale of the right to collect the direct contributions of the Yazidi faithful.

Under the Ottomans the family of the mir had the customary usufruct of the revenues of the sanctuary of Shaikh 'Adi although the Yazidi shrine never acquired the legal status of waqf and was never registered in the awqaf department either as a Muslim or a Yazidi religious endowment. In 1884 the Ottoman authorities attempted unsuccessfully to transform it into a Muslim waqf after the Ottoman army led by 'Umar Wahbi Pasha had swept into the Lalish valley in 1882, evicting the Yazidi occupants of the two Yazidi shrines of Shaikh 'Adi and Shaikh Shams and replacing them with Muslim priests. It is very likely that the Ottoman efforts were unsuccessful largely because of the fierce resistance put up by the Shaikhanli Yazidis who perceived that if such a 'desecration' of the holy place had

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101. According to a widespread practice inheritance was transmitted only in male line since 'no Yazidi woman, daughter, sister, mother or wife can be an heir'. It seems, however that in Sinjar no such strict rules existed and in some cases special provisions were made for women heirs. Edmonds, op.cit., p.27; Field/Glubb op.cit., p.8. Quote from Field.

102. Ahmad, op.cit., p.326; Field/Glubb, loc.cit..

continued it probably would have led to the final dispersal of their community of which the tomb of 'Adi b. Musafir represented the most powerful symbol. The shrine was finally restored to the Yazidi Mir 'Ali Beg in 1907 although no steps were made by the authorities to regularize the legal position of its customary beneficiaries by the issue of title deeds in the name of the Mir or of the Yazidi community as a whole (103).

In 1926 the Yazidis of Shaikhan attempted to register the shrine and the neighbouring lands in the name of the community, encouraged by the recent visit of the League of Nations commission in charge of delimiting the frontier between Turkey and Iraq, who gave assurances to the Yazidi leaders concerning the future religious freedom of the community. Perhaps the Yazidis were also encouraged to put forward their claims because of their belief that the local British authorities would have seen to it that the dispute should be resolved in their favour (104). In the period of the mandate the revenues of the sanctuary were still considerable although, as already mentioned, less substantial than in the Ottoman period. In 1931 the British authorities estimated that the mutawalli of Shaikh 'Adi collected a sum of Rs.40,000 per year in alms which the Iraqi authorities were increasingly eager to control. This partly explains the

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103. Letter from Isma'il Beg Chol, Hamu Shiru and Qulu Husayn to Hormuzd Rassam, Nov.1930, CO 730/162/7. Longrigg, Iraq 1900 to 1950, pp.58-59.

104. However the Ministry of Awqaf, which was created at the end of 1920, was by then controlled by the Iraqi government and the British representative acted only in an advisory role. Special Report, p.249.



reaction of the government to Yazidi claims on the sanctuary. The Iraqi authorities started to maintain that the creation of a Yazidi waqf was not feasible given that Shaikh 'Adi was a Muslim saint, so that his shrine should cater to the needs of the Muslim community (105). In August 1930 news reached Shaikhan that official proceedings were being started by the government to transform Shaikh 'Adi into a Muslim waqf, but they were stopped because of an immediate protest on the part of prominent members of the community who started to send petitions to Baghdad. Also the Administrative Inspector of Mosul intervened by sending an official complaint to the authorities (106). From then on the Yazidi leaders of Sinjar started to become increasingly concerned with events occurring in Shaikhan, the heartland of the Yazidi religion . The Mir visited Sinjar at the end of August to convince the local Yazidi chiefs to support his application to the government for the registration of the shrine in the name of the community. At approximately the same time some groups of Yazidis from both Shaikhan and Sinjar started to raise complaints against Sa'id Beg accusing him of mismanagement of Yazidi religious funds. For the tribal leaders of Sinjar the Shaikh 'Adi affair represented a good opportunity to come out publicly against the Mir and to put forward a claim for a share in the control of the

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105. Extract intell report n.4, 12-2-1931, ref. d/d, CO 730/162/7; letter by Paulus Fa'iq to Hormuzd Rassam, 5-9-1930 incl memo Rassam to League of Nations, 9-12-1930, CO 730/162/7.

106. Extract intell rep n.4, 12-2-1931, ref.d/d, CO 730/162/7; secr report SSO Mosul to Air Staff Intell, 25-8-1930, I/M/44, AIR 23/158.

Yazidi religious revenues (107).

#### V.7 - PLANS FOR THE CREATION OF A YAZIDI ANTI-MIRATE IN SINJAR

At the beginning of 1930 some lay and religious members of the Yazidi communities of Sinjar and Shaikhan addressed several petitions to the Iraqi authorities of Mosul and to the local British representatives (108). Their complaints focussed on the allegedly immoral conduct of the spiritual head of the community, Sa'id Beg, who was accused of violating the Yazidi religious laws by squandering the money of the faithful for his own personal purposes. He was reported to be a regular frequenter of the brothels of Mosul where he enjoyed the company of beautiful women and was often intoxicated and surrounded by suspicious characters. As Luke remarked in 1925: '... [Sa'id Beg] loves to look upon the wine when is red and, above all, upon the arrack when it is white.' (109). The Mir was also bitterly criticized for having neglected his duties vis-à-vis the sacred buildings of the shrines of Shaikh 'Adi and Shaikh Shams which were reported to be in a general state of decay. These accusations, although perhaps rather excessive, were by no

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107. Secret rep SSO Mosul to Air Staff Intell, 20-8-1930, I/M/44, AIR 23/158.

108. Rep SSO Mosul, 24-8-1931, I/M/10, AIR 23/159.

109. Luke, op.cit., p.131.

means without foundation. His financial situation had indeed become very precarious, as he had contracted heavy debts with Mosulawi Muslims who had lent him considerable amounts of money which he used to spend for his own pleasure. His relations with 'dubious' characters was generally considered by some Yazidis to have been encouraged by the authorities in Mosul who wanted to exploit his weaknesses in order to make him increasingly dependent on government support. Various sources confirm that in the last years of the mandate Sa'id Beg increasingly required the financial and political support of the local Muslim authorities in order to retain his position. His main advisors had become the qaimmaqam of Mosul, the rais al-baladiyyah of Shaikhan, the powerful mukhtar of the village of Bahzani and Yunis 'Abbawi, a Muslim Mosulawi of dubious reputation who was appointed by the Iraqi authorities official representative of the Yazidi community to the government in 1933 (110). Sa'id Beg's pro-governmental inclinations are also clearly confirmed by a document he wrote which was circulating in Sinjar and Shaikhan in October 1930. Its overtones probably reflect the influence that 'some Iraqi nationalists' who were reported to have recently approached the Yazidi Mir, started to exert on the religious chief (111):

'We, the Yazidi Nation, are in a state of quiet enjoyment and

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110. Secr report SSO Mosul, 22-10-1930, I/M/44, AIR 23/159; 'Note sur la question Yezidi' incl in Memo Delegué Adjoint Dair al-Zur to Cousellor Fr HC, 6-12-1933, n.2301, BEY 611.

111. SSO Mosul rep, 29-11-1930, n.n., AIR 23/159.

comfort and receive nothing from the Arab government except justice and therefore we want to remain under Arab protection '(112).

This declaration dealt the final blow to Sa'id Beg's reputation especially in Jabal Sinjar where his obviously pro-Arab and pro-Muslim proclivities had the immediate effect of mobilizing the tribal leadership of the Mountain. A strong anti-Sa'id coalition led by Hamu Shiru began to take shape and gained momentum after some unsuccessful attempts on the part of Sa'id Beg to convince Hamu Shiru and Shaikh Khalaf al-Haskani to support his pro-Muslim inclinations. These attempts continued until January 1931 when the Mir sent Yunus 'Abbawi to Jaddalah to reach some sort of agreement with Khudaida Hamu Shiru. The latter's obstinate refusal to recognise the authority of Sa'id prompted 'Abbawi to rush back to Shaikhan (113).

As early as October 1930 Shaikh Khidr of the Qiran tribe, whose reputation as a man of religion was also well established in Shaikhan, voiced the dissent of 'certain inhabitants of Sinjar and Shaikhan' who complained about Sa'id Beg's pro-Arab policy which was contrary to all the religious laws of the community. The Sinjari leader proposed the dismissal of the Mir and the creation of a committee to take charge of managing the funds of Shaikh 'Adi to include himself, Hamu Shiru, the head of the Yazidi religious class

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112. Text petition incl in SSO Mosul report, 9-11-1930, I/M/44, AIR 23/159.

113. Rep.s SSO Mosul, 31-10-1930 and 1-1-1931, I/M/44 and I/M/10, AIR 23/159.

of the kotchaks residing in Bahzani and three respected shaikhs from 'Ayn Sifni. In December of the same year all the leading Sinjari tribal leaders officially asked the authorities in Mosul to remove Sa'id Beg in a petition signed by Hamu Shiru, his son Khudaida, Shaikh Khidr Qirani, Shaikh Khalaf al-Haskani and by 'Atu and Matu, the Habbabat chiefs who had decided to join the anti-Sa'id faction after the attempt to gain the support of the Mir against the Fuqara' leader in late 1929 (114).

As had generally happened during the Ottoman period, the Mir had very little influence on the activities of the tribal leaders of Sinjar in the 1920's and it is mainly for this reason that Hamu Shiru's prestige was not affected by developments in Shaikhan. The Fuqara' leader could champion the Yazidi cause and present himself as the custodian of the religious and economic interests of the community, and at the same time protect and consolidate his position in the Mountain. First the existence of a puppet mir in Shaikhan manipulated by the Iraqi authorities would have eventually allowed the government to extend its influence in Sinjar with obviously negative repercussions for its Yazidi and Christian population on whose support Hamu's prestige and authority largely relied. Many abuses perpetrated by the Muslims in Sinjar had already been reported by the local population whose need of protection was manifested very clearly during the debate for the creation of a Yazidi waqf in Shaikh 'Adi.

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114. Secret rep SSO Mosul, 22-10-1930, I/M/44, AIR 23/159; secr rep SSO Mosul, 10-12-1930, I/M/44, AIR 23/159.

On that occasion the tribal leaders of Sinjar speaking on behalf of the population advocated the creation of an enlarged Yazidi fund to include all arable land located in the Mountain.

Although some Yazidi cultivators had already acquired legal title deeds, the inclusion of lands cultivated by Yazidi tribesmen in a permanent religious endowment controlled by the community would have provided the peasants with further reassurances of their future rights of exploitation of the land (115). Secondly the removal of Sa'id Beg could have also become very beneficial on purely economic grounds if Hamu Shiru could assure himself a share of the alms controlled by the Mir. Hamu's monetary reserves had started to decrease considerably after the 1925 revolt of Dawud al-Dawud when the government reduced his monthly allowance from Rs.300 to Rs.240 in order to punish him for what it alleged to be his inadequate assistance against the Mihirkani chief. In 1926 his subsidy was stopped twice, in the months of January and May. In the following years the authorities continued to withhold his monthly salary from time to time in effort to convince him to implement a 'friendlier' policy towards the Muslim authorities. His allowance was stopped once again in January and February 1931 in an attempt to convince him to support Sa'id Beg (116).

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115. Letter Sinjari Yazidis to Adm Mosul, 7-7-1931 incl in secr rep SSO Mosul to Air HQ Hinaidi, 13-7-1931, I/M/36, AIR 23/159.

116. Secr rep SSO Mosul to Air Staff Intell Baghdad, 10-4-1926, 9/b/178, AIR 23/148; rep SSO Mosul, 3-2-1931, n.I/M/36, AIR 23/159; rep SSO Mosul, 1-1-1931, n.I/M/10, AIR 23/159.

The efforts of the Iraqi government to convince the Sinjari aghas not to challenge the authority of the acting Mir were unsuccessful. In June 1931 Hamu Shiru presented to the British authorities of Mosul his own candidate for the mirship, Husayn Beg, a member of the princely family of Shaikhan and a cousin of the Mir. A series of new candidates, all close relatives of Sa'id Beg had already been considered by the Sinjari leaders who realized that only a member of the princely family would be acceptable to the commoners and the religious classes (117). Over the following months support for Husayn Beg grew in the Mountain and propaganda in favour of the new Yazidi Mir also began affecting the Shaikhan area where the great majority of the priesthood resided. Members of the religious classes started to side with one or the other of the two factions: earlier in May Barakat b. Shaikh Nasir who had begun to support the Husayn Beg party was murdered by a group of qawwals still loyal to the Mir (118). However, it seems that the leaders of the religious classes as well as large sections of the Yazidi priesthood were still on Sa'id's side. This can be explained by the fact that the appointment of a new Mir while Sa'id Beg was still alive contravened Yazidi religious law which sanctioned that:

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117. Husayn Beg was apparently held in great esteem in Sinjar for his piety and excellent moral character. In 1925 he was reported as exerting a certain amount of power in the Mir household but it seems that in later years he had become passive and reclusive. Guest, op.cit., p.187. Rep SSO Mosul to Air Staff Intell Hinaidi, 1-5-1931, I/M/36, AIR 23/159.

118. Secr corr SSO Mosul to Air Staff Intell Hinaidi, 20-5-1931, I/M/36, AIR 23/159.

'[the Mir] is free and independent and no one has the right to oppose or to negotiate with him. He cannot be dismissed or removed except by natural death or assassination (which God forbid)... This authority belongs to him since the foundation of this religion until the present day ...' (119).

The introduction of new rules which would regulate the election of the mir was indeed very dangerous for the position of the members of the Yazidi religious classes since it could initiate a wider process of reform in the Yazidi religious institution. Any change in the customary practices which had monitored relations of power in the religious establishment for centuries were in fact likely to damage the position of the men of religion whose privileges and rights had been practically unquestioned. In contrast by the beginning of 1932 all the Yazidi leaders of Sinjar from both of lay and religious backgrounds, including 'Atu and Matu of the Habbabat and the Mihirkani leadership, recognised Husayn as the custodian of the religious interests of the Sinjari community. They decided that the future Mir who was still living in the Shaikhan district, was to reside in Sinjar in the village of Jaddalah which would become the new seat of

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119. Sometime in 1931, following the movement to remove the Mir which was already in place in Sinjar, the heads of the religious classes drafted a document known as the Shaikhan Memorial which they presented to the British and Iraqi authorities in Mosul. They spelled out the customary rules for the appointment of the mir and the most prominent members of the religious classes, for the allotment of alms and described in detail some traditional observances concerning marriage and inheritance. From the description given in the Shaikhan Memorial the Yazidi religious establishment appears to be rigidly organized and almost entirely controlled by the mir. It is interesting to notice that only Edmonds gives much credence to the document which does not appear in archival records. Edmonds, op.cit., pp. 25-27. Quote from section A p.25.



the Yazidi mirate (120).

As is evident the changes advocated by the Sinjari Yazidis were indeed very radical and if implemented without a general consensus on the part of the most prominent tribal leaders and men of religion could have had far reaching repercussions on the internal stability of the community. For an equitable solution of the dispute some sort of external arbitration was required, especially on the thorny issue of the destiny of Sa'id Beg. In December 1930 the British Administrative Inspector in Mosul, perhaps bearing in mind the requests made by Shaikh Qidr two months before, ventilated the idea of electing a committee to take charge of the management of Yazidi religious revenues. At that time the issue of the administration of Shaikh 'Adi funds still represented the main cause of complaint among the Sinjari Yazidis who had repeatedly asked Mir Sa'id to produce accounts of the tithes collected at the shrine since his election. When it became clear that the Sinjari leaders were in favour of the election of a new Mir, the British High Commissioner after several consultations with members of the pro-Sa'id and pro-Husayn parties proposed to the government in May 1932 the creation of a Yazidi religious council which would include representatives of Sinjar and Shaikhan on the grounds that this would enable the community to reach an agreement both on the election of their religious leader and

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120. Rep SSO Mosul, 4-1-1932, I/M/10, AIR 23/159; extr from SSO rep, 18-1-1932, I/M/23, AIR 23/159.

the control of their financial affairs (121). In a couple of months the supporters of the creation of the 'anti-mirate' of Sinjar led by Hamu Shiru presented a plan to the British authorities which formulated the structure and aims of the future Yazidi religious body. Its main task was to redefine the corpus of religious laws which regulated the modalities for the appointment appointment and dismissal of the Yazidi mir as well as sorting out a new procedure for the administration of the religious revenues. Once formed the council had to put up recommendations regarding the appointment of its future members and to draw up a provisional charter detailing their additional duties (122). The Iraqi government seemed to favour the formation of an independent religious body whose control was entirely in the hands of lay and religious members of the Yazidi community. In October the Iraqi Minister of Interior informed Sa'id Beg who was paying a short visit to Baghdad that the government was ready to fulfill Yazidi aspirations for the achievement of a tighter and more egalitarian control of their religious affairs although he alluded to the

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121. Extract conf report on the administration of the Mosul liwa for Dec 1930, AIR 23/159; rep SSO Mosul to Squadron leader G. Reed, 18-5-1931, FH/DO/26, AIR 23/159.

122. Rep SSO Mosul to Air HQ Hinaidi, 29-8-1931, I/M/36, AIR 23/159. It is quite evident that the existence of Communal Spiritual Councils which gave the Christian and Jewish communities of Iraq the right of managing the personal status of their members as well as ample autonomy in the administration of pious foundations and charitable bequests provided the framework within which the British authorities and the Sinjari leaders advocated the creation of a Yazidi religious council. For the development of the Spiritual Councils during the period of the mandate see: Special Report, pp.281-282; K.Attar, The Minorities of Iraq during the Period of the Mandate 1920-1932, unpubl. Ph.D. dissertation Columbia University, 1967 pp.83-88.

investigation in process on the conduct of the Mir (123). By November the two factions had officially submitted their proposals to Baghdad which clearly showed the government that Sa'id Beg and his following, who were mostly Shaikhanlis, had no intention of accepting the proposed religious council and were firmly opposed to any fundamental change in the community. By January 1932 it became evident that the Iraqi authorities were deliberately avoiding any definite commitment while simultaneously approaching Husayn Beg, to whom they promised their support on condition that he did not take up permanent residence in Sinjar (124).

#### V.8 - THE PEACOCK TOUR

After the dispute over the possession of the Sinjar standard, which jeopardized public security in the Mountain throughout 1931, the authorities in Mosul realized that they had somehow to come to terms with the movement which was challenging the authority of Sa'id Beg. In the spring of 1931 a number of Shaikhanlis petitioned the government to stop the yearly tour of the Shaikhan standard in their villages on the grounds that they refused to pay their religious alms to a Mir who was no longer acting in

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123. Rep SSO Mosul to Air HQ Hinaidi, 12-10-1931, I/M/36, AIR 23/159.

124. Report SSO Mosul for period ending 9-11-1931, AIR 23/159.

accordance with the 'true spirit of Malak Ta'us'. At approximately the same time in Sinjar Hamu Shiru and Shaikh Khidr treathened to seize the Sinjar sanjaq, which the Mir was going to send to the Mountain shortly, in retaliation against the government's refusal to remove Sa'id Beg (125). Although the local authorities issued orders to stop the Shaikhan tour the standard reached the village of Bahzani on 17 April where the Mir himself supervised the collection of the alms. The Yazidi villagers temporarily put aside their complaints against Sa'id most probably because the arrival of the sacred image of Ta'us in the Shaikhan district coincided with the celebration of the Sarisal festival which was of special religious significance for the believers (126). The planned tour of the peacock in Sinjar created far more concern in Mosul; the Iraqi authorities summoned the Sinjari chiefs in June to work out an arrangement which would allow the qawwals to carry out their duties regularly. After much debate Hamu Shiru promised not to hinder the collection provided that it was supervised by six qawwals, three of whom were chosen from his supporters. Under these conditions the tour started at the beginning of July but after a few days the standard had to be brought back to Mosul since the population refused to pay alms to the qawwals. The presence of an Iraqi official in

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125. Rep SSO Mosul, 9-3-1931, I/M/10, AIR 23/159; rep SSO Mosul to AIR intell Hinaidi, 20-4-1931, I/M/36, AIR 23/159.

126. Handwritten report from local informant to Air intell Hinaidi, n.d., AIR 23/159. The Sarisal festival celebrated the beginning of the Yazidi new year, see G.Furlani, 'Le Feste dei Yazidi', Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, 45(1938), pp.49-84.

charge of registering the collections (which, according to the latest instruction from the mutasarriif had to be held in trust by the local treasury) seems to have been the main cause of the resistance put up by the Yazidi villagers; and the peacock remained at the government headquarters for several months (127). In Sinjar the resentment of the tribal chiefs and the population several times threatened to degenerate into armed confrontation with local government officials while British efforts to convince the government to give immediate instructions for the formation of the Yazidi religious council intensified (128). In December 1931, after Hamu Shiru and Shaikh Qidr had sent a petition to the League on behalf of the population of Sinjar demanding to be placed under French administration, the government handed over the peacock to the Fuqara' chief who delayed two months in handing it in to Husayn's deputy in Sinjar, his brother Saydu. This clearly shows that Hamu Shiru did not yet trust his designated Mir who was still living in Shaikhan, and feared that once in possession of the sacred image, Husayn would be forced to surrender it to his cousin Sa'id Beg. However by February 1932 Saydu's possession of the peacock legitimized Husayn's authority vis-à-vis the believers of Sinjar who proclaimed him their new Mir (129).

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127. Rep SSO Mosul to Air HQ Hinaidi, 11-8-1931, I/M/36, AIR 23/159; rep SSO Mosul to Air HQ, 13-7-1931, I/M/36, AIR 23/159.

128. Rep SSO Mosul, 24-8-1931, I/M/10, AIR 23/159.

129. Annual Report 1932, p.34, FO 371/16922 E 2831; extr intell rep SSO Mosul, 1-2-1932, I/M/23, AIR 23/159; extr SSO Mosul rep, 18-1-1932, I/M/23, AIR 23/159; extr from SSO Mosul rep n.4 period ending 15-2-1932, AIR 23/159.

The government's recognition of Husyan as custodian of the religious interests of the Yazidis of Sinjar had a double advantage. On one hand it had the immediate effect of restoring order in the Mountain and in the longer term Husayn might be persuaded to render material assistance to the administration. On the other it convinced those leaders who had addressed the petition to the League to repudiate their 'disloyal' intentions towards the government, particularly in view of the visit of the frontier commission which was expected to tour Sinjar between March and May 1932. For the same reason the authorities convinced Hamu Shiru in March to postpone the first yearly tour of the peacock, as they were determined to avoid any embarrassing demonstrations on the part of Sa'id's supporters (130).

Husayn Beg was not allowed to reside in Sinjar and by the beginning of the summer 1932 relations with the Sinjari leaders deteriorated. Three other rival claimants to the mirship appeared in Shaikhan, each of them trying to seek the support of the government. However, the weak position of Sa'id Beg and his close links with the authorities allowed him to retain office after the termination of the mandate in October 1932 (131). The death of Hamu Shiru in 1933 weakened the position of the Fuqara' although his capable son Khudaida was recognised by the Iraqi government as paramount shaikh of Sinjar. Isma'il Beg Chol also died in 1933; he had continued to claim his right to the mirship in the course of

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130. SSO Mosul to Air intell Hinaidi, 21-2-1932, I/M/31, AIR 23/159.

131. Annual Report 1932, p.34, FO 371/16922 E 2831.

the development of the pro-Husyan movement. The Sinjari leaders' attempts to get access to a share of political and economic control in the household of the Mir of Shaikhan were however finally crushed when the Muslim Yunis 'Abbawi was appointed by Baghdad as representative of the Yazidis in 1933, in charge of dealing on behalf of the community with the government.

#### V.9 - 1931-1932: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Between 1931 and 1932 the election of a new Mir in Sinjar who was not recognised by an agreement legitimized by Yazidi religious law would have established a local centre of religious power likely to create a dangerous fissure in the community. However, the Iraqi government did not take any steps which might led to the dismissal of the Mir of Shaikhan although for some time it allowed the chiefs of Sinjar to hope for the permanent establishment of the mirship in the Mountain. The British proposal for the formation of a religious council constituted entirely of Yazidis was not accepted mainly on the grounds that it would strengthen the autonomist aspirations of the Sinjari leaders and eventually encourage the whole community, as well as other heterodox groups whose religious status was not recognised, to press for the institution of local Spiritual Councils along the lines of the those already functioning for the Christians and Jews. In the last months of the mandate it was essential for

the government to avoid any friction with the ethnic and religious minorities settled on Iraqi soil since the League of Nations continued to demand guarantees for their future welfare as one of the main conditions for Iraq's admission to the League of Nations which was planned for October 1932.

The League had also become directly involved in the affairs of the Yazidi community as final arbitrator for the solution of the dispute over the delimitation of the border in western Sinjar. In October 1931, after having attempted to reach an agreement on the Syro-Iraqi boundary line on several occasions, the British and French governments referred the matter to the League which appointed a frontier commission to be sent to the areas under dispute in February 1932 (132). Between 21 April and 11 May the party surveyed the Jabal Sinjar which still represented one of the controversial parts of the border area, making thorough surveys of the geography, economy and society of the Yazidi Mountain.

Since 1929 both the mandatory administrations had started to support their claims to the Western portion of Sinjar through correspondence exchanged between the two High Commissioners in Beirut and Baghdad or during informal negotiations carried out before October 1931. The French government presented the area as economically dependent on Syria, generally stressing the close socio-economic links

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132. 'Projet de requête comune au Conseil de la SDN au sujet de la fixation de la frontière entre la Syrie et l'Irak', 31-10-1931, BEY 1528. This Anglo-French agreement was discussed in the 65th session of the League Council in December 1931 (C.880.1931.VI). For the formation of the Frontier Commission see C.260.1932.



existing between the Yazidi tribes settled in the west and the Bedouin tribes which were under Syrian administration (mainly Jawalah Tayy, Jubur and Shammar al-Zur) and emphasized the lack of common political organization among the Yazidi tribes who lived in the Mountain. As far as their relations with the Mir of Shaikhan were concerned contradictory remarks about the authority he exercised over the population of Sinjar were addressed both to the League and to the British authorities in Iraq. However they all tended to strengthen the idea of an independent Sinjar which could be easily split between two different state administrations (133). In contrast, the British mandatory authorities had every interest in pressing for the indivisibility of Sinjar, mainly on the grounds that it had long represented a compact socio-economic unit whose division by an international frontier would involve serious interference in in the lives of the local population, especially from a religious point of view (134). In reply to this the French remarked that many Yazidi communities were already settled in Syria and outside Iraq and this had never represented a major hindrance in the maintainance of their religious identity or to the fulfillment of their religious duties.

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133. 'Note sur le Sindjar et la région du Bec du Canard', 2-11-1927, BEY 308; 'Le Sindjar, 14-8-1929, Service des Renseignements da la Région de l'Euphrate, n.3.340/DZ, pp.4-5, BEY 1529; 'Etude sur le Djebel Sindjar', 1932 c.a, BEY 1516; note n.14 incl in doc.s Syro-Iraqi border commission by French assessors, 2-5-1932, BEY 1528; proceedings of 2nd session Anglo-British conference July 1930, 17-7-1930, MAE 521.

134. Memo British Embassy Paris to Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, 19-9-1928, MAE 608; British memo to League, 27-2-1932, E 807/15/9, pp.6-8.

The events which occurred in Sinjar between 1931 and 1932 obviously tended to favour French claims since they were a clear expression of the separatist attitude of the population who were not only challenging the authority of the Mir of Shaikhan but also making clear demonstrations against the Iraqi government. At the beginning of 1932 the Iraqi authorities realized that in order to keep the western portion of Sinjar in Iraq, whose military and strategic importance was beyond doubt, they had to show the League that they intended to fulfill the aspirations of the local Yazidi population. Yet at the same time they could not support the election of Husayn Beg to the mirship and his settlement in Sinjar since it would have presented his authority as merely local. Hence it could be used on the part of the government as an argument in favour of the indivisibility of the Yazidi community. It is in this context that the shifting attitude of the Iraqi authorities vis-à-vis Husayn has to be viewed, although at times it contradicted all the previous interventions of the government in Sinjar which had tended to strengthen the links of the local population with Shaikhan and weaken the power and authority of the majority of the local Yazidi chiefs.

The report of the Frontier Commission was presented to the Council in October 1932 in the same session that the admission of Iraq to the League was discussed (135). The measures taken by the government in Sinjar had had the

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135. Report of the Commission entrusted by the Council with the study of the Frontier between Syria and Iraq, C.578.M.275.1932.VI. It was discussed in the 68th session, C/68 session/P.V.4.(I) 3-10-1932.

desired effect, since the tribal chiefs, mukhtars and tribesmen interviewed by the assessors by and large expressed their desire to remain under Iraqi administration. The recommendations of the frontier commission in favour of the inclusion of western Sinjar in Iraq were accepted by the Council although a special recommendation for the inclusion of the Jabal Jaribah in Syria was not taken into consideration. However, although the wishes of the local population were taken into account, Jabal Sinjar was incorporated in Iraq mainly as part of a territorial exchange which was negotiated before the presentation of the Franco-British commission report in Geneva. In fact both Albu Kamal, the entire basin of the Khabur and the Karatchok Dagh were included in Syria.

## CHAPTER VI

# CHRISTIAN/YAZIDI RELATIONS IN NORTHERN IRAQ

## VI.1 - THE YAZIDI ENCLAVE OF SHAIKHAN: HISTORICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC OUTLINES

The Yazidi population of Iraq included several communities settled north of Mosul in the districts of Shaikhan, Zakhu and Dohuk. The majority of the Yazidis living outside Sinjar were concentrated in Shaikhan which had been administrated from Mosul since the Ottoman occupation of the area in the 16th century. During the period of the mandate the predominantly Yazidi district of Shaikhan was divided into Shaikhan and al-Qush nahiyyahs. The socio-economic organization of the Shaikhanli Yazidis shared a number of important features with the group settled in the other Yazidi enclave of Jabal Sinjar. Both communities lived concentrated in rural areas organized in villages whose inhabitants were mainly agriculturalists. However, there were some significant differences which had contributed to distinguish the development of the two groups over time and which also affected their relations with the central authorities and their neighbours. First, the Shaikhanli Yazidis lived in a political and ecological 'transition' zone located between the mountainous belt of Kurdistan and the plains surrounding Mosul. As a result of this the area had been easily accessible in the past both to the Ottoman walis who usually exercised effective control over the people inhabiting the plain and to the strong, tribally organized and often

anarchic Kurdish nomadic confederations who used to spend the summer in the mountains and migrated towards the Mosul plain during the winter months. Secondly, the Yazidi community in Shaikhan was very much exposed to social intercourse with other religious and ethnic groups with whom the Yazidi peasantry usually shared their lands. In fact the religious and racial composition of the population of Shaikhan gadha was mixed since it also included significant numbers of Christians and of Muslim Kurds, besides a relatively small group of Jews (1).

At least since the 8th century A.D. Shaikhan like Jabal Sinjar had been an important centre of Christian settlement. The lands lying to the east of the Gomel river, which cut across the district from north to south, were in fact part of the western section of the old Nestorian diocese of Marga (Chaldean name for prayer) which stretched as far as the Great Zab. West of the Gomel, Shaikhan depended on the diocese of Bu Nuhadra which included the area lying between the Gomel and the eastern bank of the Tigris. In some ecclesiastical chronicles the village of 'Ayn Sifni and its neighbourhood, which also included the valley of Lalish with the sanctuaries of Shaikh 'Adi and Shams al-Din, were

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1. The earliest official statistics concerning population of Shaikhan gadha are provided by the 1947 census (1363 Muslim, 8143 Yazidis, 2403 Christians and 163 Jews). Ihsa' al-sukkan li sanah 1947, Wizarah al-Shu'un al-Ijtima'iyah, Baghdad 1954. In the case of the Yazidis these figures are partly confirmed by a British survey carried out in the early 1920's according to which there existed in Shaikhan 1000 bayts of Yazidis, a bayt generally consisting of 7-8 people: Military Report on Mesopotamia (Iraq) Area 9 Central Kurdistan, Air Ministry, 1929, pp.310-311. In the same period the numbers of the Christians might have been slightly higher given the provisional settlement of group of Assyrian tribesmen in the area whose details will be provided in the following section.

referred to as Bet Rustaqa which was geographically located in Bu Nuhadara but administered by the Nestorian bishop of Marga (2). The Yazidi Baba Shaikh who was the highest religious authority of the sect after the Mir and who, after the establishment of the Yazidis in Shaikhan, resided in the area, was also known as Ikhtiyar Marga (the old man of Marga). Moreover the term Mereghe was still employed to define a sacred site in the Lalish valley which included various Yazidi sanctuaries (3).

Historical evidence would suggest that the appearance of the Yazidis in Shaikhan was intimately linked to the birth of Yazidism as a religious movement which was itself closely connected with the presence in the area of the 13th century Muslim Sufi Shaikh 'Adi b. Musafir who lived most of his life in the Lalish valley. Yet, the origins and development of the Yazidi community in the area over the following centuries, and the impact which the new religion had on the Christians are at present still obscure. However, the situation in the 19th and early 20th centuries would suggest that in the course of time the old Christian communities of Shaikhan were able to retain their religious identity unlike in Jabal Sinjar, where the arrival of the Yazidi tribes resulted in the gradual disappearance of Christianity in the Mountain.

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2. J.P.Fiey, Assyrie chrétienne, Beirut 1965-68, 3 vols, vol.1 p.227; vol.2 pp.785-786. Fiey gives a fairly detailed description of the development of Christian settlements and monasteries in western Marga, Bu Nuhadara and Bet Rustaqa before the arrival of Islam in the area. Ibid., vol.1 pp.225 ff.; vol.2 pp.321-755/785-815.

3. Sebri/Wikander 'Un témoignage kurde sur les Yézidis du Djebel Sindjar', pp.112-115.

In the years of the mandate the Christians settled in Shaikhan were mostly Chaldeans since after the end of the 18th century the majority of the Nestorians in the area separated from their old church and joined the Uniate (Catholic) movement of the Chaldeans which gathered many followers among the Christian population of the Mosul plain (4). Only in the two villages of Ba'ashiqah and Bahzani, mainly inhabited by Yazidis belonging to religious classes, were there some Christians who belonged to the western Syrian church. 1517 Yazidis lived in Ba'ashiqah and its neighbourhood together with 258 Muslims and 791 Christians, three fifths of whom were Jacobites, the rest being Syrian Catholics while all the Christian population of Bahzani was Jacobite (5). According to British surveys carried out in 1925 however it seems that mixed Christian/Yazidi settlements were more an exception than a rule and that the Yazidis shared their villages with Christians only in big centres like Ba'ashiqah, Bahzani and 'Ayn Sifni (6).

Both Yazidis and Christians were sedentary

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4. Chevallier, Les montagnards chrétiens du Hakkâri et du Kurdistan septentrional, p.38. Interesting details on the appearance of the Chaldean Church in northern Iraq are provided by the Anglican missionary Athelstan Riley in his Report on the Foundation of the Archbishop's Mission to the Assyrian Church in 1886, London 1891, p.32.

5. Chevallier, op.cit., p.40; Fiey, op.cit., vol.2 pp. 461;468. The Christians settled in northern Iraq and eastern Turkey belonged to churches of Syriac language and tradition. They were divided into eastern Syrians (Nestorians and the Uniate Chaldeans) and western Syrians (Jacobites and the Uniate Syrian Catholics). The Jacobites survived in Shaikhan since only the Nestorians were affected by the Chaldean movement. See Chevallier, op.cit., pp.9-10.

6. In Shaikhan out of 43 villages 23 were entirely Yazidi, 11 Christian, 2 Kurdish and 6 mixed, C.400 m.147.1925.VII, p.34.



agriculturalists who lived organized in village communities. There was a marked socio-economic differentiation among the Shaikhanli Yazidis based on their position vis-à-vis the Yazidi religious establishment whose presence was much more substantial than in Sinjar. The Yazidi men of religion in fact constituted the backbone of the Yazidi society of Shaikhan whose very name (the land of the shaikhs) echoed the high concentration of shaikhs living in the area. All classes of the Yazidi priesthood were represented and, with the sole exception of the kochaks, they generally did not engage in worldly occupations, although in the period of the mandate some of them were reported to own flocks usually shepherded by Yazidi commoners (7). This meant that only those Shaikhanli Yazidis who had no religious status were economically productive while all the members of the priesthood lived on alms and donations paid by the commoners in exchange for the performance of religious services. Contemporary observers generally agree that in the period under consideration the Yazidi peasantry was still largely exploited by the religious classes. In 1928 MacLeod stated that the average Yazidi commoner spent one fourth of his income in donations to the standards, to the shrines, and to the members of the religious classes with whom he was affiliated. This was indeed considerable given that the Yazidi peasantry were also fiscal subjects of the Iraqi government (8).

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7. MacLeod, op.cit., p.61.

8. Ibid., p.62.

There is little information on the legal relationship of the Yazidi peasants to the land they cultivated. At the beginning of the mandate it seems that the lands surrounding Ba'adri were the personal property of the Mir Sa'id Beg who was still the most powerful landlord in Shaikhan. In other parts of the district the Yazidi peasants started to claim title deeds for large portion of lands which they had lost as a result of former Ottoman persecutions. In some villages located in southern Shaikhan, closer to the Mosul plain, landed property was very fragmented probably as a result of both inheritance and the arbitrary issue of tapu deeds on the part of the Ottoman authorities in the past. It also often resulted that large plot of lands were legally owned by Mosulawi Muslims. In 1920 the British authorities advocated a quick land settlement in these villages, envisaging the kind of disputes which might arise among the local population in the future (9).

Tribal affiliations did not have the political meaning that they assumed among the Yazidis of Sinjar, in the sense that there was no group of local leaders chosen on the basis of tribal descent. However, all the Yazidi inhabitants of Shaikhan still regarded themselves as members of different groups whose names recalled a past extra-Shaikhanli tribal origin. Membership in a particular group had little socio-economic meaning outside the context of the territorial unit of the village although members of the same group were

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9. Mosul Division Report by Col. Leachman incl in Monthly Reports of Political Officers in the Baghdad vilayat Dec. 1918, L/P&S/10/620; Iraq Administration Reports 1919, pp.18-19;22, CO 696/2.

usually scattered in different villages (10). The Shaikhanli Yazidis were peaceful people very much exposed to the tyranny of the nomads, although there is no evidence that in the past they had assumed a rayat status, as it had happened to other sedentary communities in Kurdistan who had become subject to the authority of Kurdish feudal landlords from time to time. In Shaikhan the focus of common identity of the Yazidi population, which in the case of the inhabitants of Sinjar was provided mainly by a tradition of militant resistance in defence of their exclusive position in the Mountain, centred primarily around religious loyalties which were cemented by the presence of a rigidly organized local religious establishment whose main points of reference were the residence of the mir and the shrines. At the same time the survival of the Yazidi religion in the area very much depended on the support the religious classes were able to obtain from the commoners. By and large it seems that the lay and religious society of Shaikhan had succeeded in keeping this interaction very much alive given that, especially in the 19th century, the community was able to resist various Ottoman attempts at Islamisation despite the fact that the pashas' armies had practically free access to the area. As vividly although somewhat romantically portrayed in 1928 by MacLeod:

'The vicissitudes of their history and genius of their creed

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10. The main groups were the Rubanishti, the Qa'idi, the Khalti, the Hakari, the Dumili and the Khatari. See Edmonds Pilgrimage, pp.85-87 for the distribution of the groups in the various villages.

have therefore made the laity dependent on their religious officials and the hierarchy correspondingly dependent on the laity. Each must support the faith and thus protect each other' (11).

## VI.2 - KURDS AND ASSYRIANS IN THE AREAS OF YAZIDI SETTLEMENT EAST OF THE TIGRIS

During the mandate approximately 2000 Yazidis were settled in the gadhas of Zakhu and Dohuk, two of the five Kurdish districts administered as part of the province of Mosul. Sunni Kurds constituted the majority of the population of these two areas which were also inhabited by some 8000 Christians and 7000 Assyrian refugees (12). It seems that before 1832, when K r Muhammad Beg, chief of the Kurdish tribe of Soran, slaughtered thousands of Yazidis settled north of Mosul who had refused to recognise his authority, the Yazidi communities of Iraq were settled over a much wider area. Yazidi settlements stretched between the Great Zab and the Khabur rivers, until the area known as Silafani located between Zakhu and Faysh Khabur in the north-western corner of Iraq. In the 1930's there were only five Yazidi villages left in Silafani mainly inhabited by members of the two Yazidi tribes of Huwari and Masaki some of whose tribesmen were also

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11. MacLeod, op.cit., p.61.

12. Racial Statistics for Kurdish areas according to the latest figures (February 1930), CO 730/157/5.

settled in Shaikhan (13). There were also two nomadic Yazidi tribes, the Shaikhan and the Huwayriyyah: the Shaikhan moved around the Lalish valley and the Huwayriyyah were nomads and worked mainly as shepherds for the powerful Kurdish confederation of the Slubbi and therefore generally followed the seasonal migration of the tribe from their winter quarters located in the north to their summer pastures near Zakhu. Especially in the case of the latter contacts with the Yazidi sedentary population were very sporadic and limited to certain months of the year (14).

The ethnographic composition of the population in Shaikhan varied from time to time according to the seasonal migrations of a number of Kurdish nomadic tribes coming from the northern areas usually located in Turkish territory. Members of three sections of the Arthushi confederation, a powerful tribal group from which the Ottomans used to recruit soldiers for the 56th Hamidiyyah regiment, grazed their flocks in Shaikhan during the winter months. These were the Artushi (a section named after the entire tribe) whose tribesmen settled in the al-Qush nahiyyah, the Mahmadan and the Zaidak, a group of nomadic tent dwellers some of whom occasionally also engaged in agriculture. It was especially in the case of the Zaidak that the Yazidi came to be

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13. Layard, op.cit., vol.1 p.276; Damluji, op.cit., pp.20-21; Edmonds, op.cit., p.37.

14. In the early 1920's the Huwayriyyah included 300 families and were divided in four sections: Isayah, Shahabka, Daluka, Tahalaki. Military Report on Iraq (Area 9), pp.252-253. M.Sykes, 'The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire', Journal of the Anthropological Institute, 38(1908), p.459.

particularly affected by the presence of Kurdish nomads. Their chief Mami Agha was a powerful feudal landlord who lived for most of the year in the Shaikhanli village of Shakfatiyyah near Ba'adri, the headquarters of the Yazidi mir. Mami Agha owned several villages in the neighbourhood inhabited mainly by Yazidis and during the summer when the majority of the Zaidak drifted back to their quarters located in the northern mountains, he would leave some of his tribesmen behind to cultivate his land and to police his properties. In the twenties it seems that the presence of Mami Agha and his tribesmen created a great deal of friction between the Kurdish chief and Sa'id Beg especially over rights on certain pastures in the area surrounding Ba'adri. After 1925 the Shaikhanli Yazidis provided shelter for groups of Kurdish tribesmen previously living in eastern Turkey who had sided with Shaikh Sa'id of Palu in the course of his rebellion against the government like the chief of a small section of the Buthan tribe, Yaqub Shahin. Tribesmen belonging to the Kurdish confederations of the Harki and Surchi would also occasionally encroach on Yazidi lands although their presence was generally less intrusive than that of the Zaidak (15).

From 1921 the districts inhabited by the Yazidis north of Mosul started to be affected by the migration of Assyrian tribesmen the majority of whom came from the Hakkari region, a mountainous district in eastern Turkey which was

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15. Military Report on Iraq (Area 9), pp.127;178-180;220;328;335. C.400 m.147 1925.VII, p.35.

provisionally administered by the Turkish authorities after the end of WWI (16). At the beginning of 1915, when the Russian army occupied the area, the Assyrian tribes openly defied the Turks by supporting the invaders. When the Russians were compelled to retreat from the Hakkari mountains after a couple of months the Assyrians, fearing the retaliation of the Turkish army and the local Kurdish tribes, poured into north western Persia and joined their co-religionists who were settled in the plain surrounding Urmia. Later on in 1917 both the Urmian and Hakkari Assyrians moved to southern Iraq seeking the protection of Great Britain and were provisionally settled in a refugee camp near Ba'qubah, some 50 km. north of Baghdad. Between 1920 and 1924 a number of unsuccessful attempts were made to repatriate the Hakkari tribesmen to their original homes in Turkey. As a result of these efforts groups of Assyrians were temporarily settled in various districts of the Mosul vilayat under British control. By the autumn 1921 the first two schemes for repatriation devised by Agha Petrus Elow, an Assyrian belonging to the Baz tribe, with the assistance of the British authorities had

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16. The Hakkari Assyrians were Nestorian Christians who lived organized in tribes and recognised the religious authority of a Patriarch called Mar Sham'un who after 1915 followed his people in their diaspora outside Turkey and Iran. They were divided in independent tribes (Upper Tiyari, Lower Tiyari, Thkuma, Baz, Jilu and Diz) and a number of rayah groups who lived scattered in the Hakkari region, in the Urmia plain and among the Kurdish tribes. Their members generally engaged in agriculture and were submitted to the Assyrian independent tribes or to the authority of local Kurdish aghas. A comprehensive account of the religious, socio-economic and political organization of the Assyrians tribes in the Hakkari region before the 1915 diaspora is to be found in Chevallier, op.cit., pp.90-260 and in P.Rondot, 'Origine et caractère ancestraux du peuplement assyrien en Haute-Djézireh syrienne; esquisse d'une étude de la vie tribale' BEO, 41-42(1989-1990), pp.75-104.

largely failed and resulted in the settlement of 7,450 Assyrians in the gadhas of Dohuk, Zakhu and Aqrah (17). After the advance of the Turkish army in 1924 on a number of Hakkari villages which had been temporarily resettled by members of the Upper Tiyari, Lower Tiyari and Thkuma sections, 200 people were temporarily settled in the Shaikhan district which by November 1928 had become the permanent residence of 500 Assyrians mainly belonging to the Baz, Jilu and Thkuma tribes. In the neighbouring villages of Ba'adri and Kifri the newcomers were settled on lands belonging to the government: in Basifni they lived on lands owned by the Mir Sa'id Beg, while in the village of Baristak they occupied the landed estates of Yunis 'Abbawi, the Muslim protégé of the Yazidi Mir (18).

### VI.3 - ASSYRO-CHALDEAN PLANS FOR AUTONOMY AND THE IRAQI YAZIDIS

The first Assyrian refugees arrived in Shaikhan in 1924; there is no evidence that any significant migration of Assyrians affected the Jabal Sinjar during the mandate. However, after 1919 the Iraqi Yazidis became part of two major Assyrian plans which aimed to create an autonomous

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17. Military Report on Iraq (Area 9), pp.196-198.

18. Conf memo Adm Mosul to Adv Int, 7-10-1924, n.C/416, AIR 23/539; secr memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell, 28-11-1928, n.I/M/40, AIR 23/290. Military Report on Iraq (Area 9), p.199. See also 'Sketch map of villages in which Assyrians were settled 1920-1933' in R.S.Stafford, The Tragedy of the Assyrians, London 1935.



Christian enclave in northern Iraq.

In 1919 the American-Assyrian delegation at the Versailles Peace Conference proposed the creation of an independent Assyro-Chaldean state north of Mosul under European protection which would constitute a new homeland for all the dispersed members of the Assyrian nation. As can be assumed from the phrasing of the proposal, the term Assyrian included not only the former Nestorian inhabitants of Hakkari and Urmia (i.e. those normally considered 'Assyrians') but also Christians of other denominations who lived in northern Iraq (Chaldeans, Jacobites and Syrian Orthodox) and, rather surprisingly, the Maronites (a branch of the western Syrian church not represented in Iraq) and the Yazidis of Sinjar (19). In 1919 the destiny of those Assyrian tribesmen who had recently arrived in Iraq was still very uncertain and in the general confusion their leaders, who had followed the tribes in their diaspora, had not yet been able to formulate precise demands to the British authorities, let alone establish contacts with the local population. However, the proposal of the Assyro-American delegation in Versailles is a clear indication of the growing importance that European

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19. Attar, The Minorities of Iraq, pp.130-131. Much confusion exists on the usage of the term Assyrian. For the purposes of this enquiry suffice to say that since the end of the 19th century it was currently employed to denote the old Christian Church of the East (the Nestorians) as opposed to its uniate branch of the Chaldeans. After the end of WWI some secular-minded Assyrians, as the examples provided in this section illustrate, started to employ it to indicate their nation in a much wider sense, that is to include all the ethnic group of Semitic origin which was represented historically by all the eastern Christians. See J. Joseph, The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbours, Princeton 1961, pp.3-5;13-18 and J.F.Coakley, The Church of the East and the Church of England, Oxford 1992, pp.4-6.

protection was assuming in the Assyrian pursuit of some sort of national independence. Moreover it gives evidence of the awareness shared by some Assyrian leaders that the support of the non-Muslim inhabitants of northern Iraq as a whole would be particularly vital for any the future establishment of an Assyrian homeland in the area.

In the following years the outlines of the 1919 plan served as a base for two subsequent schemes devised by the Assyrian military chief Agha Petrus Elow and an Anglicised Mosulawi Chaldean, Hormuzd Rassam son of the late Hormuzd Rassam who in the 1840's had accompanied Henry Layard during his excavations in northern Iraq. During the mandate they both engaged themselves in active propaganda for the creation of a Assyrian Christian enclave in the Mosul province which would also include all its indigenous Christian and Yazidi populations. Both Christians and Yazidis, the latter constituting the second largest non-Muslim minority in the province, responded to Assyrian propaganda although, in the case of the Yazidis, only the leaders of Sinjar seem to have pledged themselves to the Assyrian cause (20).

After a first settlement scheme in the 'Amadiyyah area proposed by Colonel Leachman had failed in 1919, the Assyrian leader Agha Petros Elow, a commander of a Levy battalion who flamboyantly claimed to have guided the Assyrian nation during the war, unsuccessfully attempted to repatriate some

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20. According to an unofficial census carried out by the Iraqi authorities between 1922 and 1924 in the Mosul province lived 54,934 Christians, 20,257 Yazidis and 3,579 Jews while the Muslim population which included Kurds, Turks and Arabs numbered 217,194. C.400.m.147 1925.VII, p.31.

sections of Assyrian tribesmen to Hakkari in 1921 (21). It was mainly the failure of these plans (resulting in the provisional settlement of a significant number of Assyrian tribesmen and their leaders in the Kurdish and Christian districts of the north) that served as a trigger for the circulation of pro-Assyrian propoganda among the non-Muslim communities living in the area under British control. In 1922 maps of a future Assyrian state were already circulating in Mosul whose boundaries included the region between Urmia Lake and Siirt under Turkish control where the Hakkari Mountains were located as well as the area administered by the British mandatory authorities (22). In 1923, in a letter sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Agha Petrus gave to the British government a more acceptable proposal for what concerned the territorial extension of his autonomous Assyrian entity. He envisaged the creation of a Christian enclave limited to a region entirely under Iraqi control which roughly corresponded to the Mosul qadha on the grounds of the ethnic, cultural and religious unity of its inhabitants and excluded the predominantly Kurdish areas of Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah (23).

Generally speaking this unity was quite evident in the case of the sedentary Christians (Jacobites, Chaldeans and Syrian Catholics) who had lived together for centuries,

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21. See p.295-296 and Attar, op.cit., p.129.

22. Despatch SSO Mosul to Divisional Adv Mosul, 9-3-1922, n.527, AIR 23/449.

23. Despatch Agha Petrus to Assistant under Secretary of State, 15-2-1923, n.n., CO 730/56.

sharing their villages and lands. As far as the Assyrians and the Yazidis were concerned Agha Petros' statements were largely based on his personal assumptions (24).

The Assyrians were not socially and economically integrated with the local communities in their provisional settlements in northern Iraq. First, they were usually given lands or villages which were owned by the government and had been abandoned by their former inhabitants and this very much contributed to strengthen their separate identity and to retain their tribal organization in which strong emphasis was placed on blood relations and the development of military skills. Secondly, their recent employment in the Levies had started to create friction with some sections of the local population who increasingly perceived them as a privileged group, the local protégés of the British par excellence (25). Moreover, apart from doctrinal affinities with the other Christian groups, the Assyrian Church constituted an

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24. It is interesting to notice that Agha Petros substantiated his claims of ethnic unity of the populations mainly on the grounds that they were all of 'Assyrian' origin, Assyrian being referred to the Assyrian Empire which flourished in northern Iraq in the first millennium B.C.. The myth of a direct link between the non-Muslim population of northern Iraq and the old Assyrians was somehow a Western creation since it was first put forward by the British archeologist Henry Layard in the 1840's and later by some Anglican Missionaries, especially Rev. Wigram. Layard included also the Yazidis of Sinjar among the supposed descendants of the old Assyrians mainly on the basis of their physical resemblance with the men heads portrayed in the Assyrian reliefs. However, it was generally common belief among the Chaldean priesthood that the Yazidis were of 'Assyro-Chaldean' race. Joseph, op.cit., pp.13-18; 'Les Yezidis' by Père J.Tfindij, p.1, BEY 569.

25. It was after the Cairo Conference in 1921 that the British government decided to recruit the Assyrians in the Iraqi Levies. By April 1922 50 % of the Levies were constituted by Assyrians the majority of whom were concentrated in the Mosul vilayat, north of the Great Zab. 'Iraqi Levies' report by Inspector General, 19-4-1922, CO 730/36.

independent body whose proselytising activities, after the Chaldean schism at the end of the 18th century, had never extended to the Christian communities settled in the Mosul province, who were firmly under the control of the Chaldean and Jacobite and Roman Catholic Churches (26).

The Sinjari and Shaikhanli Yazidis had a long tradition of friendly relations with the sedentary Christian communities living in the area and, in the case of Shaikhan, the local Yazidis had recently started to welcome Assyrian refugees on their lands. It is true that the Yazidi faith had assimilated many beliefs and practices from Christian communities but the Yazidis of Iraq had retained a markedly separate linguistic and religious identity. They were Kurdish speakers and their society was structured upon a series of religious loyalties which found its main source of communal identity in a rigidly organized religious establishment (27). Nonetheless the prospect of being included in a future Christian state attracted widespread support in Sinjar given the long standing resentment felt against the Muslims while in Shaikhan any pro-Christian demonstration was halted by the Mir who probably feared the reaction of the local Muslim authorities. In 1923 Hamu Shiru and Isma'il Beg started corresponding with the emissaries of Agha Petros who notified the High Commissioner in March that he had received

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26. See Coakley, op.cit., pp.11-18.

27. It seems that members of the Yazidi priesthood of Shaikhan had occasional contacts with the Nestorian Patriarch and that some Nestorian priests resided permanently in Shaikh 'Adi. Quarterly Report of the Assyrian Mission, July 1910, vol.80, p.1031, LPL.

several petitions from the Yazidis who urged him 'to bring about this autonomy as soon as possible' (28).

In the following years Agha Petros lost much credit vis-à-vis the British authorities and large sections of the people he claimed to represent. Firstly he refused to recognise the authority of the Nestorian Patriarch Ishai, the Mar Sham'um XXI, on the grounds that he was a leader of a 'poor denomination' (i.e. given Agha Petros' claim to represent all the Christians of northern Iraq). This lost him the support of a substantial number of Assyrians who still recognised the Patriarch as their religious and temporal leader. Secondly, he quickly became a 'suspicious and unreliable character' in the eyes of the mandatory administration given his frequent contacts with Turkish, and especially French, agents (29). In fact there is clear evidence that in 1921 the British government was very concerned about the growing influence of France in Mosul, especially of the French Catholic missionaries. In this context Agha Petros' alleged contacts with some missionaries provoked much apprehension in the Foreign Office which made several attempts in this period to persuade the Church of England to extend its missionary activities, which had been mainly confined to the areas of former settlement of the Nestorians, to the Mosul plain (30). Although Agha Petros

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28. Conf corr Agha Petros to HC, 10-3-1923, CO 730/56.

29. Conf corr Agha Petros to CO, 5-2-1925, CO 730/91.

30. Evidence of this is to be found in vol.21 (1921-22) Archbishop of Canterbury's Papers, Assyrian Mission 1879-1931, LPL. The Assyrian mission which was based in Urmia and was closed at the beginning of WWI was the

was still politically active in favour of the non-Muslim minorities in 1925 he had suddenly disappeared from Iraq in 1923. He was in fact compelled to leave the country by the British authorities and settled permanently in France.

#### VI.4 - 1930-1932: LAST ATTEMPTS OF THE NON-MUSLIM RESCUE COMMITTEE

In 1925 the definitive fixing of the Turco-Iraqi border under the aegis of the League of Nations had ended the dispute over the Mosul vilayat but had not yet solved the problems related to the settlement of the Assyrian refugees living in Iraq. First, the Hakkari mountains were included in Turkey and the Kemalist government did not allow the return of the Assyrians in their former homeland. Secondly, the creation of an Assyrian enclave in the mountainous region of Barwari Bala, which was inhabited by a number of Assyrian tribes before the First World War and was included in Iraq after 1925, encountered equally strong opposition on the part of the Turkish government. The Turks considered any major concentration of Assyrians along the borders between Turkey and Iraq as a British move to revive old antagonisms between the Assyrians and themselves. Thirdly, the Iraqi government and the British authorities for various reasons were not able

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only Anglican establishment in the area and its influence west of Urmia never extended beyond the Nestorian settlement of Hakkari. By contrast, the French Dominican mission of Mosul was very powerful among the Christians of the plain.

to implement a coherent and definitive settlement scheme. Among these was the increasing difficulty of dealing with the various groups of Assyrians given the marked political implications the Assyrian question had assumed after 1922 when a growing number of Assyrian tribesmen had started being employed in the Levies, the development of a very strong anti-Iraqi Assyrian nationalism which to a great extent was nurtured by the close relations the Assyrians had established with the mandatory power and, last but not least, an evident lack of funds for the implementation of a major settlement scheme given that the Iraqi government was facing increasing financial difficulties especially towards the end of the mandate (31).

However after the signature of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930 plans for the creation of a Christian-Yazidi autonomous entity, which Agha Petros had widely publicized in the years 1922-1923, started to be revived. The Treaty, which foreshadowed the termination of the mandate and defined future relations between Great Britain and Iraq, did not

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31. Of the 40,000 Assyrians living in Iraq in 1926, 20,000 came from areas located in Turkish territory. Between 1927 and 1928 a British officer was put in charge of devising a settlement plan subsidized by the Iraqi government. According to unofficial statistics by 1930 only 1,500 Assyrians remained to be settled mainly belonging to the Tiyari tribes. However, this figure is not very reliable given that it did not include all those Assyrians who were settled on land privately owned whose position was still very precarious. In late 1932 in the Mosul and Arbil liwas 2,200 families of Assyrians were settled in 118 villages of which 80 were property of local landowners. In August 1932 the last attempt on the part of the British authorities to settle the Assyrians in the Baradost qadha failed mainly because of the inability of the government to exert an effective control in the area which was mainly inhabited by Kurds. 'Note on Assyrian settlements', 1930 c.a, incl in FO 371/14524 E 5375; statistics concerning the Assyrians incl in FO 371/16037 E 6857. Sluglett, Britain in Iraq, pp.213-214.



contain any special provisions for safeguarding the rights of minorities. Given that the presence of Great Britain was generally perceived by the minorities as essential for their welfare, it is understandable how after 1930 some groups, especially Assyrians and Kurds, intensified their efforts to obtain constitutional guarantees from the local government. In this context the League of Nations through the Permanent Mandate Commission became a crucial arbitrator between the minorities and the Iraqi government while the influence of Great Britain in minority affairs gradually started to decrease (32).

After 1930 the Assyrian movement in Iraq did not constitute a united front mainly because some of the leaders of the community were still divided by factionalism and personal rivalries. However, two main trends can be pinpointed: a more moderate, pro-Iraqi movement led by Bishop Juwalaha who represented the Barwari-Bala native group of Assyrians and was ready to come to terms with the future sovereignty of a Muslim state and a more intransigent attitude fostered by the family of the Patriarch who favoured the idea of Assyrian independence, either in or outside Iraq (33).

It is in the context of the latter that in 1930 the Assyrian Patriarch and his powerful aunt Surma Khanum started to support the activities of two British citizens, Hormuzd

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32. For the role played by the League and the Permanent Mandate Commission between 1930 and 1932 see Attar, op.cit., pp.195-197.

33. Joseph, op.cit., p.198; Attar, op.cit., p.154.

Rassam, an Anglicized Chaldean whose grandfather had been the assistant of the archaeologist Henry Layard during his expeditions in northern Iraq and Matthew Cope, an Englishman who had arrived in Iraq at the beginning of 1930 for a commercial venture (34). In July 1930 Hormuzd Rassam constituted The Iraq Minorities (non-Moslem) Rescue Committee based in London with the main purpose of raising funds for the relief of the Assyrians in northern Iraq whose precarious conditions, widely publicized in Great Britain, had a strong impact on British public opinion. The Committee, which Rassam chaired, also claimed to work also on behalf of the other Christian communities settled in the area, as well as of the Yazidis, the Jews and those Kurds who shared their villages with Christians and Yazidis in the Mosul plain . However, it soon became evident that the activities of the Committee were not simply humanitarian. In fact the charter of the organization in September 1930 included an additional section which pledged its members to gather as much information as possible about the abuses perpetrated by the local authorities against the non-Muslim minorities with a view to presenting evidence of their oppression to the League of Nations (35). Moreover in the same month Rassam officially asked the Permanent Mandate Commission to foster the creation of a non-Muslim 'free-state' in northern Iraq

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34. Intelligence on Hormuzd Rassam is incl in CO 730/152/2; secr intell on Cope (Special reserve, Royal Marines) Air 23/455; Note on Capt Cope, Air Staff Intell Hinaidi to Air Ministry, 31-10-1930, n.n., AIR 23/455.

35. Appeal issued by the Iraq Minorities (non-Moslem) Rescue Committee (Sept. 1930 c.a) incl in FO 371/14524 E 5375.

whose administration and internal security would be supervised by the League (36).

In April 1930, while Rassam was still in London, Matthew Cope started to work in northern Iraq, especially among the Christians and the Yazidis, in order to collect evidence of the oppressive treatment meted out to them by the Iraqi authorities and the local Muslims. At the same time he approached some local leaders in order to make them cooperate in gathering intelligence on the situation of their people and to obtain their formal support for Rassam's activities in London. It is interesting to note that early in 1931 Cope had also established contacts with the Kurdish mutasarraf of Sulaymaniyyah, Tawfiq Wahbi, in order to discuss a future agreement on the recognition of Assyrian rights in the Mosul area which was also claimed by the Kurds (37).

A wealthy Mosulawi Christian merchant, 'Abd al-Karim Qaraqullah who was apparently one of the main financial supporters of the Committee in Iraq, and 'Abdallah Fa'iq Paulus, a Christian lawyer whose activities were concentrated in the Mosul qadha, played a central role in providing Cope with vital information on the Yazidis. It was Qaraqullah who approached the leaders of the Sinjari Yazidis on behalf of the Rescue Committee while Paulus provided Cope with evidence of several abuses perpetrated by the local administration

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36. Annex VI to petition by Rassam to Chairman Permanent Mandate Commission, 23-9-1930, CO 730/152/2.

37. Secr intell on Cope (Special reserve-Royal Marines), AIR 23/455; extr report Major Wilkins (C.I.D) on his conversation with Cope, 30-9-1930, AIR 23/455; extr Police Intell, 14-3-1931, n.11, AIR 23/455.

against Yazidis resident in Shaikhan. Paulus was one of the most popular lawyers among Yazidis and Christians in the Mosul gadha since he usually defended them in court cases which involved Muslims. In the period under consideration he had already received many petitions from Yazidi peasants which he sent to the Iraqi and British authorities in Mosul hoping that they would take effective measures to prevent further abuses (38).

As early as September 1930 the results of Cope's propaganda were already tangible since he was able to obtain a number of petitions signed by prominent members of the Assyrian, Chaldean, Armenian, Jewish and Yazidi communities. These documents which generally gave support to the activities of the Rescue Committee and reported the bad conditions of the non-Muslims in northern Iraq were submitted to the British mandatory authorities and subsequently to the Permanent Mandate Commission. At the same time Mar Sham'un drew up a document which praised Rassam personal credentials and reliability (39).

A petition from Sinjar, most probably largely inspired by Qaraqullah, was among the documentation which the committee was able to produce. The document was signed by Shaikh Khalaf al-Haskani, Shaikh Khidr of the Qiran tribe and Hamu Shiru, and its overtones somehow convey the impression

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38. Secr Intell SSO Mosul to Wind Commander Graham, 16-2-1930, ref. FH/DO/7, AIR 23/455; very secr intell SSO Mosul, 11-5-1931, ref. FH/DO/22, AIR 23/455; Yazidi petitions to Paulus submitted to Mosul Civil Court, 5-8-1930, incl in FO 371/14525 E 6119.

39. Petitions sent by Rassam to the Secretary of Permanent Mandate Commission, 23-9-1930, incl in FO 371/14524 E 6119.

that its contents substantiated claims already put forward to the League by the other non-Muslim communities, especially the Assyrians, rather than presenting the actual situation in the Mountain. The Sinjari leaders put much emphasis on the very precarious sanitary condition of the Yazidi population of Sinjar, the lack of medical assistance, the poor economic conditions of the tribesmen and the absence of Yazidi representation in the public administration. The last point was certainly true but there is clear evidence that the mortality rate in the Mountain had been relatively low since the beginning of the mandate and neither malaria nor other epidemics had affected its population, as distinct from other parts of the Mosul qadha, especially in the plain where the concentration of Assyrian refugees in malarial, congested or infertile districts often had disastrous effects both on the economy and on the health of the local population (40).

Two months later Rassam sent two other documents from Sinjar to the Foreign Office. The first was signed by Hamu Shiru and Isma'il Beg and expressed their deep concern over the destiny of the shrine of Shaikh 'Adi, the second, signed by the same Isma'il and Qulu Husayn, the powerful mukhtar of the Sinjari village of Alidina and addressed directly to the Permanent Mandate Commission supported the petition submitted earlier in September, complained about the pro-Arab attitude of Mir Sa'id Beg and explicitly recognised Rassam as speaker

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40. Petition of the Yazidis, Annexe 2 to Rassam's documentation sent to the Permanent Mandate Commission, pp.9-11, FO 371/14524 E 6119. Comment on the petition sent by HC to CO, 27-3-1931 incl in FO 371/15314 E 1906.

on behalf of the Sinjari community. The contents of these two petitions are clear evidence of the extent to which the commitment of the Sinjari Yazidis to the movement was intimately linked to the internal dissent existing within the Yazidi community, especially over the refusal of the Sinjari leaders to recognise the authority of the Mir of Shaikhan. On one hand if the whole plan was to be implemented the inclusion of Sinjar in an autonomous Christian entity was perceived as a good opportunity to assert the independence of the Sinjari Yazidis from Shaikhan, whose Mir and religious classes were committing increasingly themselves to the Iraqi authorities. On the other hand, the activities of the Rescue Committee were also considered by the Sinjari leaders as a means through which they could attempt to influence the attitude of the Iraqi government vis-à-vis the recognition of their candidate for the Mirship, given the increasingly important role the League was playing in influencing relations between the minorities and the local authorities (41).

In April 1931 the propaganda of the Committee among the populations of northern Iraq suddenly ceased. Cope was in fact deported to Syria by the British authorities and Qaraqullah exiled to Baghdad (42). However, Rassam continued his activities in London until September 1931 when

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41. Corr Rassam to FO, 16-12-1930, incl 2 Yazidi petitions (1-11-1930/20-11-1930), FO 371/14525 E 6811. The text of the first petition is also included in CO 730/162/7.

42. Secr corr Air HQ Hinaidi to secretariat HC, 20-4-1931, ref:I/14/3, AIR 23/455; rep from British informant working in Hasakah, 4-6-31, n.n., AIR 23/455.

a final petition presented by the Committee was discussed at the 26th session of the League Council. The document included precise requests for the establishment of a semi-autonomous Christian enclave within the Kingdom of Iraq (43). The League rejected Rassam's proposals, as well as all the other autonomist aspirations from other Iraqi minorities, and stressed the importance of maintaining the unity of the Iraqi people if Iraq was to be released from the mandatory system in October 1932. However, as a main condition for the admission of Iraq to the League, the local government was explicitly asked to give constitutional guarantees which would ensure the welfare of the minorities after the British departure from the country.

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43. Text of final petition to League incl in FO 371/15317 E 5245.

## CONCLUSION



The main theme of the preceding chapters has been the impact of the gradual encroachment of the new Iraqi state into an area which had to an important extent managed to keep governmental authority at arm's length. In general terms the state was anxious to increase and extend its influence while the Yazidi community of Sinjar was particularly unreceptive to these efforts at nation building. In the course of my discussion of community-state relations from the latter part of the 19th century until the early 1930's I have also tried to examine the society and economy of this part of northern Iraq and more specifically the political and socio-economic changes experienced by the Yazidis during this period.

The Yazidis' 'traditional' antagonism towards the Muslims, which has been evident since the beginning of the Ottoman occupation of Iraq, continued to be displayed throughout the years of the British occupation of the Mosul province and to a great extent determined the close relations entertained by the Sinjari Yazidis both with the British administration and the local Christian communities. The same 'distrust' towards Muslims, which appeared to continue to be deeply rooted in Sinjari tribal society, also constrained the community's relations both with those Sunni Kurds living outside Sinjar and with the Kurdish national movement. A clear indication of this is that the only Kurdish nationalist leader to gain anything of a reputation in Sinjar, Hajo Agha of the Havarkan, was himself a Yazidi, although he was the

leader of a mixed tribal confederation. However, it appears that the Yazidis' hostility towards the Muslims was the byproduct of their experience of 'tyrannical' Muslim rule, which at the beginning of the mandate was very much identified with the Ottomans or with those Kurdish leaders employed by the Turks in the administration of Iraqi Kurdistan, and therefore had primarily political roots. In fact, in the course of the analysis of the social and political organization of the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar, it became clear that in Sinjar Islam co-habited with Yazidism as one of the two 'official' religious creeds of the tribesmen. Social interaction with Muslims on a day-to-day basis was therefore an accepted fact of life and occurred also in the case of all those Arab tribesmen, both sedentary and Bedouin, who lived or moved around the Yazidi Mountain.

By and large during the mandate the inhabitants of Sinjar were able to maintain their position inside the Mountain and by 1932, in comparison with other marginal groups living in the area, no major socio-economic transformations had occurred to undermine that tight corporativeness which they had displayed in the past in the face of external interference. Despite the more substantial government presence and the new possibility of direct military intervention offered by the Royal Air Force, the authorities well understood that they could by no means exercise direct control over the Yazidi Mountain without the support of the local leaders. As it has become evident in the course of this enquiry, this was a consequence of the

particular nature of the tribal organization of the Sinjari Yazidis: first of all extreme political fragmentation and mobility prevented any externally imposed authority from exercising effective control over all the groups; secondly the tribes, or more precisely their single fractions, still represented a powerful focus of allegiance for the Yazidi villagers which could not be disrupted by a more all-embracing presence of a centralized state administration. In the 1920's the nature of the power and authority wielded by the major Yazidi tribal chiefs of Sinjar was still mainly dictated by their personal and tribal interests which determined this political fragmentation. This is one of the main reasons why initial British efforts to create a paramountship in the Mountain by subsidizing Hamu Shiru, as a means to exercise effective control over the tribes and tribal leaders, had largely failed. However, a crucial new factor contributed to increase the importance of a number of Sinjari leaders vis-à-vis the central government outside and beyond the context of the role they played in local affairs. This was a result of the 'international' dimension which the Jabal Sinjar had assumed in Iraqi politics because of the disputed borders with the new states of Turkey and Syria which lay in the proximity of the Yazidi Mountain. These provisional boundaries favoured the diffusion of a great deal of anti-British and anti-Iraqi propaganda among the Yazidi tribes which served on several occasions as a trigger for subversive activities against the Iraqi administration as well as creating friction with the Turkish and Franco-Syrian

authorities. It is in this context that many of the attempts at adopting a more conciliatory attitude towards the Sinjari aghas on the part of the British and Iraqi authorities have to be viewed, although towards the end of the mandate the progressive increase in the number of Muslim employees in the administration of the Mountain created a great deal of resentment among the local population. In an important sense therefore the support of these Yazidi chiefs became essential for the nation-building policy of the new Iraqi state especially in the course of the dispute over western Sinjar which the Franco-Syrian authorities claimed as part of Syria.

This newly acquired importance vis-à-vis the central administration which compelled the government to attempt to gain the support of the local leaders while at the same time implementing policies which were widely unpopular in the area was gradually understood by large sections of the Yazidi leadership especially after 1925. This very much encouraged some aghas, above all the paramount leader Hamu Shiru whose economic and political influence was gradually decreasing, to voice their 'separatist' aspirations on behalf of the whole community. Interestingly these aspirations not only resulted in a rapprochement with the Assyrian Christian autonomist movement in an attempt to avoid direct Muslim administration and insistent demands for the establishment of an autonomous Yazidi religious council, but they also provoked a sudden deterioration of relations with the Yazidi religious leaders of Shaikhan, who had become increasingly under the control of the Iraqi authorities. Quite surprisingly the Sinjari Yazidis

also started to voice their particularism also vis-à-vis their co-religionists living in Shaikhan, expressed in terms of religious revival and reform and through various attempts to transform Sinjar into the new religious centre of Yazidism. In this particular context the growing encroachment of the state in Sinjar offered the Sinjari Yazidi leaders a unique, albeit short-lived, opportunity not only to fight for their survival, as had happened in Ottoman times, but to promote themselves as the champions of the 'true' Yazidi religion. This religious revival was undoubtedly favoured by the growing temporal influence among the tribes of members of the Yazidi priesthood which had started in the late Ottoman period.

The quest for religious and political autonomy in the last years of the mandate coincided with similar claims on the part of other minority groups living in northern Iraq, especially Kurds and Christians, and reflected an increasing need to obtain recognition and constitutional guarantees from the Iraqi government in view of the impending termination of the mandate. As in the case of the Kurds and of the Christians, the Yazidis' efforts largely failed as documented in the development of Sinjari affairs in the immediate post-mandate years when the government's attempts to create a national identity clashed more vigorously with the Sinjaris' political and religious particularism.

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