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THE OTHER KURDS

Yazidis in Colonial Iraq

NELIDA FUCCARO

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Abbreviations

Reviews

BEO Bulletin d’Études Orientales
GJ Geographical Journal
IJMES International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
MEJ Middle East Journal
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

Collections

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
The Other Kurds

MAE Correspondance Diplomatique, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères
SAL Fonds de la Mission Dominicaine de Mossul, Bibliothèque de Saulchoir

Correspondence

ADM British Administrative Inspector
ADV British Adviser
HC High Commissioner
INT Iraqi Ministry of Interior
PO British Political Officer
SR Service de Renseignement (French Intelligence Unit in Syria)
SSO Special Service Office/Officer (Royal Air Force Intelligence Unit)
The system followed for the transliteration of Arabic terms is that of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. Long vowels and diacritical marks have been deliberately omitted to simplify the spelling. Names of major localities like Mosul and Baghdad are given in the form in which they normally appear in English. 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 and French sources. This is the case with the majority of names of Sinjari and Kurdish tribes (Mandikan, Habbabat, Miran, Artushi) and of Kurdish individuals (Hamu Shiru, Hajo Agha).
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Map 3: Jabal Sinjar – Administration Boundary and 1920 Convention Line
Introduction

This book is a contribution to the study of Iraqi communal identities, as socially and politically constructed within specific historical frames. In particular it looks at the ways in which political, socio-economic and cultural solidarities among the Yazidis, a Kurdish heterodox community living in the north of the country, developed within the particular context of the period of the British mandate (1920–32). The book is also concerned with the late Ottoman period as a way to underline the continuity of socio-economic and political processes which define group dynamics. The study of a specific ethnic community should not represent a limitation in terms of a broad understanding of the complex and multi-layered nature of Iraqi society. Further, it should not be understood as another attempt at emphasising the fragmentation of the Iraqi social fabric which is often taken for granted. The construction of communal identities, as a process through which people re-frame solidarities, is viewed as an important sphere of action which provides groups with a continuous interaction with the surrounding environment rather than favouring separation from it. In fact solidarities are the by-product of a continuous exchange and ‘strategic’ negotiation between groups and the cultural, socio-economic and political spheres within which their members operate. In this connection the Yazidi Kurds of Iraq are an extremely interesting case study as they functioned within several, and very often overlapping, frames of reference. The Iraqi Yazidis, and especially those of Jabal Sinjar with whom this study is particularly concerned, maintained a high degree of kinship ideology, but at the same time
recognised themselves as members of village communities mainly devoted to agriculture and stock-farming which included sections of different Yazidi tribes. Furthermore, although they identified with moral and social values which were directly related to their heterodox creed, they qualified racially and linguistically as Kurds, a larger ethnic group which in the period under consideration was identified with Sunni Islam. As a tribe, a religious community and as a group with common socio-economic specialisation and racial affiliation the Yazidi Kurds of Iraq could operate in a variety of contexts which served different types of action: the family, the clan, the tribe, the religious polity and the wider ethnic community.

The Yazidis, in the same way as other primordial groups, have been often perceived as closely-knit, self-contained and inward-looking communities. Hence the few available studies on the Yazidis have generally tended to view them as a rigid social and cultural entity somewhat ossified by its heterodox religious creed. To a certain extent this can be considered as a reproduction of clichés which are a clear legacy of a body of knowledge on the community which was produced by Western scholars, travellers, journalists and amateurs in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The literature of the period was either descriptive and focused on Yazidi rituals and beliefs, or sought to explain the origins of the Yazidi religion by approaching it as a coherent and scripturalist belief-system. This served to decontextualise the study of the various Yazidi communities from the socio-economic and political structures in which they were embedded. Further, little attention has been paid to different cultural milieux which have been central to the survival and reproduction of Yazidi religious solidarities for centuries. As a consequence this has generally precluded the recognition of the importance of an historical understanding of the community. From today's perspective this understanding is central to define processes through which Yazidi solidarities have been articulated over time.

The solidary aspect of Yazidi religion has undoubtedly been one of the kernels of Yazidi identity, as a way of providing links between individuals under common beliefs, rituals of worship and religious institutions. So far this issue has been largely neglected in favour of an approach which gives precedence to the study of more doctrinal
Introduction

aspects of Yazidism. Given the oral character of the religious transmission and the rural milieu within which it developed, Yazidi doctrine per se did not provide a solid frame of reference for the believer unless contextualised in a broader ritualistic setting. The survival and viability of institutions of a religious nature, which in late 19th and early 20th-century Iraq constituted the essence of what has been referred to in the book as the Yazidi polity, cannot be considered as a function of an 'official' tradition sacralised by religious texts. Practice, as opposed to formalised beliefs, has supported over time the emirate system which was the core of the Yazidi polity. This polity was structured around rituals which have been reproduced for centuries such as the parading of the Peacock (*tawus gerran*) and the yearly pilgrimage to the shrine of Shaykh 'Adi, the saint founder of Yazidism, which is located in the Shaykhan district. Similarly, prescriptions of religious nature like food taboos and various prohibitions linked to the concept of ritual purity have been central in shaping the Yazidi socio-religious space. However, as orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy has defined Yazidi morality to a great extent, community boundaries have accommodated a great deal of beliefs and practices from the surrounding milieu. This clearly explains much of the complex doctrinal and ritual syncretism found in 20th-century Yazidism which has a clear counterpart in the cultural heterogeneity of the areas of Yazidi settlement in northern Iraq.

The issue of the interconnections between the Yazidi social fabric and political authority is an important part of trying to contextualise Yazidi identity. The re-framing of communal solidarities is necessarily inscribed into the development of state power which has provided a very important context for group mobilisation. It is very much the process of 'bringing the state back in' as Roger Owen called it with reference to his re-evaluation of Hanna Batatu's *Social Classes and Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*. The complex relationship between colonialism and the development of ethnic consciousness within the specific historical frame of mandatory Iraq is an important part of this study. The former Ottoman vilayat of Mosul where the Iraqi Yazidis lived was integrated in the modern state of Iraq in 1920 and remained under British mandatory control until 1932. The colonial state as a new territorial unit defined by international boundaries
became the new arena of contestation between state and society. It also provided the bases for the progressive development of centralised rule-making and rule-enforcing mechanisms. In this context groups sought recognition, political legitimacy, social prestige and economic power, or simply the maintenance of the status quo. Colonial rule, which was the main agent of political modernisation in the area, created the conditions for the development of new inner tensions between the social fabric and political authority. Under British rule primordial communities like the Yazidi Kurds reworked communal solidarities in ways which were consistent with the imposition of new political structures. Identities, especially religious and tribal, were the primary human capital through which the Iraqi Yazidis articulated their responses to state formation.

This study acknowledges the exceptional circumstances under which nation-building developed in the 1920s in comparison with the previous centuries of Ottoman rule. Yet, it addresses the issue of the extent to which the colonial period brought about dramatic change to the Yazidi Kurds and, more generally, to the rural communities of northern Iraq. In other words, did the kind of group mobilisation which occurred in the 1920s represent a sudden break with the past? And if so, in which ways was this rupture related to the political modernisation undertaken under colonial rule?

The peculiar nature of mandatory administration created modes of state/society interaction which were entirely new, especially in the case of religious and ethnic groups like the Christians, Yazidis and Kurds. In the late 1920s their position vis-à-vis the state had changed considerably in comparison with the previous decades as exemplified by their newly-acquired status of minorities. However, the colonial state, as embodied by both the British mandatory authorities and the Iraqi administration, was by no means hegemonic. Like what happened under Ottoman rule, the power holders were forced to continuously renegotiate their position vis-à-vis the social fabric in the same way as group solidarities adjusted to changing political circumstances. In the 1920s Iraqi nation-building slowly emerged out of the segmentary opposition of new and old groups (the British, the King and his entourage, the tribal shaykhs, the landed classes, the ethnic communities) which more or less directly sought empowerment
and recognition in the newly-created arena of national politics in Baghdad. In this context the British were only one of the main actors (albeit crucial) in local power politics. However, their privileged status as representatives of the mandatory power to a great extent allowed them to skilfully manipulate and balance oppositions in line with their colonial and imperial interests. After independence it became clear that British rule left an important mark on Iraqi politics. By mediating between political and social factions it established a pattern of instability which continued for much of the post-colonial years. In the 1920s the presence of the mandatory power favoured the increasing development and reproduction of conflicts at different levels of the power structure of the colonial state. Many of these conflicts were rooted in political, social and cultural realities which were already in place in the Ottoman period and in particular in the second half of the 19th century.

The development of relations between the political centre of a new state and one of its many peripheries, both geographically and politically marginalised, takes up much of the present study on the Iraqi Yazidis. In this connection this work hopefully will demonstrate that the social and political dynamics of the mandatory period can be looked at without necessarily adopting a Baghdad-centred approach. A localist perspective also has the advantage of bringing people and communities to the core of Iraqi national development. One of the most distinctive features of the colonial period was that state power became increasingly centralised and urban-based. Hence, in which ways did the modernising forces emanating from the political centre act upon the communal solidarities of the Yazidis who inhabited fairly secluded rural areas? The manipulation of interest groups with strong bases of authority in the countryside was particularly evident in the ways in which entire tribal regions were kept by the British under a separate jurisdiction which remained in force until the 1958 Revolution. As such the British used primordialism against the increasing influence of urban or urbanised elites, following mechanisms of balanced opposition outlined above. They allowed selected local notables, tribal and communal leaders to reproduce previous mechanisms of social and economic control within the new frame of the colonial state. The incorporation and institutionalisation of local power structures
in the new system (especially tribal) provided many groups with a sense of continuity with the past. This process, which relied on existing forms of social and political identification and on established patronage networks, clearly constrained but did not preclude the development of more modern bases of association such as those of class or of membership in a wider national community. However, in the mandatory period the re-framing of solidarities, especially in the rural areas, can be understood primarily in terms of their continuities with the past. Clearly, this was partly a result of the instrumentalisation of primordialism for nation-building although it cannot be denied that uniform patterns of rural development were introduced by the colonial state. A law for the land settlement was promulgated in 1932 following a systematic land registration. Further, in the 1920s the government attempted at various times to introduce a homogeneous taxation system in order to facilitate the estimation and collection of revenue. To a great extent all these issues directly concern the Iraqi Yazidis as they were a tribal and a religious group which inhabited the Iraqi countryside. During the mandate primordialism was not a social reality which affected the articulation of state power at only a local level. It also impinged upon the sphere of public policy as for instance in the ways in which the political elites were increasingly recruited from the tribal milieu. Moreover, Ottoman institutions which directly regulated the religious sphere such as the awqaf system and the communal organisation of the millet remained substantially the same throughout the years of the mandate.

The development of state/society relations and the issue of continuity with the late Ottoman period can also be also discussed in the light of the concept of modernisation. If viewed from the perspective of large sections of Iraqi society, the kind of political modernisation undertaken during the mandate was by no means an evolutionary and unilateral process. Nor did it result in the breaking up of ‘traditional’ communities and in the transformation of their bases of solidarity. The same can be said for much of the post-colonial period. Modernising forces were already in place when the British arrived in the area as a result of policies implemented in the last century of Turkish rule, notably during the reformist period known as Tanzimat (1839–76) which continued under the Pan-Islamic policies
of Sultan 'Abdul Hamid (1876–1909). In this period the Ottoman government made consistent efforts to centralise and rationalise the administration of the three Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul. Although the Tanzimat reforms aimed at strengthening the existing political system rather than transforming the nature of Ottoman imperial rule, they impinged upon group solidarities which became active and instrumental as a response to the new measures enacted by the state. In this light the 1920s can be viewed not so much as a radical break with the past but as a process of adjustment to a quicker and more thorough pace of reform. The late 19th century was a period of crucial political and economic change for the Iraqi Yazidis. During this period the re-framing of their solidarities occurred primarily at the level of the tribe and of the religious community but did not substantially modify the position of the Yazidis vis-à-vis the state. Nonetheless this change is central for an understanding of developments which affected Yazidi communalism during the mandate.

An approach which focuses on the Yazidi Kurds inevitably throws light on Iraqi political development through the lens of communalism. Further, this study is particularly concerned with a specific articulation of communalism in the political sphere, the development of relations between the centre of state power and its periphery. These approaches may appear to fall into a set of notional oppositions (Yazidis v. Kurds, Kurds v. Arabs, cities v. countryside, tribes v. states) often indicated as a reflection of an Orientalist historiography closely associated to colonial constructs. The conventional historiography of the Yazidi Kurds of Iraq emphasises their isolation from state power and their strong communal boundaries both favoured by the geographical seclusion of the community. The theme of tribes v. states also features prominently in accounts of Jabal Sinjar as the history of the local Yazidi community is written primarily through episodes of warfare between the Yazidi tribes and both the Ottoman and colonial states. Historians like myself interested in the colonial period face the dilemma of how to interpret sources from colonial archives without being charged with reproducing colonial or western clichés. These sources reflect political and social realities as interpreted on the bases of the belief-systems and assumptions of the people who produced them. Clearly the very nature of colonial rule made these observers
politically motivated. However, for scholars interested in the ethnic question colonial sources may represent a strength rather than a weakness. In fact they are particularly illuminating on cultural diversity as this issue was central to the implementation of a modern state project. In this study the kind of divisiveness of Iraqi society under colonial rule which Hanna Batatu has much emphasised for earlier periods is not viewed as a construct but as a new synthesis of old dialectic oppositions stemming from the specific conditions created by the colonial state.’ In the 1920s divisions were not created ex-novo. For example the opposition between Yazidi Kurds and Muslim Arabs, which informs much of the primary sources on Jabal Sinjar under British rule, was by no means invented by the colonial power but reflected long-standing tensions between heterodoxy and Islam which in the Ottoman period expressed Yazidi/Muslim antagonism in ways which were consistent with the realities imposed by an Islamic state. Thus this study acknowledges the notion of ethnic division but looks at Yazidi communalism as defined by processes of inclusion. The kind of oppositional dynamics captured so often in British sources underlined centuries of integration of the Yazidi community in the fragmented society of northern Iraq.

Chapter One deals with religious themes and socio-religious institutions which have defined Yazidi communalism over the centuries. It also introduces the state as a context for communal action in the late Ottoman period. Chapter Two discusses the Yazidi settlement of Jabal Sinjar and the complex patterns of interconnections between tribalism, communalism, land, demography and economic development. Chapter Three examines the mechanisms of state control imposed by Great Britain over Yazidi tribal areas in the mandatory period. Particular attention is devoted to their impact on Yazidi tribal elites and, more generally, on tribal mobilisation. Chapter Four looks at the ways in which the Yazidis of Jabal Sinjar became directly involved in the process of state formation in the context of British imperial policies and of the stability of a newly emerging regional state system. Chapter Five examines developments which affected Yazidi religious and political solidarities against a background of the intense politicisation of communalism in northern Iraq on the eve of the termination of the British mandate.
Tribe, Sect and State

Kurdish Tribes and Yazidi Religion

The Yazidis are a Kurdish heterodox community whose origin dates back to the 12/13th centuries. Northern Iraq is widely acknowledged as the historical centre of Yazidism although Yazidi groups are nowadays scattered in Syria, Turkey, Iran and Soviet Armenia. Yazidism is essentially an orally transmitted religion, although a corpus of texts known as the Meshef Resh and the Jilwe has drawn the attention of a number of scholars since the 19th century. Many of the doctrinal elements of Yazidism are linked to scripturalist religions such as Islam, Christianity and Zoroastrianism. However, the predominantly oral character of the Yazidi religious tradition and its extreme syncretism would indicate that Yazidism has been closely connected to manifestations of popular culture. These manifestations are clearly linked to the Kurdish milieu as all Yazidis are Kurds and speak Kurdish as a first language. In the specific setting of northern Iraq Yazidi religious tradition has for centuries used the Kurmanji dialect with a substantial input of Arabic words. Yazidism is an endogamous religious creed: apostasy, conversion and marriage with members of other religious groups are strictly forbidden. However, it can be inferred that, at present, there is a trend towards intermarriage and more secularist orientations, especially in the context of diaspora communities living in Western Europe.

The historical development of Yazidism as a set of shared beliefs and practices is closely intertwined with the political and socio-
economic structures of Kurdish society. In this connection, Kurdish tribalism was central to the support of a specifically Yazidi socio-religious organisation which has functioned for centuries under the umbrella of the Yazidi Emirate. It seems that tribal identity greatly contributed to the reproduction and consolidation of strong religious and ethnic solidarities in the centuries which followed the appearance of the Yazidi movement in northern Iraq. Between the 13th and the 15th centuries Yazidism expanded considerably in Kurdish tribal milieux, most likely as a result of a wave of conversions which affected large sections of Kurdish tribal society. This expansion occurred relatively rapidly: in the 14th century Yazidism became the official religion of the principality of Jazira, a Kurdish semi-independent political unit which centred around the town of Cizre located in present day eastern Turkey. In the same period seven of the most powerful tribes of Kurdistan were also Yazidi. Clearly, the golden age of Yazidism was favoured by the political instability which prevailed in the area in the periods of Atabeg and Mongol rule between the 11th and the 15th centuries.4

The rapid expansion of the Yazidi religion among the Kurdish tribes poses a number of questions, particularly in the light of the practice of endogamy which constitutes one of the essential ‘dogmas’ of 19th and 20th-century Yazidism. Despite the absence of historical documentation we can surmise that it is very likely that Yazidi beliefs and practices were adapted to the flexible political, socio-economic and religious boundaries of the tribes which converted to Yazidism. The oral transmission of the Yazidi religious tradition, which has continued for centuries, was very beneficial to the early expansion of Yazidism in Kurdish milieux as religious ideas and practices could be easily ‘adjusted’ to the contingencies of a nomadic tribal society. A travel account written in the 17th century, which describes a small Yazidi tribal community of northern Syria, is the only available source which provides hints on the interaction between Yazidi socio-religious structures and Kurdish pastoral nomadism. Although in the 17th century Yazidism had generally ceased to be identified with pastoral nomadism, this account can be taken as an example of earlier trends which marked the expansion of Yazidism in the tribal milieu. The Yazidi tribal community of northern Syria had formalised procedures for the
appointment of its priests. However, men of religion were not rigidly organised in status groups as was the custom in later periods. The absence of Yazidi holy lineages favoured the integration of commoners into the religious establishment, mainly by initiation. Membership was open to Yazidis but seemingly also to non-Yazidis as a way of recruiting new followers among tribesmen. This clearly contravened the principle of endogamy. Although the Yazidi priests who operated in this tribal unit were members of a formal religious organisation at a local level which was very similar to a Sufi tariqa, they acted fairly independently of the Yazidi religious hierarchy of the Shaykhan district of Iraq, the religious centre of the group. It seems that the nomadic lifestyle of this tribal community shaped the character of the religious institution which ruled it. In particular, the more ‘informal’ nature of Yazidi priesthood can be understood as a way of rapidly promoting Yazidi practices and beliefs among the local tribal society.

By the beginning of the 16th century the rise of the Safavid and Ottoman dynasties in Persia and Anatolia, whose expansion and influence in the areas of Yazidi settlement overlapped, resulted in a dramatic decrease of popularity of Yazidism among the Kurdish tribes. Many Kurdish tribal groups converted to Sunni and Shi'i Islam which during Ottoman and Safavid rule became state religions. In the tribal milieu Yazidism remained confined to small groups of tribesmen who belonged to mixed tribal confederations such as the Milli and the Heverkan whose presence is documented since the late 18th century. More importantly, as a result of increasing Ottoman religious persecutions, the marginalisation of the Yazidi religion determined the dramatic expansion of one of the two major Yazidi enclaves of northern Iraq, that of Jabal Sinjar. This mountainous area located in the middle of the Jazira plateau developed as a distinctive diaspora settlement since the early Ottoman period and over time retained a distinct tribal character. The other major Yazidi settlement which was located in the Shaykhan district north of the city of Mosul and was the seat of the Yazidi Emirate. Up to the present day Shaykhan has functioned as the religious centre of the community. Over time the two Yazidi enclaves of Iraq developed quite distinctive identities. This is indicated by the loose framework within which the Shaykhanli Emirate operated in Jabal Sinjar and the absence of a centralised
The socio-religious milieu which fostered the development of Yazidism is central to an understanding of a number of religious themes which over time have defined the position of the Yazidis vis-à-vis orthodox Islam. The social and religious origins of the Yazidi movement have often been accepted uncritically, perhaps as a result of the particular nature of the sources used as historical evidence. These sources come primarily from the Muslim and Eastern Christian (Suryani) traditions. While they facilitate an understanding of the place occupied by the Yazidis in the ideological order of Christianity and Islam, their value as historical documents can be questioned.

In the 1930s Muslim traditions concerning the Yazidis provided the basis for an historical interpretation of the emergence of the community in Iraqi Shaykhan. These traditions generally agree on a strong connection between the development of Yazidism and the presence of Sufi practices and institutions in Kurdish milieu. Sufism played a paramount role in the Islamisation of the tribes after the Muslim conquest of Kurdistan. By the 10th/11th centuries it seems that the majority of the Kurdish population of northern Iraq was more or less under the influence of Sufi masters.

Ibn Taymiyya, a 14th-century Muslim theologian, when discussing the development of the Yazidi movement (al-Yazidiyya) relates it to the establishment and expansion of an orthodox Sufi brotherhood (al-tariqa al-'adawiyya) which was founded by Shaykh 'Adi b. Musafir al-Hakkari, an Arab mystic and ascetic who claimed Ummayyad descent. The historical 'Adi (d. 1162) was born near Baalbek in Lebanon and received his religious training under a number of Sufi masters. Among these was the famous 'Abd al-Qadir al-Gilan, the founder of the Qadiriyya order which attracted an enormous following in the Kurdish areas. Sometime at the beginning of the 12th century Shaykh 'Adi settled in the north of Iraq and founded the 'Adawiyya order. Ibn Taymiyya recalls that two generations after the death of Shaykh 'Adi some of the members of the 'Adawiyya started to emphasise 'Adi's divine attributes and to worship the Ummayyad Caliph Yazid b. Mu'awiya to whom 'Adi claimed to be related. In Ibn Taymiyya's words the 'Adawis of northern Iraq developed a ghuluww (exaggeration), a technical term which defined beliefs which deviated from Muslim
orthodoxy. Clearly the ‘Adawis’ veneration for ‘Adi and Yazid placed them among those groups who had ‘left’ the straight path of Islam. A ghuluww for ‘Adi and Yazid b. Mu’awiya in 13th-century northern Iraq had other important implications which Ibn Taymiyya does not mention. Although it is not clear whether the first Yazidiyya developed a marked political character, this ghuluww must have been viewed with suspicion by local supporters of the Abbasid establishment as it represented a manifestation of pro-Ummayyad sympathies. The name Yazidis, or followers of Yazid b. Mu’awiya, became widespread in Muslim circles and started to be used to distinguish those who practised ghuluww from the orthodox members of the Iraqi ‘Adawiyya. Although any political concern might have disappeared by the end of Abbasid rule, the name Yazidis continued to be employed by the Muslims and as such the community became known in Europe since the 19th century.6

By and large Muslim sources dealing with the first nucleus of Yazidis are particularly concerned with the Muslim background of the community. They do not convey any sense of the complex and multilayered milieu within which the first Yazidiyya emerged in northern Iraq. Ibn Taymiyya, when dealing with the dissident movement which developed within the ‘Adawi order, does not provide hints about the socio-economic bases of the new heterodoxy which have to be generally inferred from the context. Religious institutions such as the ‘Adawiyya brotherhood functioned as veritable socio-economic and religious points of reference for the rural populations. As the ethnic and religious composition of northern Iraq was extremely diversified, brotherhoods represented an ideal venue for cultural and religious osmosis given the central role they played in the development of important economic processes, primarily in the exchanges between nomadic/semi-nomadic and agricultural communities. It is in this light that one should consider the history of the ‘Adawiyya and the emergence of a new dissident community which had a specifically Kurdish character. The inclination on the part of the Kurdish members of the ‘Adawiyya to adopt heterodox beliefs is hinted at in a number of medieval chronicles.7 In particular, the contribution made by Kurdish groups to the ‘Adawi order, generally portrayed in Muslim sources as an essentially Arab institution, is emphasised in a corpus of
Christian Suriyani traditions. These traditions offer interesting insights into the role played by the Kurds in the formation of the early Yazidiyya. They also hint at a more active role played by the local Christians in the process. The Christians were the second largest religious group living in the north of Iraq. A 15th-century treatise compiled by a local Nestorian monk called Ramisho discusses the appearance of the Yazidis in the area. Ramisho relates that the sanctuary of Shaykh 'Adi, which was to become the religious centre of Yazidism, was an old Christian convent. Given that the area controlled by 'Adi's brotherhood had been for centuries an area of Christian settlement, it is possible that in earlier periods the sacred building identified by Ibn Taymiyya with the centre of the Sufi 'Adawis housed Christian monks. Ramisho's text describes at length the activities of the convent, which catered for the needs of a local sedentary population, prevalently Christian, and of groups of nomadic Kurds who provided shepherding for the cattle owned by the Christian monks. The arrival and establishment of the Yazidis in the area is related to the bloody occupation of the convent carried out by nomadic Kurds in the 12th century. Interestingly, the central character of the narrative is a Kurdish brigand named Shaykh 'Adi who is the leader of the powerful tribe of the Tayrahites. From Ramisho's account it is clear that this tribe was not yet fully Islamised, had strong pro-Ummayyad proclivities and, according to another Suryani source, had retained strong Zoroastrian beliefs of western Iranian origin.

The narrative of Ramisho clearly indicates the fictitious character of the story of the Kurdish 'Adi who cannot be identified with the historical 'Adi b. Musafir but perhaps with 'Adi b. Abi al-Barakat, one of his successors to the leadership of the 'Adawiyya who lived in the 13th century. However, in an important sense it highlights the centrality of an orthodox religious institution in the development of the Yazidiyya, thus echoing the Muslim tradition concerned with the Sufi brotherhood founded by 'Adi. It also hints at the idea of official religious establishments linking sedentary to nomadic groups as well as scripturalism to popular religion. Furthermore Ramisho's tradition underlines other important factors which undoubtedly contributed to the formation of Yazidi religious beliefs: the central role played by nomadic elements as vehicles of Iranian religious influences, and the
idea that Yazidism emerged out of the progressive superimposition of different religious and cultural themes. The Yazidi belief system, as it became known in Europe from the 19th century, is indeed highly syncretic as it includes doctrinal elements from the pre-Islamic Indo-Iranian tradition, Zoroastrianism, Dualism and Sufi Islam. Furthermore, it displays remarkable Muslim and Christian influences, especially for what concerns practices and rituals such as baptism, circumcision and fasting which are performed by the members of the community. From this perspective the question is not whether Yazidism is originally a Muslim, Zoroastrian or Christian creed, a debate which to a great extent has monopolised Yazidi studies since the mid-19th century. Yazidism is the original by-product of the encounter of different cultural/religious themes which permeated the fragmented society of northern Iraq. In recent periods historical myths concerning a Muslim and Zoroastrian background of the Yazidis have been used to further the political allegiance of the community. In the 1960s the Ummayyad background of the group was publicised by the Iraqi government. In the 1970s the Zoroastrian connection served the purpose of Kurdish nationalist propaganda which presented Yazidism as the original religion of the Kurds.

The influence of Indo-Iranian religious themes on the development of the Yazidi doctrine accounts for the most important symbol of Yazidi social cohesion and religious identity which is Malak Tawus or the Peacock Angel. Tawus’s cult has provided long-standing vitality to the Yazidi Emirate. It has legitimised the Yazidi polity by supporting important institutions such as the mirship, the system of collections of religious alms and the religious class of the shaykhs. The cult of the angels is an ancient Iranian religious practice which influenced other Kurdish heterodox communities such as the Ahl-I Haqq and the Alevi. According to a number of sources the cult of Malak Tawus existed before that of ‘Adi b. Musafir but materialised in the form of a bronze effigy of the Peacock Angel only after the 15th century when the Yazidi heterodoxy became clearly defined vis-à-vis the Muslim establishment. According to Yazidi beliefs Tawus is the most beautiful of the Angels of God and his representative on earth. Although part of a dualist conception of the universe which permeated the Iranian religious milieu before Islam, the relationship between
God and the Peacock Angel in Yazidism differs from the good/evil opposition found in Zoroastrianism which epitomises the struggle between Ohrmazd and Ahreman. Tawus is the alter-ego of God rather than his opponent. The Peacock Angel directly emanated from him, but at the same time he has developed an independent sphere of action. He is an active, lively and positive force which imparts life and movement to humankind. The Meshef Resh, one of the Yazidi sacred texts, relates:

Thereupon Malak Tawus asked God how Adam could multiply and have descendants if he were forbidden to eat the grain. God answered: 'I have put the all matter into thy hands.' Thereupon Malak Tawus visited Adam and said: 'Have you eaten the grain?' He answered: 'No, God forbade me.' Malak Tawus replied and said: 'Eat of the grain and all shall go better with thee.' Then Adam ate of the grain and immediately his belly was inflated. But Malak Tawus drove him out of the garden, and leaving him, ascended to heaven. Now Adam was troubled because his belly was inflated, for he had no outlet. God therefore sent a bird to him which pecked at his anus and made an outlet, and Adam was relieved.\[^{11}\]

The story of Malak Tawus and Adam is a clear reminiscence of the Biblical tale of the creation of man. It also highlights the positive action of the Peacock Angel in his role as initiating humankind to life and suffering by endowing the first son of God with his physiological functions. Clearly in Yazidi beliefs Malak Tawus is the active mediator between mankind and God. Over time his role became identified with that played by Shaykh 'Adi b. Musafir in the first Yazidiyya of Iraqi Shaykhan through a process of superimposition of individual identities typical of oral transmission which tends to ignore time as well as spatial referents. The 'exaggerate' cult for Shaykh 'Adi in the first Yazidiyya developed as a result of the need of finding direct mediation between God and the faithful on the part of the followers of the Sufi. Eventually 'Adi was endowed with divine attributes and considered the representative on earth of Malak Tawus.

At least since the 18th century the Yazidi cult surrounding the bronze image of Malak Tawus was the most evident symbol of the Yazidis' dissociation from Islam and of the community's links with
obscure practices of paganism and idolatry. In Muslim milieu the image of Tawus became associated with that of the devil. This occurred through processes of identification which can perhaps be related to the dualist nature of Tawus’ representation in Yazidi religious mythology. The Yazidis were as a result labelled devil-worshippers and this name increasingly identified them among their Muslim neighbours. By the 19th century the power of the chief of the community, the Yazidi Mir of Shaykhan, was embodied in a bronze effigy of Malak Tawus of which there were several copies. The Yazidis claimed that these were not idols, as often perceived by European and Muslim observers, but symbols which the true spirit of Malak Tawus could enter whenever it was called. The authority of the mir vis-à-vis all the Yazidi believers was legitimised 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 the Caucasus, the most recent Yazidi settlement outside Iraq. Up to the present day the peacock tour (or tawus gerran) is the central religious event for the Yazidi villages of Iraq, far more important than local festivals or the Autumn festival, the annual Yazidi gathering around Shaykh ‘Adi’s shrine. In the 1920s there were seven sanjaq in Shaykhan which were kept in the mir’s palace at Ba‘adri. Each of them was associated with a specific region in which the Yazidi lived, both in and outside Iraq.

The Yazidi Polity of Northern Iraq

The centre of the Yazidi polity was the Shaykhan district which was the seat of the Yazidi Emirate and the spiritual centre of the community. The Emirate was the by-product of the progressive institutionalisation of the Yazidi belief system which crystallised around the cult of Shaykh ‘Adi and his followers whose shrines were located in the sacred valley of Lalish. Since the Ottoman occupation of the area in the 16th century, Shaykhan had been directly administered from Mosul. During the period of the British mandate it was divided into the Shaykhan
and al-Qush districts and came to include significant numbers of Christians and Muslim Kurds, alongside a relatively small group of Jews. Jabal Sinjar and Shaykhan shared important socio-economic features: they were rural areas organised in village communities whose members were mainly agriculturalists. However, well into the 20th century the Yazidism of Shaykhan displayed a formal socio-religious structure which centred upon the person of the Yazidi mir and his extended family. By contrast in the Jabal Sinjar the Yazidi religion permeated an highly tribalised and fragmented Kurdish diaspora community in which religious loyalties were often submitted to strong tribal identities. In an important sense Jabal Sinjar represented a veritable testing ground for the power of communal identification wielded by the Yazidi creed in tribal milieu. The existence of a stratified religious establishment, which included several endogamous groups, was central to the identification of sections of the Kurdish population of Iraq with the Yazidi belief-system. In Yazidism the maintenance of a tight network of social relations was closely connected to the preservation of Yazidi religious values. A commoner was linked from his birth to a Yazidi shaykh or pir, to a spiritual guide chosen among prominent shaykhly families and to a karif, a sort of godfather who presided over the ceremony of circumcision and who could be also Muslim. Although local shrines provided an important focus for the worship of the individuals both in Shaykhan and in Jabal Sinjar there did not exist formalised venues for the performance of Yazidi religious duties. If in Yazidism there was anything close to a mosque or church, it was the house of the representatives of the religious classes, especially of the shaykhs. Yazidi men of religion, with the exception of the Mir of Shaykhan and his entourage, often did not directly control the local system of production and exchange but nonetheless their presence contributed to diminish the already meagre surplus of the Yazidi cultivators. As the majority of the Yazidi priests did not engage in worldly affairs, they effectively used their religious standing to provide for their livelihood. In exchange for the performance of various religious functions as instructors, teachers and ministers of faith they were subsidised by the commoners on a regular basis, especially in kind. Alms were particularly onerous for the average Shaykhanli commoner given the high concentration of men of religion living in the
area. Contemporary observers generally agree that during the period of the British mandate the Yazidi peasantry was still largely exploited by the religious classes. In 1928 the RAF chaplain McLeod stated that the average Yazidi commoner in Shaykhani spent one-quarter of his income in donations to the image of Malak Tawus, to the holy 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 state.\textsuperscript{14}

The Yazidi mir and his extended family who resided in Shaykhani effectively translated religious authority into forms of political and economic control over local society. This control was, however, confined to groups of Yazidi commoners settled in the proximity of the seat of the Yazidi Emirate. The permanent ownership of landed estates allowed the Yazidi mir to develop semi-feudal relations with sections of the local landless peasantry which did not include only Yazidis. In 1925 Luke remarked:

\begin{quote}
[The mir's castle in the Shaykhani village of 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.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

As the mir of Shaykhani played a paramount role in the control of the local system of production, Yazidi mirs often functioned as intermediaries between the local Yazidi groups and the government in the same way as local Muslim notables or representatives of the Christian clergy. In Jabal Sinjar until the end of the 19th century the authority of the local Yazidi priests was confined to the religious sphere. The Yazidi tribal elites, who were of lay background, monopolised the productive and political process and dealt with the local Ottoman authorities on behalf of the community.

\textit{The Emirate of Shaykhani}

The Yazidi Emirate of Shaykhani was headed by the Yazidi mir, the
Kurdish form of the Arabic amir (ruler). The mir is often indicated as the temporal as well as religious chief of the community. Yazidi mirs have consistently maintained their spiritual legitimacy as representatives on earth of Malak Tawus who was closely associated to both Shaykh ‘Adi b. Musafir and the Caliph Yazid b. Mu‘awiya. However, their political authority was largely local and greatly affected by their shifting relations with the various state administrations which ruled the area. In the 1920s the immediate entourage of Mir Sa‘id Beg included mainly members of his extended family and a number of representatives of the religious classes settled in Shaykhan. The long tradition of internal strife and dissension among the relatives of the mir indicates that the mir’s family represented the core of the structure of the emirate which included different classes of priesthood. In this connection the existence of the mir and his household assured the continuity of the Yazidi religious establishment. 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 for both political and financial support. As primogeniture did not always represent the basis of succession to the emirate the relatives of the mir decided between the candidature of rival claimants. In theory only the mir, when still alive, could select his successor chosen from the most suitable male candidates. In practice the consensus of all the princely family played a determining role. Members of the religious classes living in Shaykhan were particularly crucial in determining the election of a new mir thus confirming the relatively weak influence of men of religion coming from Sinjar in the process. It seems that in the 17th century rights to the mirship were transferred from the family of Yazidi shaykhs which claimed to descend from the Sufi Hasan al-Basri to that of Abu Bakr. The mir then began to be selected from a particular group called Chol whose first representative was Shaykh Muhammad al-Kurdi al-Arbili, a name which suggests a non-Shaykhanli origin. The history of the princely family in the eight generations which preceded the ascension to power of Mir Sa‘id Beg Chol, who ruled the Yazidi community between 1913 and 1944, 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.16

Until World War II economic factors played a determinant role in undermining the position of the mir vis-à-vis his close relatives as there was no custom sanctioning the precise division of the revenues among the mir's household. Given the lack of communal management of the treasury of the emirate (bayt al-mal) the mir was the sole administrator of a considerable amount of wealth which came from the collection of alms from the Yazidi commoners. Understandably the autocratic economic power of the mir accounted for much of the opposition from his relatives and offered the Ottoman and British mandatory governments an opportunity to interfere in Yazidi affairs by supporting claims of relatives who were denied access to their share. It was only after Mir Sa'id Beg's death in 1945 that his son Tahsin stipulated that one third of the income of the mir's treasury should be distributed among the other princes, one third employed for the upkeep of Shaykh 'Adi's shrine and the last third should be left in the hands of his grandmother Mayan Khatun who was acting as regent.17

All Yazidi commoners, both from Iraq and outside, replenished the mir's personal treasury through offerings made to the standards which symbolised the power of Malak Tawus and which were toured yearly by the qawwals, a special group of Yazidi priests. The ceremony which accompanied the parading of the Peacock in Yazidi villages emphasised the mir's links with the supernatural power of Tawus thus strengthening his authority vis-à-vis the believers. Other 'religious taxes' included offerings made to the two main Yazidi sanctuaries of Shaykhan, the shrine of Shaykh 'Adi and Shams al-Din, whose upkeep depended on funds from the princely bayt al-mal.

Relations between the mir and members of the Yazidi religious classes of Shaykhan were established in the context of the collection of the alms which the mir usually farmed out to the highest bidder. During the period of the British mandate 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 shaykhs which meant that this group had customary rights to sanjaq alms. This could partly explain why at the beginning of the
20th century the association between the seven standards and the seven families of *shaykhs* which constituted the backbone of the Yazidi religious establishment survived so strongly. In the Shaykhan 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*. Clearly the *mir* was in the position of benefiting from the collection of the religious tithes even in cases when they were partially allotted to a particular family of *shaykhs*. In fact *qawwals*, or bearers of the standard, could only be appointed by the *mir* who rented out the rights of exhibiting the standards in far away districts to the highest 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.

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 Shaykhan. The *qawwals* not only acted as emissaries for religious purposes contributing to reinforce the cult of the Peacock Angel but carried out propaganda in favour of the *mir*. They were also in charge of the reproduction of Yazidi religious tradition as the keepers of a corpus of hymns known as *qewls*. It seems that since the ascent to power of Mir Sa'id Beg in 1913 growing importance had been attached to literacy which later became an essential qualification for having access to the *qawwal*ship. *Qawwals* in fact were one of the few Yazidi religious groups whose membership became progressively less restricted although traditionally they were recruited from the Dimli and Tahzi families. First, given their scarce numbers they were allowed to marry commoners. 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. It is true that the son of a *qawwal* had more chances of receiving an adequate training from his father or within his household since there were no special institutions where future *qawwals* could be instructed.
The second major source of income for the princely family came from the offerings of the faithful to the holy shrines of Shaykh 'Adi and Shams al-Din. The rights of collections of these alms were farmed out by the mir to a member of the religious class of the faqirs who usually belonged to the 'Ubakr family. This faqir was also appointed mutawalli, or keeper of the shrine, a term which echoes the procedure of administration of Muslim endowments (waqf). Perhaps the term mutawalli was adopted by the Yazidi leadership only in the 1920s in connection with an attempt on the part of the Iraqi government to transform the Yazidi shrines into waqf property. During the period of the mandate the tenure of office of the Mutawalli of Shaykh 'Adi 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. 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 Shaykh 'Adi paid Mir Sa'id Beg Rs 8,000 in 1927 while Rs 5,000 came from Shaykh Shams for the right of collecting the contributions and fees of the pilgrims in the same year. The Yazidi mir also benefited from the appointment of the baba shaykh, the head of all Yazidi shaykhs who ranked second in importance after the Yazidi mir and resided in the Shaykhanli village of Esiyan. At the end of the 1920s the baba shaykh had to pay Rs 8,000 annually to the Yazidi prince in order to retain his office. The mir had also the customary right to inherit the properties of those Yazidis who died without legitimate heirs. 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. The income which derived from the sale of the right to collect the direct contributions of the Yazidi faithful provided the major source of revenue for the Yazidi mir and his family. Although the mir possessed some immovable properties in the Shaykhan district (the castle of Ba'adri, his official residence, and some landed estates in the neighbourhood) the continuation of the Yazidi Emirate depended on the economic support granted to him and his family by the Yazidi commoners. The Emirate was a self-funding
institution which capitalised on the Yazidi belief system and provided a complex web of socio-economic and political alliances. However, it did not provide a generalised intermediary structure between the state and the Shaykhanli Yazidis given that for example sections of the Yazidi peasantry were linked to local Christian, Muslim or even Yazidi notables by patron-client relations. These notables provided the link with the state administration without necessarily involving the mir.

In Jabal Sinjar the local Yazidi community developed political and socio-economic structures which centred around the tribes. Although in the second half of the 19th century political power in tribal milieux had become increasingly identified with religious authority, the local religious classes had not relied on the support of the Emirate to gain political prominence in tribal milieux. Nor it seems were the Sinjari tribes under the direct control of the Mir of Shaykhan 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 Shaykhan accentuated a sense of Sinjari separate identity which developed further during the mandate.

Religious classes

The religious network supported by the Yazidi Emirate of Shaykhan theoretically extended to all districts inhabited by Yazidis. In practice communal gatherings and exchanges of personal visits provided continuity to the relations between men of religion coming from different areas. Yazidi shaykhs seem to have been the most mobile group, with the exception of the qawwals. In the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, together with the faqirs they were the religious group which succeeded in acquiring increasing political power in Jabal Sinjar. By transcending the religious sphere their authority became increasingly affected by the development of state power, especially in the period of the British mandate. The Yazidi shaykhs were an endogamous group whose authority was legitimised by their membership in holy lineages of Shaykhanli origin. In this connection the cult of both Shaykh Adi and Malak Tawus provided legitimation of their status. The holy lineages to which all Yazidi shaykhs belonged were
named after nine eponymous shaykhs whom the Yazidi tradition recorded as the companions of ‘Adi b. Musafir in Lalish. The families of Hasan, Fakhr al-Din, Siraj al-Din, Sharaf al-Din, ‘Amad al-Din, Nasir al-Din, Shamsa, Abu Bakr and Mand. These families constituted the pillars of the Yazidi religious establishment in the 19th and 20th centuries although their precise division and denomination vary according to different sources. In Yazidi doctrine each eponymous shaykh came to acquire a holy status in view of his closeness to the Sufi master. The shaykhs also became identified with the nine angels who ruled the world headed by Malak Tawus.27

The majority of the Yazidi shaykhs lived in Shaykhan whose name (land of the shaykhs) echoed their high concentration in the area. The Yazidi Emirate and the princely family were able to supervise shaykhly activities in the area through informal mechanisms of control, especially ritual gatherings. In highly tribalised areas such as Jabal Sinjar the main points of reference for the local shaykhs were the tribes. In Jabal Sinjar the shaykhs were not hierarchically subordinate or dependent on those settled in Shaykhan and relations between members belonging to the same shaykhly families living in the two areas were sporadic. Although the Yazidi shaykhs of Sinjar claimed descent from Shaykhanli holy lineages the genealogical past of each shaykh was confused. It was usually only traceable to his direct local ancestors who came to be linked arbitrarily to legendary Shaykhanli figures. At the beginning of the 20th century even powerful shaykhs like Shaykh Khidr Qirani and Shaykh Khalaf Haskani who were to acquire a prominent role in Sinjari affairs during the period of the British mandate, could not provide coherent genealogies and could not go back for more than three or four generations.28

As remarked above, the role of the Yazidi shaykhs was predominately confined to the religious sphere. They functioned as the spiritual guides of the community, taking charge of religious instruction and of the celebration of marriages and funerals. Occasionally they would be also entrusted with the guardianship of local sanctuaries although it does not seem that over time there developed forms of hereditary control monopolised by certain shaykhly families. In line with a tradition of shaykhly authority also widespread in Muslim milieux, Yazidi shaykhs were often miracle-workers, healers and propitiators. Certain
families of shaykhs specialised in one of these performances: the Shamsa shaykhs were thought to be particularly effective in healing eye diseases while the members of the family of Shaykh Mand were believed to be snake-charmers. Clearly the average tribesmen would be more inclined to accept the authority of a shaykh if the latter was in a position to give proof of being endowed with supernatural powers.

The Yazidi shaykhs of Jabal Sinjar had an established reputation among the local population, especially those who claimed descent from the families of Hasan al-Basri (traditionally the keepers of the Yazidi literate tradition), Sharaf al-Din and Mand. Although historically it is very difficult to establish whether all the shaykhly families established in Sinjar came originally from Shaykhan, it seems that only shaykhs belonging to the family of Sharaf al-Din, whose cult was very widespread in Sinjar, could be considered as a truly Sinjari dynasty given that the greatest majority of its members lived in the Mountain. The existence of a Yazidi tradition which claims that Shaykh Sharaf al-Din was the envoy of Shaykh ‘Adi in Sinjar could perhaps support this view. In the Jabal Sinjar, as in other tribalised areas, the role of the Yazidi shaykhs can be better understood if considered within the frame of the role played by these men of religion among the tribes. A clear connection between the socio-religious function of the shaykhs and their importance in the tribal milieu is perhaps offered by another legendary tradition which associates the shaykhly families of Yazidism to three main tribal groups (Adani, Qatani, Shamsani), the first two clearly recalling the separate legendary lines of the Arabs and the third hinting at a Kurdo–Iranian tribal division. Interestingly this also takes us back to the dichotomy between Arab and Kurdish society existing in the first Yazidiyya discussed in the previous section. In the late 19th and early 20th century Yazidi traditions legitimised relations between the shaykhs and the various Yazidi tribes of Iraq on the basis of a network of tribal affiliations which connected certain shaykhly families to different tribal groups. It can be assumed that these affiliations were the result of an accepted routine which happened to have linked a shaykh and his offspring to a specific tribe or tribal section over time. In practice, however, a shaykh could cater for the needs of a number of Yazidi commoners who belonged to clans or villages outside the traditional jurisdiction of his family. The phenomenon
was very widespread in the 1920s and 1930s as we can infer from Lescot:

\[\text{... il est rare que tous les membres d'une tribu, voire d'un clan relèvent d'un même supérieur; par contre, les murtd de chaque shèx sont dispersés dans les villages et dans le districts parfois très éloignés les uns des autres.}^{32}\]

The scattered distribution of the followers of a *shaykh* was partly the result of one of the main social functions fulfilled by this class of Yazidi priests in the tribal context, 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 *shaykh* 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 the traditional rules of affiliation. Although in theory each tribesmen was linked to a *shaykh* from his birth and was considered his *mulk* (property) until his death a *shaykh*, depending on his own personal qualities, piety, religious zeal and moderation could enlarge his following among the tribal population. Popular consensus increased his personal wealth as each commoner would provide alms on a yearly basis, either in cash or in kind in exchange for the performance of basic religious functions. In the Jabal Sinjar, if a *shaykh* was well established among a tribe, he would also receive a share of water which he usually distributed to his religious protégées.\(^ {33} \) This last point is quite significant as to a certain extent it shows that the power of the *shaykhs* was connected to a mechanism of control of land exploitation which represented the main source of economic power and political prestige in the Mountain. Hence it is clear that the role of the Yazidi *shaykhs* in the tribal milieu was not completely devoid of political implications as powerful *shaykhs* were able to accumulate considerable amounts of wealth as well as to mobilise large sections of the tribal population.

A comparison with certain mechanisms of shaykhly authority as they developed in the Sunni Kurdish milieu is particularly useful as it...
highlights a number of features exclusive to Yazidi shaykhs. By and large the socio-religious functions of the Yazidi shaykhs were not very different from those of the Sunni men of religion who traditionally operated in other areas of the countryside as members of the Naqshbandi or Qadiri brotherhoods. These brotherhoods were Sufi religious orders which had virtually monopolised the religious life of Sunni Kurdistan since the 19th century. Especially among the Naqshbandis a substantial number of laymen were able to acquire shaykhly status by means of initiation which proved to 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 shaykhs and one Qadiri group whose members had no sayyid status, the Talabani, 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 shaykhs.

The Yazidi shaykhs as members of holy lineages generally transmitted their office to their sons or at least to individuals who belonged to the same family group. Understandably, open recruitment to the families of shaykhs in the Sunni Kurdish milieu came as a natural result of the necessity of increasing the following of a particular order. In contrast the Yazidi shaykhly families could count on a limited number of potential followers since their influence was restricted to the Yazidi believers. After the period of Yazidi expansion in the tribal milieu, which ended in the 15th century, Yazidi men of religion did not recruit supporters from other religious communities given the strict enforcement of the Yazidi religious diktat on proselytism. Moreover, the various families of shaykhs were more or less able to control all the Yazidi lay population given that each commoner was a 'customary acquisition' of a shaykh from birth. On the one hand if the existence of Yazidi 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, on the other hand it was also a disadvantage from the point of view of the consolidation of their political power among the tribes, since the shaykhs could not build up matrimonial alliances with local notables and tribal chiefs as often happened in the Sunni Kurdish milieu.

However, the Yazidi shaykhs seem to have had much tighter control
on Yazidi society at large since they were the important reproducers of the Yazidi belief system. They usually monopolised religious instruction in the villages thus providing continuity to a commonality of practice and ritual for the purpose of group identification. In Sinjar in the 1920s the Yazidi shaykhs still instructed their disciples on an individual basis and their houses were the main venues for religious gatherings. This helped to strengthen their personal influence over the commoners. In the Syrian Yazidi enclave of Jabal Sim'an it seems that in the same period certain shaykhs even founded a Yazidi religious school. Their Sunni counterparts generally operated within the structures of specific brotherhoods where they imparted their religious teachings only to those individuals who wanted to join the order. At village level people usually followed the teachings of local mullahs.

Despite the fact that Yazidi shaykhs of Sinjar seemed to have been generally denied access to political authority until the end of the 19th century their position vis-à-vis society at large was very well established. In tribal terms they could cater for the needs of different tribes without necessarily becoming identified with the interests of a specific tribal group. Although clear distinctions did exist between Yazidi shaykhly families, this did not imply that they constituted compact and co-ordinated groups as part of a structured and centralised religious organisation like the Qadiri and Naqshbandi brotherhoods where certain powerful groups of shaykhs like the Barzinji, the Sada' of Nehri and Shaykhs 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 Yazidi shaykhs in Jabal Sinjar is that they worked largely on very individual basis and only the awareness of belonging to a separate 'caste' within Yazidi society must have created a great deal of esprit de corps.

Parallel to the activities of the shaykhs, and central for an understanding of the development of Yazidi affairs in the mandate period, is another Yazidi religious class, that of the faqirs. Unlike the shaykhs the faqirs had no specific religious office vis-à-vis the Yazidi commoners as they were primarily 'Darwishes of Shaykh 'Adi' who led an ascetic life and had only sporadic contacts with the lay population. Their secluded lifestyle, general detachment from worldly affairs and halo
of sacrality which surrounded them, gave legitimation to the *faqirs'*
position in the Yazidi religious hierarchy. It also created a great deal of
group cohesion. The *faqirs* were a highly mobile religious class as they
did not constitute a status group along lines similar to that of the
*shaykhs*. Although membership in the group could be transmitted from
father to son, both members of other religious classes and common-
ers could enter the order provided that they underwent specific
religious training and obtained the final approval of the *mir*. Mem-
bership in the group however could also be transmitted from father
to son, provided that the latter was willing to accept to become a *fa-
quds*. The *faqirs* undoubtedly was seen by both
the religious classes and commoners as a means through which they
could enhance their prestige. It seems that in Shaykhan *faqirs* were
recruited exclusively from *shaykhs* belonging to the Ibrahim Khatni
and 'Ubakr families and from a specific group of the religious classes
of the *pirs*.

By contrast it seems that at the end of the 19th century the Sinjari
*faqirs*, whose recruitment was monopolised by the *faqir* Hamu Shiru,
started to be drawn increasingly from the local Yazidi lay tribal popu-
lation. By the early 1930s this practice had developed to such an extent
that it was reported that virtually any Yazidi commoner, regardless
his personal inclination, character and reputation could become a *fa-
quds*. Political developments which became apparent at the beginning
of the 1920s would indicate that since the second half of the 19th
century the *faqir* class in Jabal Sinjar had become the focus of new
political allegiances which led to the formation of a new tribal group.
This group was entirely composed of *faqirs* and became known as the
Fuqara' tribe. Generally speaking *faqirs* tended to be very cohesive
groups at local level even outside the specific context of Jabal Sinjar.
In Shaykhan they displayed strong group solidarity as staff in charge
of the upkeep of Shaykh 'Adi's tomb. In the Syrian Yazidi enclave of
Jabal Sim'an, where the local *faqirs* were referred to as Qara Bash or
Black Heads, it seems that by the mid-1930s they had developed along
lines similar to those of the Sinjar Fuqara': they started to loose their
specificity as religious group to become a political force organised
along tribal lines.
The Yazidi Kurds and the State: Ottoman Reform

Centralisation

The establishment of direct Ottoman administration in the Mosul province following the downfall of Mamluk rule over the city in 1854 had important implications for the Yazidi communities of Jabal Sinjar and Shaykhan. The Ottoman government became particularly concerned with extending and consolidating its authority in the rural hinterland of Mosul after the local Mamluk dynasty of the Jalilis had taken over the administration of the province for almost a century.42

In the second half of the 19th century centralisation was perceived by the Ottoman government as a necessary step towards the modernisation and survival of the Empire in line with a reform movement first promoted by the Tanzimat (1839–76) and subsequently supported by the Pan-Islamic policies of Sultan 'Abdul Hamid (1876–1909). By and large the Ottomans developed a specific ‘Yazidi policy’ in the context of their concerns vis-à-vis rural separatism and religious particularism which represented a formidable enemy to the stability of the Ottoman state, especially in the heterogeneous society of the Mosul hinterland. Thus reform aimed at furthering the loyalty of specific socio-economic and religious groups living in the area with a view to assuring the viability of Ottoman rule, especially for what concerned the maintenance of public security and the efficient implementation of tax collection.

At the end of the 19th century changes which affected the Yazidi community of Jabal Sinjar, which from then on started to acquire a more prominent role in Yazidi affairs, depended on the more or less direct intervention of the Ottoman government in the areas of Yazidi settlement. During the Tanzimat period communal boundaries proved permeable to state control in northern Iraq. In the Iraqi Jazira, a highly tribalised area populated by Arab nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples, the increased Ottoman presence on the edge of the desert and improved military technology considerably restricted the raiding and khuwa-collecting prerogatives of the Shammar tribe, which since the beginning of the 19th century had imposed its lordship over local nomadic groups. Yazidi banditry which had represented a major
economic resource for the villages of north Sinjar was also considerably reduced. This resulted both in better protection of the caravan routes lying north of Jabal Sinjar and in harsher measures being taken by the government against bands of Yazidi plunderers which could occasionally include inhabitants of the neighbouring Turkoman settlement of Tall 'Afar. However, despite a general improvement of public security the control achieved by the Ottomans over Jabal Sinjar was still confined to certain areas exposed to the military expeditions of the local governors. The results of the various military interventions of the Ottoman government in Sinjar in the 18th and early 19th centuries show that before 1837 the government had no permanent access to northern Sinjar. The fact that the Jalili authorities of Mosul and the Mamluk governors of Baghdad delegated the protection of vital trade routes lying north of Sinjar, especially the Mosul–Nusaybin road, to the Shammar is a clear indication of the weakness of the government authority in the area of Yazidi settlement. However, revenues started to be collected on a more regular basis from some villages of eastern Sinjar 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 in northern Sinjar. There is no evidence which shows that since then and until the 1870s local Yazidi tax-farmers were integrated permanently into the administration.

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 Ottoman government had very much shifted its attention to southern Sinjar where Turkish officials started to be posted on a more or less regular basis. A local Turkish representative was reported in Balad Sinjar as early as 1849 and it seems that the Turkish presence continued until the beginning of World War I. The establishment of a permanent Turkish garrison in Balad which was the largest settlement in the Mountain came mainly as a result of the sudden penetration of the government to the adjoining area of Tall 'Afar which was inhabited by Shi'i Turkomans. Their leaders were city notables and powerful landowners but at the same time retained authority over the sedentary population which was organised along
kin ties. After Hafiz Pasha’s expedition 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. In the 1880s Tall ‘Afar became an administrative unit dependent on the Sinjar qadha.47

Although the influence of the Turkish governors varied a lot and was generally limited to those tribes living in the vicinity of Balad, 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, the Turkish governor of Baghdad, 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.48 After the enforcement of universal conscription in 1854 the Yazidis became liable for military service but there was much resistance to enrolment in the Ottoman army especially in the Sinjari community.

At the beginning of the 1870s the Turkish qaimmaqam of Jabal Sinjar Ahmad Beg approached the chief of the Yazidi tribe of the Musqura, Sufuq Agha, and appointed him Paramount Shaykh of the Mountain, hoping to make him increasingly linked to the local Ottoman administration, especially for purposes of tax-collection. The choice of Sufuq Agha as representative of the Ottoman government in Sinjar was largely dictated by the reputation which the Musqura leadership enjoyed as the leading aghas of an extended tribe which included a significant number of Muslim tribal sections. For a brief period the government was able to extend the collection of revenues to the two powerful Habbabat and Mihirkan tribes, as well as among Sufuq’s followers in the Musqura. 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 to the Paramountcy of Sinjar, 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 Musqura Paramount and as such he became increasingly involved in Sinjari politics. The fact that Hamu’s 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 he 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.49

Hamu Shiru’s almost undisturbed rise to prominence was clearly helped by the fact that by the beginning of the 1890s the influence of the government in south Sinjar started to decrease once again. This was largely an indirect result of the general enforcement of the pan-Islamic policy of Sultan ‘Abdul Hamid in the province of Mosul which had started in the previous decade. A specific scheme to convert the Yazidis of Mosul to Islam seems to have been in place since the early 1880s with the view of assuring their loyalty to the Ottoman state and especially of solving the thorny issue of the enrolment of Yazidis in the army. Although Jabal Sinjar was the primary focus of Ottoman interest in matters concerning conscription given the reputation of military prowess enjoyed by the local tribesmen, the Ottomans targeted the core of the Yazidi Emirate of Shaykhan on the assumption that this would have facilitated the conversion en masse of the community. ‘Umar Wahbi’s attack against Shaykhan in 1892 as commander of a reform force sent from Istanbul to Mosul to crush tribal rebellions in the province provoked the conversion of the Yazidi Mir Mirza Beg and the desecration of the shrine of Shaykh ‘Adi which was turned into a Quranic school. The mir started to be subsidised on a regular basis by the Ottoman government.50

However, contrary to Ottoman expectations, the campaign of the Ottoman general had a determining influence in setting in motion a widespread religious revival in Jabal Sinjar. Yazidi refugees from Shaykhan, both commoners and men of religion, fled to the Mountain in search of shelter and their stories about the atrocities committed by the Muslims in Shaykhan paved the way to vigorous millenarian and anti-Muslim propaganda which started to be carried out by two Shaykhanli religious personalities, Mirza al-Kabari and Alias Khallu who had settled in Sinjar. Slogans of a forthcoming new Yazidi reign of justice and prosperity against Muslim oppression were very effective in mobilising large sections of the local Yazidi population. A
general state of turmoil which threatened to degenerate in open hos­
tilities prompted the intervention in Sinjar of ‘Umar Wahbi who
unsuccessfully tried to penetrate into the Yazidi country from the
northern districts at the end of 1892. A major result of this failed
military expedition was that the faqir Hamu and his followers be­
came the focus of anti-Muslim resistance and increased their military
capacity by seizing a considerable amount of Turkish arms and am­
munition which was to be determinant in their struggle against the
Ottomans during World War I.51 In the following years inter-com­
munal strife raged in the Yazidi Mountain and resulted in the
weakening of the Musqura and Mihirkan tribes which, as they in­
cluded large numbers of Muslims, were traditionally viewed as inclined
to foment Ottoman encroachment in Sinjari affairs.52

By the time Hamu acquired the Paramountcy of Sinjar his follow­
ers had dramatically increased in numbers and they had come to
constitute a compact and organised group which started to be referred
to as the Fuqara’ tribe.53 Among the Fuqara’ the ‘creation’ and preser­
vation of tribal cohesion very much depended on membership in the
faqir religious group to which all the male members of the tribe be­
longed. 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-politi­
cal 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. The rise to power of the religious leader Hamu Shiru at the
end of the 19th century was not a sporadic episode in the history of
Jabal Sinjar but can be inscribed within a wider movement of strength­
ening of Yazidi religious feeling directly linked to events occurring in
Iraqi Shaykhan. Clearly, the religious policies advocated by the Otto­
man reform movement did impinge upon the power structure of the
Yazidi Emirate.

The Yazidi religious revival which occurred in Sinjar had far reach­
ing repercussions among the Iraqi Yazidis as it promoted the political
ascendancy of two other religious leaders, Shaykh Khalaf b. Nasir and
Shaykh Khidr b. ‘Atu who became the temporal chiefs of two power­
ful Sinjari tribes, the Haskan and Qiran. They shared with Hamu Shiru
the fact that they were second generation Sinjaris whose fathers had arrived in the Mountain from Shaykhan around the 1850s. As far as it is possible to ascertain for the first time in the recent history of Sinjar not only did some of the Yazidi tribes came under the control of Yazidi men of religion who replaced their traditional lay aghas but also these new tribal leaders belonged to families which had no established reputation in the Mountain.

At approximately the same time the Sunni Kurdish milieu witnessed similar developments as it was affected by the emergence of the temporal power of a number of families of religious standing. The politicisation of religious authority in Sunni Kurdistan, which had a paramount influence on the emergence of Kurdish nationalism in the 20th century (especially with the Sada' of Nehri of the Dersim vilayat and the Barzan family of northern Iraq), was a response to the void of political authority in the inter-tribal context determined by the downfall of the Kurdish emirates. These were semi-autonomous political units whose full control was regained by the Ottomans between 1834 and 1847 as part of their new policies of centralisation. As Ottoman officials did not succeed in implementing an effective policy of peacekeeping in the Kurdish tribal areas, previously controlled by the tribal structures which supported the lay emirate system, religious leaders came to play a prominent role in the resolution of local conflicts. As a result their authority became increasingly linked to the management of the temporal affairs of particular tribal groups. In the Hamidian period the Pan-Islamic policies of the government utterly strengthened the power of men of religion in Kurdistan. Furthermore, it seems that tribal policies implemented by 'Abdul Hamid in Iraq greatly encouraged the expansion of Sufi orders whose leaders became the privileged intermediaries between the tribes and the Ottoman state.54

The downfall of the Kurdish emirates, which resulted in an increase of shaykhly power in Kurdistan, and the establishment of a religious leadership among the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar can be viewed primarily as a result of the intervention of the Ottoman state which brought back religion as the primary factor in defining inter-communal, intra-communal and state-community relations. The Pan-Islamic policies of the Sultan 'Abdul Hamid obviously had a wide impact on the religious feeling of the Yazidi population of Sinjar, especially of
those tribes which consisted entirely of Yazidi Kurds. It is true that the Sinjaris were less affected by religious persecution than the inhabitants of Shaykhan, 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 atabeg, Badr al-Din Lu’lu’, against the Yazidis of Shaykhan, Sinjar became the focus of anti-government Yazidi resistance as it sheltered groups of refugees from Shaykhan, 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 Shaykh Khalaf, Shaykh Khidr and Hamu Shiru finally consolidated their temporal leadership among the tribes of the Haskan, Qiran and Fuqara’.

In pre-modern Iraq racial affiliation had not emerged as a determinant for the purpose of group identification as a result of the theocratic nature of the Ottoman state. Thus relations between the Yazidis and the Sunni Kurds living outside Sinjar were rather strained. The Yazidis were generally suspicious vis-à-vis the political expansionism of Kurdish tribal *aghas* which by and large had been actively supported by the Ottoman state before and after the collapse of the emirates. Particularly notorious was the attack on Shaykhan in 1832 by the last independent Mir of Rowanduz, Kor Muhammad Beg, who slaughtered more than half of its Yazidi population. In the late 1870s the new religious policies of Sultan ‘Abdul Hamid encouraged many Kurdish tribes (both Sunni and Shi’i) to persecute non-Muslims. Hundreds of Yazidi villages of the Mosul plain and of Shaykhan were attacked by Kurdish *aghas*. Their inhabitants were either killed or compelled to desert their lands which were subsequently occupied by Sunni Kurdish tribesmen.55

**Land Reform**

The application of the 1858 Land Code to northern Iraq started after the appointment of Midhat Pasha to the governorship of Baghdad in 1869. The new code was central to the implementation of Ottoman reform in the rural areas. Its application aimed at sedentarising tribal
groups by linking cultivators more permanently to their land in order to effectively pacify, tax and conscript the inhabitants of the Iraqi countryside.\textsuperscript{56} In the northern Jazira the application of the land code, which theoretically should have conferred private 'ownership' of lands to individual members of the tribes and agricultural communities, was largely unsuccessful as the distribution of title deeds (\textit{tapu}) was effectively implemented only among minor tribal groups like the Jubur and the 'Uqaydat. In Jabal Sinjar the Ottoman government did not implement a consistent policy of \textit{tapu} distribution. Especially after 1869 the distribution of title deeds was carried out in a confused and haphazard way. A number of reasons account for this. First, the Yazidi Mountain from 1869 until 1879 was administered as part of the \textit{mutasarrifiyya} of Dayr al-Zawr and as such was placed under the direct control of Istanbul.\textsuperscript{57} Secondly, communications between the members of the Yazidi tribes and Ottoman officials posted to the \textit{tapu} department of Dayr and Mosul were difficult. The tribesmen, all illiterate and generally refusing contacts outside their kin groups, had no clear idea of concepts such as private property which was being introduced for the first time in the provinces of the empire. They still tended to consider the exploitation of their land as a natural right deriving from their tribal membership.\textsuperscript{58} Thirdly, the application of universal conscription among the tribes of the northern Jazira which started after 1854 very much hindered \textit{tapu} distribution as land registration was generally perceived by the Yazidi cultivators as the first step to their enrollment in the army. As a result at the beginning of the 20th century most Sinjari Kurds did not possess the \textit{tapu} deeds for the land they cultivated. This reflected the general failure of the policy of land distribution in the tribal areas of Iraq where only 20 per cent of the land was registered as \textit{tapu} at the arrival of the British in 1914.\textsuperscript{59}

In the Mosul province those who were in a position to bribe local officials, usually rich Mosulawis or Christian traders, acquired the title deeds of vast tracts of land thus depriving the cultivators of their rights of legal ownership. In the Jabal Sinjar there was not the kind of wholesale appropriation of agricultural lands by city notables which took place in the Yazidi villages of the Mosul plain as a result of the application of the code. However, in southern Sinjar the penetration of the Mosulawi trading class in the form of acquisition of permanent
rights of ownership of agricultural land started to become apparent. Furthermore, some properties became very fragmented as a result of haphazard *tapu* distribution. In a number of instances this constituted a source of conflict among the villagers which became very evident during the period of the mandate as in the case of the Sinjari settlement of Jaddala which will be discussed below. Unfortunately not much information on land conditions is available for the Shaykhan area.
Tribal identity and religious dissidence accounted for much of the strained relationship between the Yazidi communities of Iraq and the Muslim states which ruled the areas of Yazidi settlement after the appearance of the Yazidi movement in the 12th/13th centuries. In the 19th century the political and ideological boundaries drawn by imperial rule in northern Iraq were determined by the nature of the Ottoman state which was Islamic and largely controlled by Sunni Turkish elites. The Ottoman religious and military establishments placed heterodox groups like the Yazidis on the lowest rung within the ideological order of Ottoman society. As the Yazidis were neither Muslims nor recognised as protected communities (ahl al-kitab or Peoples of the Book) they had no defined legal status vis-à-vis the local Ottoman administration. To a great extent state/society relations were not institutionalised but developed informally by means of practices which varied according to specific circumstances. The issue of Yazidi conscription as it developed in the last quarter of the 19th century is a clear example of this. Between 1875 and 1885 the Iraqi Yazidis were allowed to commute military service obligation by paying the badali ‘askariyya, a tax which replaced the old gizya and which was imposed only on the ahl al-kitab communities. After 1885 the strict enforcement of Pan-Islamic policies resulted in intensified attempts at enrolling sections of the community in the Ottoman army thus nullifying established procedures.¹

Over time the nature of Ottoman state power undoubtedly contributed to strengthening Yazidi communal boundaries. In other words
the fact that Yazidi identity became progressively defined by exclusion from the political and moral orders supported by the state is an important factor which explains the survival of this community during the Ottoman period. In this connection Fuad Khouri has also suggested that the 'sectarian ideal' has provided firm bases for the preservation of Yazidi communal structures. In Khuri's view these structures drew legitimation from the Yazidis' historical identification with discrete territorial units, especially Jabal Sinjar and Shaykhan. This approach emphasizes the isolation of the community from the authority of the state and the constraints which this 'exile' imposed on the whole group. Furthermore, it leads inevitably to look at the Yazidis as an almost self-sufficient unit with a semi-independent political and economic status which has been strongly identified with the land they occupy.

Concepts such as seclusion and territorial exclusiveness, if employed as a framework to analyse political and socio-economic developments which affected the Iraqi Yazidis in the 19th and 20th centuries, are rather problematic. On the one hand they underline a static, unitarian and unchanging self-perception of the group. On the other they tend to ignore dynamics of conflict, integration and self-definition occurring among the community and to underplay not only the influence of the state but, very importantly, also that of local society. Unfortunately, the majority of available sources concerning the 19th century record events such as the establishment of direct taxation, tribal rebellions and military occupation. These events, although highlighting an important dimension of community/state relations, do not explain sufficiently local socio-economic, political and cultural realities especially in relation to the important issue of inter-communalism. By contrast evidence concerning the period of the British mandate is more useful and provides a clear indication that the development of Yazidi communalism was by no means exclusive as it reflected centuries of interaction between the Yazidis Kurds and other groups in the heterogeneous society of northern Iraq.
The Other Kurds

Yazidis and Christians

Since the first centuries of the Christian era both Shaykhan and Jabal Sinjar were under the influence of local Christian institutions as they were populated by large Christian communities. Eastern Christianity was generally represented among the populations of the Kurdish areas, especially in central Kurdistan which covers present-day eastern Turkey. In northern Iraq the Kurdish Emirate of Adiabene, whose capital was in the town of Arbil, was ruled by a family which converted to Christianity in the 5th century. With the Islamisation of the region after the 7th century Christianity became progressively marginalised among tribal peoples and remained confined to sedentary groups of agriculturalists. However, the social organisation of tribally organised Christian communities living in Kurdistan such as the Nestorians of Hakkari (also known as Assyrians) and the Jacobite Christians of Tur 'Abidin has often been considered an indication of the Kurdish 'background' of these two groups. In the 19th and 20th centuries these tribal communities spoke a neo-Aramaic dialect and displayed a superior agricultural technology which was usually associated with Christian sedentary communities supposedly of Semitic origin. By and large the greatest majority of Christians living in Kurdistan included sedentary agriculturalists often submitted to Kurdish tribal aghas. Socio-economic differences and religion were more important than ethnic affiliation in determining relations of power. Race became relevant only in the aftermath of World War I when being a Kurd or an Arab acquired a particular political meaning. By the same process in the 20th century many educated Kurds emphasised Christianity as an element of the pre-Islamic identity of the Kurds. This was a reflection of the increasing politicisation of the ethnic question which identified Islam closely with Arabism.

The Christian Churches represented in the area of Yazidi settlement were of Syriac language and tradition. They were divided into the Eastern Syrians, which included the Nestorians and the Uniate Chaldeans, and the Western Syrians, which comprised of the Jacobites and the Uniate Syrian Catholics. The two uniate churches of Iraq emerged as schismatic movements within the Nestorian and Jacobite Churches in the 16th and 18th centuries when they recognised the
authority of the Roman Catholic Church. The expansion the Chaldean and Syrian Catholics was favoured by Catholic missionary endeavours which became particularly apparent in the 18th and 19th centuries. It seems that this Catholic revival was actively supported by the Jalilis of Mosul who attempted to control the prosperous Christian villages of the Mosul plain with the support of the new Chaldean and Syrian Catholic clergy.3

The advance of Catholicism in the Mosul province was also actively promoted by the Dominican Mission of Mosul which was established in the 18th century. The mission was primarily concerned with the non-Catholic Christian communities of the province and did not undertake any major conversion project among the Muslim Kurds in order to avoid any friction with the local Ottoman authorities. Since the early 19th century the Dominican missionaries had taken a keen interest in the Yazidis given an increase in Ottoman religious persecution. Between 1914 and the late 1930s they put forward concrete proposals for the evangelisation of the group. In Jabal Sinjar the conversion projects of the Dominicans were conceived as part of the extension of the activities of the mission towards the Syrian Jazira which after 1920 was under French control. Furthermore during the 1920s Dominican interest in the Yazidis paralleled their efforts at converting to Catholicism the Assyrians settled in northern Iraq who since 1886 were under the control of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian mission. In 1926 two Yazidi children from Shaykhan who belonged to the household of the Yazidi Mir Sa'id Beg joined the mission boarding school of Mar Ya'qub, a Chaldean convent located in the province of Siirt which was opened in 1893 for the specific purpose of educating Assyrian children. In 1928 Father Hugueny, the Superior of the mission, built a chapel dedicated to 'Notre-Dame des Yesidis' in the Shaykhanli village of 'Ayn Sifni as a first step to establish a mission house among the local Yazidi community. In 1933 the Dominican scholar and Kurdologist Thomas Bois envisaged a long-term project for the evangelisation of the community which entailed the despatch of Catholic priests to Shaykhan and eventually the establishment of missionary schools in a number of Yazidi villages. It seems that by 1936 missionary initiatives which aimed at proselytising the Iraqi Yazidis were handed in to the newly-established
Dominican mission of Qamishi in the Syrian Jazira. Clearly the Dominicans shifted their attention to Jabal Sinjar which was closer to the new mission and which since 1914 housed increasing numbers of Christians.4

For centuries the district of Shaykhan had been a centre of Christian settlement as the corpus of Christian tradition on the local Yazidis indicates. The lands lying to the east of the Gomel river, which cut across Shaykhan from north to south, were in fact part of the western section of the old Nestorian diocese of Marga which stretched as far as the Great Zab. West of the Gomel, Shaykhan depended on the diocese of Bu Nuhadra which included the area lying between the Gomel and the eastern bank of the Tigris. Some ecclesiastical chronicles refer to the village of ‘Ayn Sifni and its neighbourhood, which included the valley of Lalish with the sanctuaries of Shaykh ‘Adi and Shams al-Din, as Bet Rustaq which was geographically located in Bu Nuhadra but administered by the Nestorian bishop of Marga until the 7th/8th centuries.5 Syriac traditions suggest that the sanctuary of Shaykh ‘Adi was a Christian church while Muslim sources would indicate that the shrine was originally a mosque.6 The historical Bet Rustaq was renamed Shaykhan in the 15th century as a result of the increase of tombs of Yazidi shaykhs in the area. Shaykhan was an ecological transition zone which linked the mountainous belt of southern Kurdistan to the Mosul plain whose sedentary population was predominantly Christian. The city of Mosul after the Muslim conquest developed as the local stronghold of Sunni Islam. In the 19th century increasing Kurdish tribal migrations from the north and north-east resulted in the disappearance of Arab Bedouin tribes from the Mosul plain.7

In Shaykhan the ethnographic composition of the population was similarly affected by the movements of the Kurdish nomads who attempted to occupy land and exploit resources controlled by local Yazidi, Christian and Muslim agriculturalists. The earliest official statistics concerning the population of the Shaykhan district were compiled in 1947 by the Iraqi government and show a substantial presence of Muslims many of whom were almost certainly nomadic or semi-nomadic Kurds.8 In particular, it seems that a number of sections of the Kurdish nomadic Artushi confederation succeeded in establishing their winter quarters in a number of Yazidi villages where Kurdish chiefs
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had acquired virtual ownership of land. During the summer properties were cultivated by Yazidi peasants under the supervision of a 'police force' which included Artushi tribesmen. The Yazidis shared with the local Christians the status of a peasant population who were submitted to nomadic bellicosity. Both groups were not militarised although Yazidi villages had retained tribal traditions and genealogies. During the years of the British mandate the Christians constituted approximately one-fifth of the population of the district and the majority of them belonged to the uniate church of the Chaldeans.

According to British surveys carried out in 1925 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‘ashiqa, Bahzani and ‘Ayn Sifni. Most interestingly these villages were mainly inhabited by Yazidis belonging to the religious classes and by a substantial numbers of Jacobites and Syrian Catholics.

In Shaykhan local Christian traditions and institutions continued to exist despite the expansion of Yazidism in the area after the 13th century. By contrast the particular circumstances of the Yazidi settlement in Jabal Sinjar contributed greatly to a diversification of Christian/Yazidi relations. As early as the 4th century Sinjar was part of the Nestorian diocese of ‘Ariyabi whose centre was in the town of Nusaybin, an influential Nestorian metropolis which functioned as the centre of the missionary activities towards Persia. After the Muslim conquest of the Jazira in 640 the generally tolerant policy of the Muslims vis-à-vis the Christian communities undoubtedly guaranteed the Nestorians of Jabal Sinjar relative security and protection from the extortions of their new rulers. The Sinjari Christians were allowed to profess their faith and to retain their former rights over their land and properties. The prosperity of the Christian community of Sinjar in the early Islamic period is also clearly indicated by the prestige which a number of pre-Islamic Christian centres of learning and spiritual retreat such as Dayr Batura, Dayr al-Kabir and Dayr Sarjis acquired in Islamic times.

The Yazidi colonisation of the Mountain can be divided into two main periods: a first period of consolidation of Yazidi presence between the 13th and 17th centuries and the second, after the 17th
century, which coincided with the establishment of Ottoman rule in northern Iraq. Between the 13th and 17th centuries the Yazidis seem to have gradually occupied the areas where the Christian population was settled. Although the character of this occupation is not well known, it can be inferred that it was not the result of a sudden military conquest. Instead it can be defined as a gradual process of penetration by Yazidi tribal groups which escaped persecutions of both religious and socio-economic nature from the Mosul plain and Shaykhan. Local Christian groups were able to retain their identity until the early Ottoman period while the Yazidis slowly developed organised village communities with a strong emphasis on kinship relations.

Although scanty historical evidence exists on the early Yazidi settlements in Jabal Sinjar, the presence of Kurdish groups can be inferred from a number of local Yazidi traditions and from records concerning Shaykhan. A Yazidi myth reported by a Sinjari story-teller at the beginning of the 1930s portrays a Yazidi hero Eliye Sher involved in fighting a local non-Kurdish non-Yazidi population settled in the Mountain. This legend presents the Yazidi occupation of Sinjar as an epic of conquest and, more importantly, underlines the close interaction between the two groups. Some oral traditions circulating among the Yazidi tribes of eastern Sinjar attributed the diffusion of Yazidism in the Jabal to Sharaf al-Din Muhammad (d.1256), an historical character, son of Shaykh Hasan al-Din, chief of the Shaykhan group murdered by the Zangid Atabeg of Mosul Badr al-Din Lu'lu' in 1246.

The Yazidi group of Shaykhan continued to suffer widespread persecutions at the hands of Badr al-Din who in 1254 slaughtered the followers of Shaykh 'Adi and burnt 'Adi's bones after having desecrated his tomb in the valley of Lalish. It is most likely that the first groups of Yazidi refugees left Shaykhan for Jabal Sinjar in this period given that the Mountain enjoyed a relative degree of autonomy from Mosul. The local Sinjari leaders could take advantage of the Zangid–Ayyubid dispute over the northern Jazira and use Ayyubid attempts to occupy Sinjar as a political weapon against the Mosulawi Zangids. Badr al-Din's harsh treatment of the Shaykhanli 'Adawiyya (as the followers of 'Adi were called in contemporary sources) was the result of their refusal to pay taxes to the treasury of the Zangid ruler. By contrast,
the roots of the widespread anti-Yazidi and anti-Christian military campaigns carried out by Sunni Kurdish tribesmen in the same period are not clear.16

The Badr al-Din persecutions, the attacks of Kurdish nomadic tribes and Mongol incursions into northern Iraq, which resulted in the capture of Mosul in 1262, give a full picture of the extreme political instability of the area which created the conditions for the beginning of a Yazidi diaspora towards Jabal Sinjar. In the second half of the 14th century the Muslim traveller Ibn Battuta reported that groups of Kurdish tribal people were well established in the north of Jabal Sinjar, although he did not mention the Yazidis specifically. Balad Sinjar, Karsi and Jaddala, the main villages of Jabal Sinjar which in the early Ottoman period were to become Yazidi strongholds, were predominantly inhabited by Christian communities. A century later there were at least 30 villages with some settled Yazidis among their population and in the 16th century the lands of northern Sinjar were known as Saçla Dagh, that is the mountain of the Saçilu people, Kurdish Yazidi nomads thought to have eight moustaches.17

It was after the establishment of Ottoman rule over the northern Jazira in the 16th century that Sinjar became a ‘Yazidi Mountain’ as the first major Ottoman military expedition in 1638 seems to indicate. Given the size of the forces mobilised by the Wali of Diyar Bakr, Malak Ahmad Pasha, and Yazidi losses we can assume that at that time the number of Kurds settled in the Mountain was rather high.18 Ottoman persecutions in the Shaykhan 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 and completed the process of the creation of a Yazidi enclave in Sinjar.19

In the first half of the 17th century the Nestorian diocese of Sinjar ceased to be mentioned in ecclesiastical records. The disappearance of official Christian representatives from the Mountain was partly a result of the increasingly unstable position of the Nestorian Church in the area north of Sinjar as a result of the advance of the Jacobites. In fact the once large Nestorian community of Nusaybin was drastically
reduced in size after 1644. However, it is also likely that Christianity started to lose ground in the Mountain as a consequence of the expansion of the Yazidi religion. An interesting indication of the threat posed by Yazidi proselytism can be found in the cry for help sent by some Sinjari Christian notables to the Nestorian Patriarch Eliyas of Nusaybin in 1660. They asked for the nomination of a local Christian representative as well as the despatch of priests to cater for the needs of the faithful and reinvigorate religious feeling among the population. In this context the Suryani source explicitly mentions for the first time the presence of Yazidi men of religion.20

Unfortunately available sources do not clarify whether the Christian community of Sinjar survived the first centuries of Ottoman rule. However, by the end of the 19th century a rich Christian urban elite whose interests were mainly linked to trade had clearly emerged in Jabal Sinjar. The Christian merchants were settled in the main market centres of the Mountain (Balad, Jaddala, Bardahali and Sakiniyya) and operated in close connection with local Yazidi aghas. They served as the main commercial links between Sinjar and Mosul for the export of agricultural and pastoral products and were essentially outside the Yazidi tribes and the tribal system. Their background would indicate that they 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 ‘urban’ character of the community’s lifestyle and economic activities, the fairly small number of its members (whose majority were originally from outside Sinjar and especially from Mosul), their lack of integration in the rural milieu and the absence of active Christian institutions in the area show that the Sinjari Christians had arrived fairly recently in the Mountain. Most likely this was a result of the commercialisation of agriculture in the Mosul province in the 18th century which led prominent Mosulawi merchants to make increasing investments in Jabal Sinjar. It is likely that after the 13/14th centuries the Christian settlers of Jabal Sinjar progressively developed strong socio-economic and cultural links with the Kurdish newcomers. Further, a wave of conversions to Yazidism might have occurred, a fact which could explain the ‘Kurdification’ of the old Christian settlers and their integration into the Yazidi tribal system.
Towards the end of the 19th century, when the religious policies of the Ottoman government resulted in widespread religious persecutions against the Iraqi Yazidis, many members of the community started to view conversion to Christianity as a viable alternative to both Islamisation and conscription. By the beginning of World War I this option was no longer viable as in 1915/1916 the Ottomans initiated widespread persecutions against the Christian communities living in Mardin, Nusaybin and Jazira b.‘Umar with the support of a number of Sunni Kurdish tribes. In this climate groups of Christian refugees, which included Armenians, Chaldeans, Jacobites and Nestorians, made their way to Jabal Sinjar hoping to find shelter among the local Yazidi community. By 1916 some 900 hundred people took permanent residence in Balad and in the village of Bardahali which had by then become the headquarters of the Fuqara’ tribe headed by Hamu Shiru. The Fuqara’ chief became the main promoter of the settlement of Christians in the Mountain by granting them his protection in accordance with a Sinjari custom which encouraged the settlement of Christians provided that a local Yazidi agha guaranteed for them.

The arrival and permanent settlement of Christian groups, which came to constitute approximately 4 per cent of the entire population of Jabal Sinjar, was of extreme importance in determining the future position of Hamu Shiru. Their presence also affected substantially Yazidi inter-tribal relations and the last phase of Yazidi/Ottoman confrontation which ended with the Ottoman siege of the Mountain in the summer of 1918. In fact the last Ottoman occupation of Sinjar was prompted by Hamu’s refusal to hand in all the Christian refugees to the Turkish authorities.

The most important result of Hamu’s pro-Christian policy was that it allowed the Fuqara’ chief to seize control of Balad Sinjar, the local capital of the Mountain and its most important commercial centre. By sheltering Christian refugees he gained the support of the local Christian merchants which was based in the town, thus acquiring increasing economic and political prestige. Sometime after 1916 he started to act as mediator between the Christian traders of Balad Sinjar and the rural hinterland of the Mountain. The aghas of the Habbabat tribe, who had previously monopolised deals between merchants and
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Tribes, became subordinated to the Fuqara' chief and started to look for new sources of political and economic support among the Qiran and Samuqa tribes, two semi-nomadic groups settled in eastern Sinjar. Furthermore once Hamu seized Balad he started to act as arbiter in local disputes, especially over crucial issues involving the allotment of pastures, agricultural lands and water. This clearly strengthened his patronage network and personal following according to patterns of development of shaykhly authority discussed above.25

Protection granted to the Christian refugees was also important in the context of Hamu's promotion of a widespread Yazidi religious revival. The Christian refugees were clearly looking for protection from Muslim abuses and as such very inclined to support a stronger sense of militant resistance to Ottoman interference cemented by Yazidi religious feeling. In this connection the arrival of the Christians led to a major inter-tribal rearrangement which had started since Hamu appointed himself to paramountcy of the Mountain in the 1890s.

After 1915 friction between Muslims and Yazidis increased dramatically and contributed greatly to the creation of internal discord between tribes like the Habbabat, Musqura and Mihirkan which also included Muslim Kurds, traditionally perceived as potential allies of the Ottoman government. Although both the Musqura and Mihirkan tribes were divided by internal factionalism, by 1916/1917 it seems that the majority of their 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 Albu Mutaywid and the Yazidi Haskan was led by Dawud al-Dawud, the Yazidi leader of the Mihirkan, a powerful tribal agha whose opposition to Hamu Shiru was to prove vital in checking the ambitions of the Fuqara' chief during the mandate.26

Inter-communalism

In the 1920s the population of Jabal Sinjar was extremely fragmented in terms of racial 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. The largest community of extremist Shi‘is, the Babawat tribe, were so closely related to the Yazidi tribe of the Habbabat that the names of their sections were usually omitted in tribal lists which directly included Babawat tribesmen among the Habbabat. The presence of Yazidis and Muslims in the same tribal units reflects an important feature of Kurdish tribalism which was represented in Jabal Sinjar. It was particularly evident in mixed tribal confederations living outside the Mountain such as the Milli and the Heverkan which included Muslims, Yazidis and Christians.

Part of the Arab population of Jabal Sinjar was also tribally organised and lived on the flatlands of eastern and south eastern Sinjar. However, unlike the Yazidis, the Arab tribes of Sinjar did not display such religious variety since they were usually composed of Sunnis. There were also a number of Sunni Arabs whose lives and activities were organised outside a tribal context. By 1932 they were concentrated in Balad Sinjar and shared with sections of the local Christian population the status of a rich urban elite whose interests were mainly linked to trade.

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 number 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 tribal people were settled in the Mountain. On that occasion British statistics were particularly concerned in highlighting the racial and religious distribution of the population of Sinjar: a majority of Yazidi Kurds (approximately 17,500) with large numbers of Muslim Arabs, Sunni Kurds and extremist Shi‘i who were most likely of Kurdish ethnic affiliation. The Yazidi tribal population was concentrated in the hilly districts of northern Sinjar where villages were almost entirely Yazidis. In the lowlands of southern Sinjar Yazidis mixed frequently with Muslims and Christians.

The presence of Sunni Kurds can be explained by substantial migrations from Kurdistan between the 16th and the late 19th centuries
which are particularly relevant for the tribal history of the area. In this connection the majority of Sunni Kurdish tribesmen living in Sinjar in the 1920s were not newcomers but in many instances they 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 arrival of the Yazidis. Similarly some sections of the Habbabat claimed descent from the Arab Muslim Tayy tribe.31

Furthermore in the 19th century the intervention of the Ottoman state in Sinjar seems to have impinged directly upon the religious composition of some mixed tribal units as a result of conversions, both from Yazidism to Islam and vice-versa. 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 tribe it seems that around the 1850s its members all converted to Islam as a result of the intervention of the government and remained Muslims until at least the 1940s.32

The Kurdish Muslim population of the Mandikan tribe were grouped in separate sections which did not usually include Yazidis, following a pattern of tribal organisation very common in Jabal Sinjar. This generally prevented conflicts of religious character although it seems that the historical background of the tribe with its marked Muslim influence provided the base for peaceful co-habitation of its Muslim and Yazidi members. Among the Musqura 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 Musqura 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 Musqura and Habbabat were not considered tribal members and generally lived grouped together in certain villages. However, the Babawat group living in the proximity of Balad Sinjar provides the most striking example of the ways in which the development of shared practices and rituals was far more relevant than actual belief-systems for purposes of social identification among the populations of Jabal Sinjar. Although the Babawat’s veneration for 'Ali placed them in direct doctrinal antagonism with the Yazidis (whose cult for Yazid b. Mu'awiya was particularly strong in Sinjar) they established strong socio-religious links with the Habbabat tribe. They made offerings to the Yazidi men of religion living in Balad, and to the sacred image of Malak Tawus when paraded in the district of Sinjar. They also participated in Yazidi religious ceremonies. Furthermore a contemporary observer noted that Babawat tribesmen could not be generally distinguished from the local Yazidi population on the basis of their clothing, language or eating habits, the last point probably indicating that they had adopted Yazidi food taboos. At the level of the tribal leadership political alliances did play a role in the definition of the attitudes of a number of 'Ali Ilahi leaders. They distanced themselves from any Yazidi influence and retained strong political links with the Shi'i Turkoman community of the neighbouring settlement of Tall 'Afar who were traditionally inclined to support Ottoman expansionism towards the Yazidi Mountain.

In spite of the complex and heterogeneous tribal affiliations existing in Sinjar, Kurdish and Arab tribalism were separated because tribes were grouped strictly along ethnic lines, rather than religious affiliation. Sunni Arab tribal enclaves existed in the Sinjari villages of Zamani, Khatuniyya and Wardiyya. These included sections of the Arab Bedouin tribes of the Juhaysh, Tayy and Khawatina which traditionally gravitated in the plains of the Jazira. Their presence was often a result of the Yazidi practice of entrusting flocks to Bedouin tribesmen on a seasonal basis which led to the permanent establishment of Bedouin tribal communities in the Mountain.

The boundaries of the Yazidi tribes could not generally accommodate Arab tribal communities as the history of the Arab Muslim tribe
of the Khawatina indicates. The Khawatina were a numerous group of mixed Bedouin origin who originally came from the village of Khatuniyya which was located in the far north-western corner of Sinjar outside the geographical boundaries of the Mountain. Towards the end of the 19th century some Khawatina groups settled in the rich Sinjari villages of Jaddala and Wardiyya which during the period of the British mandate were progressively occupied by Yazidi tribes. The Yazidi occupation of land controlled by the Khawatina did not result in the integration of Arab tribesmen into the Yazidi tribal system, whether as equals or subordinates. Land disputes which occurred in the 1920s would indicate that the majority of the Khawatina living in Sinjar were ousted out of their lands and forcibly resettled in other Sinjari villages or sent back to Khatuniyya.35

Although Arab communities and Yazidi tribal groups remained physically separated, they often established relations of mutual dependence. A close socio-economic symbiosis linked the Yazidi Fuqara’ to the Arab tribe of the Albu Mutaywid whose members were hired on a regular basis by the Hamu Shiru as cultivators of Yazidi lands. In the 1920s, unlike the Khawatina, Albu Mutaywid tribesmen were allowed to remain on their lands provided that they paid annual tribute in kind to the Fuqara’ chief.36

Membership of and participation in the life of the Yazidi tribes of Jabal Sinjar was generally speaking limited to Kurdish tribesmen but was certainly not exclusive to the Yazidis. In this heterogeneous diaspora community there clearly existed a sense of Kurdishness which was reproduced by the multi-confessional Yazidi tribal system. Linguistic unity, that is the usage of the Badhinani variant of the Kurmanji dialect, and a militant clannish tradition of village communities in mountainous areas clearly permeated the ethos of the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar.37 This tradition clearly converged in a clear identification with land and territory which constituted the kernel of Kurdish tribalism in the Mountain.
Communities and Tribes

The Yazidi Tribes

Migrations in the 19th Century

Precise information concerning the Yazidi and Muslim people who emigrated to Sinjar first became available from the middle of the 19th century together with some general references to the Yazidi tribes already established in the Mountain. Tribes are seldom mentioned in the few available 19th-century travel accounts on Sinjar. Thus the presence of tribal groups can be inferred from later studies on Sinjari tribalism. However, it is only at the beginning of the 20th century that the religious and ethnic composition of the Sinjari population and the territorial distribution of its different communities can be detailed more precisely.38

By and large, the majority of the tribes which were to play an important role in 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, Samuqa 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 very exposed to the attacks of the Ottoman governors of Mosul; the Muslim–Yazidi Mandikan, the ‘Ali-Ilahi Babawat, and the Musqura. The Musqura were the only Yazidi tribe whose extra-Sinjari origin can be easily recognised from the names of the two clans of the Mala Khalata and Dunbali which echoed the names of the famous 16th-century Yazidi tribes of the Khaladi and Dunbali Bakht.39

By the beginning of the 19th century the majority of the tribal population of the Kurdish tribes of Sinjar was Yazidi although conversions to Islam would occasionally occur. In the course of the 19th century 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 these immigrants contributed to the modification of existing patterns of tribal alliances, they strengthened the position of the Kurdish–Yazidi community of Sinjar to a certain extent by reinforcing the idea of Sinjar as the privileged homeland for the Yazidi
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diaspora.

A first wave of refugees came from the area known as Buhtan, located north of the Jabal Tur in the vilayat of Diyar Bakr. Until the middle of the 19th century Buhtan constituted the third major Yazidi enclave after Shaykhan and Sinjar. At the beginning of the century there were some 6,000 Yazidis, together with a substantial number of Nestorians and Armenians, living between Arzun and Jazira b. 'Umar. The social organisation of the Buhtani Yazidi was similar to that of their Sinjari counterparts as they were sedentary agriculturalists organised along tribal lines. Their progressive migration towards Jabal Sinjar in the 1840s coincided with an advance of the Christian Jacobites in the area who seem to have gradually replaced a number of old Nestorian communities. More importantly it primarily came as a result of the downfall of the Buhtani Kurdish-Yazidi Emirate of Ridwan whose Yazidi leader, Mirza Agha, ruled over a mixed population of Yazidis, Muslims 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 reprisals. By the 1860s the Yazidi population of the vilayat of Diyar Bakr was drastically reduced in size and twenty years later a Dominican missionary based in Siirt reported that Yazidi settlements were confined to the banks of the Tigris.

The most important of the Buhtani groups to arrive in Sinjar was the Sharqiyyan, a Yazidi clan whose members often associated with the mixed tribal confederation of the Milli. Once settled in Sinjar they were to form the first nucleus of the Fuqara' tribe. At much the same time other tribesmen affiliated to the powerful tribal confederation of the Heverkan moving around Buhtan and the Jabal 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 1930s, although they were never able to achieve territorial unity.

In the 19th century Yazidi migrations to Jabal Sinjar were not confined to the tribal milieu. A second major influx of refugees included members of the Yazidi religious classes who fled from Shaykhan as a result of Turkish and Kurdish persecutions. Between 1830 and 1845 Turkish governors and Kurdish aghas repeatedly attacked Shaykhan. Although the government had not yet consistently started his
conversion policies, many members of the Yazidi religious establishment were either killed or converted to Islam to avoid death. By the 1890s when the religious policy of the government had become more articulate and effective in the context of the Pan-Islamic movement of the Hamidian period, many shaykhs, pirs and faqirs were forced to seek shelter in Sinjar. Many religious men in Shaykhan converted to Islam, especially among the high religious ranks, after the arrival of General 'Umar Wahbi Pasha's army in 1892 which resulted in the conversion of the Yazidi mir. It seems that before the military expedition Muslim missionaries together with the mufti of Diyar Bakr were sent to the area in an attempt to convince the Yazidi religious classes that conversion to Islam was their only choice of survival.

The integration into the tribes of many Yazidi men of religion who arrived in Sinjar in the second half of the 19th century occurred quite differently from that of the commoners who would usually join tribal groups to which they were related. Yazidi priests acted outside the context of traditional tribal loyalties. In Sinjar men of religion could, according to convenience and circumstance, join existing tribes, constitute their own groups, or control different groups acting as intermediaries in the resolution of disputes between conflicting sections. This versatility, which was very much favoured by the widespread religious revival set in motion by Ottoman persecutions, led to the emergence of a priestly class which occupied paramount positions in tribal milieux. By the end of the 19th century Shaykh Khalaf b. Nasir became the leader of the Haskan tribe, Shaykh Khidr b. 'Atu acquired prominence over the Qiran and the faqir Hamu Shiru established his own tribal group, the Fuqara' tribe.

Yazidi Tribalism

It can be inferred that a tribal organisation had existed in Sinjar since the earliest Kurdish colonisation of the Mountain. The new settlers arrived from Kurdistan in small groups which were usually part of larger Yazidi or Sunni Kurdish tribal units. Once settled in the Mountain these groups tended to maintain their former life-style and social organisation. However, given the lack of historical evidence, it is not
clear whether some changes took place as a result of the process of adaptation to the specific territorial and socio-economic conditions of the Jabal. For many of the earlier observers of Sinjari tribalism the idea of tribe was closely associated to the pastoral nomadism practised by the Bedouin Arab confederations of the Jazira lowlands. Munro Kennedy McLeod, a Royal Air Force chaplain who visited Sinjar in the 1920s, clearly expressed his disappointment when discussing the social organisation of the Kurdish community of Sinjar:

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.45

In Jabal Sinjar kinship ideology represented the basis of the socio-economic and political organisation of a peasant population who lived grouped in village communities. Tribalism in Jabal Sinjar could be recognised in structural elements, political attitudes and cultural parameters.46 The word usually employed to indicate a Yazidi tribe was that of ‘ashira, an Arabic word used all over Kurdistan both to define the Kurdish tribes and, when relevant, to emphasise the tribal status of their members as opposed to groups of non-tribal Kurdish people.47 In some cases the word ‘ashira was also used as a synonym for ‘confederation’ and hence described groups of different tribes loosely connected by social and political links. However, the fact that the factions of some Kurdish nomadic tribes generally enjoyed a high degree of independence from one another may have led some Western observers to the conclusion that they were tribes on their own.48 As will be shown later, the Yazidi ‘ashira 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 Yazidi tribes were traditionally divided into two main groups: Jawana and Khurkan. This partition was first mentioned by Dr Forbes in 1834, but it is likely that the terms Jawana and Khurkan were employed by the local population long before. The fact that in Sinjari tradition the Jawana are associated with the Shaykhanli Shaykh Sharaf
al-Din Muhammad who is believed to have spread the Yazidi religion in Sinjar in the 13th century could partly confirm this assumption. The Fuqara’ were not included in either of these two groups despite the fact that they were tribally organised. Their special religious status and the fact that they constituted themselves as a tribal group in the 19th century contributed to set them apart from the these two main tribal divisions.

Perhaps at some stage of the history of Sinjari inter-tribal relations the division between Jawana and Khurkan had political relevance and reflected the existence of two opposing factions, as suggested by a Yazidi informer. 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 ‘Jawana’ 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 Jawana and Khurkan to emphasise 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: Jawana were the sedentary cultivators and gardeners, Khurkan the semi-nomadic shepherds.

The Jawana 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 and occupied 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 entailed seasonal migrations towards the Jazira plain. Hence it appears that the Jawana/Khurkan division corresponded primarily to a territorial division of the tribes since it referred mainly to the different lifestyles of their population which was determined by the nature of the resources available. The terms Jawana and Khurkan came to be associated over time with the tribal units which occupied certain areas.
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The fact that they continued to be used even when entire tribes or tribal sections had moved away from their original lands indicates that a tight relationship had been established between tribes and their original land of settlement. 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 Jawana and Khurkan crossed tribal and territorial boundaries: members of the same tribe could dwell in both Jawana 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 illustrates well 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, Samuqa and Qiran, whose settlement followed a north-south direction along the western ridge of the Mountain. They included exclusively Yazidi tribesmen organised in different sections and as a general rule members of various sections of the tribe shared the same villages. Some groups of Haskan, which together with the Qiran represented the most powerful pastoral tribe of the Mountain in the 1920s, were settled among the Jawana since they were affiliated to the Mihirkani 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 Mihirkani although it seems that its members were still aware of their Haskan origin.

Minor Khurkani groups were the Mandikan, Chalkan, Chilkan, Kurkurkan, Rashakan and Haywiriyya. 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. Similarly, members of
the other two tribes settled in eastern Sinjar, the Rashakan and Haywiriyya, lived among the Jawana but were considered Khurkani. They were identified with the Yazidi pastoral tribes of western Sinjar: they shepherded the cattle of the sedentary agriculturalists as well as being owners of cattle themselves.\textsuperscript{55} 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 Samuqa tribe. There was also a group of tribesmen called Dukhiyan who lived close to the Kurkani lands in the village of Karsi. Their three main factions 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 Bahramiyya tribe of Kurdistan.\textsuperscript{56}

The tribal map of the Jawana appears to be less fragmented since it included only three major tribes; Habbabat, Mihirkan and Musquara. Generally speaking Jawana 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 land, resources and tribal people. It is mainly for this reason that in the course of time their 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 land 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 Jawana 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 Jawana were more exposed to social contacts with non-Yazidis. Their lands were located in the proximity of Tall 'Afar, more accessible from the Jazira plain and were more exposed to the migrations of tribal
people from Kurdistan because of their situation near the Mosul plain.

In the 1930s the Habbabat had a majority of Yazidis with 95 families of Sunni Kurds together with 210 families of 'Ali-Ilahi Babawat tribesmen. The Habbabat were generally settled around Balad Sinjar and two of its sections shared the village of Bakran with the Mihirkan. The position of the Habbabat in the land and villages they controlled was rather unstable. They had settled in Balad only around the 1800s and subsequently faced the territorial expansion of the Fuqara' tribe who had compelled the Habbabat tribesmen to migrate towards marginal areas around the capital at the beginning of the 20th century.

The Mihirkan tribe included among its population more than 90 per cent 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 1930s the Mihirkani groups appeared so tightly organised 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 Musqura 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 were tightly concentrated in a number of villages located in narrow valleys. Like the Mihirkanis most Musqura 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.

Although the majority of the members of the Fuqara' tribe lived in two villages located in Khurkani lands (Bardahali in the north-west and Jaddala in the south) the group was not usually included among either the Jawana or Khurkan given the recent establishment of this tribal community. Fuqara' tribesmen belonged to a number of Yazidi
groups who had arrived in Jabal Sinjar in the second half of the 19th century. Theoretically all members of this tribal community belonged to the priestly order of the *faqirs*, to which entry was automatic by birth but which also admitted disciples by initiation. However, the Faqir Hamu Shiru created a new notion of tribal cohesion which centred upon the attributes of *faqirdom* but was heavily reliant on existing tribal solidarities. In the 1930s a large part of the Fuqara' were still claiming to be linked to the Sharqiyyan tribe, a section of the Milli tribal confederation which had settled in Sinjar in the second half of the 19th century. Furthermore the leading section of the tribe, the Mala Shiru, claimed to have originated from the Dinadiyya tribe of Shaykhan some of whose sections were already settled in Sinjar in the late 18th century. In this connection during the period of the mandate Hamu Shiru consistently claimed to be a Dinadi chief. The personal prestige of the first nucleus of *faqirs* who gathered around Hamu Shiru 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 1900s. Marriages were arranged between Hamu's followers and members of other Sinjari groups. Membership in 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. By 1932 the Fuqara' tribe in Sinjar consisted of 240 families divided into six factions. Sinjari *faqirs* belonging to sections of the tribes based in Jaddala and Bardahali were also settled in other villages but maintained close political and economic links with Hamu Shiru and the Mala Shiru, the leading group of the tribe whose members were settled in Jaddala and Bardahali.

At the beginning of the mandate the economic activities of the Fuqara' were diversified. They had started to develop in the early 1900s when the first groups of Yazidi *faqirs* led by Hamu Shiru began to constitute themselves as an economically independent group. They settled in the area, became agriculturalists as well as cattle breeders and acquired large flocks of cattle. They established close links with the Christian traders in Balad, Jaddala and Bardahali which became essential for the increase of their economic power. In comparison with other tribes the Fuqara' did not control large areas of the
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countryside. The lands they cultivated were mainly located around the principal villages and did not generally extend to the rural districts. This essentially 'urban' settlement of the Fuqara' tribesmen came mainly as a result of their late 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, Musqura 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. 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 andfeuds involving Yazidi tribesmen.

During the period of the mandate the Fuqara' were the richest and the most powerful tribe of Jabal Sinjar. In the 1920s the close alliance between the Fuqara' and the British authorities allowed this tribal group to occupy the rich village of Jaddala after a long dispute with the Arab Khawatina and to increase the base of their economic power thanks to the substantial monthly subsidy allotted by the British to Hamu Shiru. At present the descendants of Hamu Shiru, and especially his grandson Khidr b. Khudayda b. Hamu Shiru, have a high religious status in the community as a result of the political authority acquired by the family in the 1920s and 1930s.

In the 20th century the Yazidis of Jabal Sinjar 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. A comparison with other forms of tribal organisation existing in Kurdistan is very useful indeed as it contributes to define the peculiarities of Kurdish tribalism as it developed in Jabal Sinjar and to relate these peculiarities to the largely non-Islamic milieu within which they developed. The internal structure of the Kurdish tribes living outside Sinjar presents various degrees of complexity, as those examples which have been studied and analysed in detail show. Differences in tribal organisation 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. However, there are some common features which can be considered as fundamental to the Kurdish way of life and which can be attributed to the Yazidi tribal community of Jabal Sinjar. Thus Van Bruinessen, after having denied the existence of a ‘typically Kurdish’ form of social organisation, 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 organisation.’

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 the notions of territory, economy and kinship which constituted the backbone of the patterns of social organisation mentioned by Van Bruinessen. However, identification with both land and productive activities was rather complex and could shift over time. As noted in the context of the main division between the Jawana 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 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 Sakiniyya 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 in the period of the mandate. As far as economic activities were concerned, the tribe represented an important unit but the centres of the economic life of the Mountain were the villages especially among the sedentary groups of eastern Sinjar. 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 1920s and 1930s divisions along tribal lines were still very evident at the level of individual villages and contemporary sources identify villagers by their tribal affiliation. Tribal identity acquired its
full relevance in times of conflict when people responded only to sources of tribal authority.\textsuperscript{68}

An analysis of the internal structure of the Yazidi tribes is particularly relevant to highlight the political meaning attached to Sinjari tribalism. In the tribes the smallest social unit was the household (\textit{usra}) which grouped members belonging to the same family group. A group of several households constituted a \textit{bra}, 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 \textit{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. Hence the \textit{bra} was primarily a social unit 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 \textit{bav}, which included greater or lesser numbers of \textit{bra} and corresponds to the level of social organisation normally occupied by the clan. This tribal division based on Roger Lescot’s personal observation in the 1930s is by and large confirmed by a contemporary Yazidi informant living in Sinjar. It seems, however, that currently \textit{bra} is used for the social unit described by Lescot as \textit{bav} and vice-versa.\textsuperscript{69}

The \textit{bav} rather than the \textit{‘ashira} represented the primary political unit of the Mountain. In the context of the same \textit{‘ashira} different \textit{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-World War I history of Sinjar. For example in March 1925, during the rebellion of the Mihirkani chief Dawud al-Dawud which created a great deal of turmoil among the Yazidi tribes, sections of the Qiran tribe living in the rich villages of Majnuniyya and Wardiyya controlled by the Fuqara’ sided with the Fuqara’ chief Hamu Shim and refused to recognise the authority of their ‘own’ tribal leader Shaykh Khidr. On this occasion they repeatedly attacked Qirani tribesmen living in the neighbouring village of Sakiniyya and pledged allegiance to Hamu Shim hoping to obtain land and water concessions from the powerful Fuqara’ leader.\textsuperscript{70}
The stability of these new alliances could vary according to a number of circumstances but the fact that in the 1920s and 1930s some names of bavs of the Yazidi tribes still recalled the names of other tribal units living in Sinjar is evidence of how widespread this practice was in the past and that it could lead to the formation of permanent coalitions. 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. The flexibility of the bav system allowed the integration of many refugee groups in the socio-economic and political structures of the Mountain very quickly. Indeed it responded very well to the needs of a diaspora community.

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 they usually lived concentrated in the same areas. In the case of the Samuqa tribe, for example, all its tribal sections were concentrated in the village of Bara which allowed a better co-ordination of their movements in the season of their pastoral migrations. In this connection Yazidi bavs belonging to semi-nomadic tribes represented migratory units along lines similar to the khels of major tribal confederations living outside Sinjar. 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 maximise 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. 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.

It is always difficult to compare the terminology used to define the levels of organisation of Kurdish tribes. Different names can be
employed in different areas and the same term can assume slightly
different meanings according to various contexts. However, it seems
that in the case of the Yazidi tribes of Sinjar the bays were veritable
clans, both from a structural and functional point of view (large size
of the groups, common political action, diversified territorial distri­
bution of its members). In Sinjar major bays 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 line­
ages usually derived their power from a 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 leg­
itimised by religion: the various fractions of the tribe were named
after prominent Yazidi faqirs who lived or were still living in Sinjar.
The bays of the Habbabat tribe acquired the status of mala as a result
of their political and economic influence which increased consider­
ably at the beginning of the 18th century when the tribe occupied
Balad and its surroundings. In principle the 'nobility' of the mem­
ers 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 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 dominant groups
was a common practice in Sinjar. As a result the genealogical past of
many tribes was confused and among Yazidi tribal leaders there pre­
vailed a rather 'pragmatic' attitude vis-à-vis the background of their
tribes. 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 Musqura, Habbabat and Samuqa genealogies which legiti­
mised their existence as cohesive units, centred upon common
ancestors who had a clear legendary and non-historical character.
Ancestors could be traced back with a certain precision only in the
context of the smallest units, households and bras. By and large,
although in Jabal Sinjar blood relations legitimised group cohesion, it seems that tribal affiliation was determined mainly by a number of variables which largely reflected territorial, economic and political circumstances.

Socio-economic and political relations among the Kurdish inhabitants of the Mountain functioned exclusively in the context of the tribes as there were no non-tribal groups living in the rural areas of the Mountain. Christian and Muslim traders lived concentrated in major villages. As such the status of each Sinjari Kurd was equal; either as a Khurkan or Jawana 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. 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, jeopardising the unity of the tribes in circumstances when communal action was required. In Sinjar the household represented the primary fighting unit as it contributed to build up the military strength of the tribe and to protect public security, especially before the establishment of a local police force in the first year of mandatory administration. It seems that during and after the military operations of World War I great quantities of arms and ammunition which circulated in the Jazira were seized by Sinjari tribesmen. By the early 1930s almost every Sinjari Kurdish male over 14 possessed a weapon. Despite the fragmentation of Sinjari tribalism the local Kurdish tribes were able to mobilise as strong corporate bodies against external threats, primarily because the majority of their households were militarised. Yazidi tribes appear to be open, flexible and relatively egalitarian as a result of the system of the semi-independent *baw* which developed as a form of adaptation to the particular territorial, demographic and political situation of the Yazidi settlement. The Yazidi tribal system was able to survive for centuries as an important means of socio-economic and political identification while at the same time accommodating a remarkable diversity. Ironically social and cultural cohesion in the stronghold of
Yazidism was maintained by means of an extremely fragmented tribal system.

Tribes, Traders and Resources

As a result of the widespread commercialisation of agriculture which occurred in the 19th and early 20th centuries the Yazidi Mountain was integrated further into regional markets which, especially after the creation of the Iraqi state in 1920, centred around the city of Mosul. However, by the beginning of the 1930s the position of the inhabitants of Jabal Sinjar vis-à-vis their land and resources had not changed substantially. Given the high productivity of the region, which was favoured by its exceptional climatic conditions, Jabal Sinjar was able to sustain increasing exports of figs, cotton wool and meat without transforming its semi-subsistence economy.

The fluctuation in agricultural production obviously could accentuate the dependence of the Sinjaris on the market for subsistence. While the area under cultivation seems to have been relatively stable in the mountain districts, in the more exposed areas of the south changing political circumstances and occasional outbursts of local conflicts between sedentary and nomadic people had a more direct influence on agriculture. Especially in the 19th century, 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. Given that rain-fed agriculture prevailed in the southern districts public security, rather than the intervention of the state in the form of improvement of canalisation, assured the maintenance of a subsistence level of production.

After the campaign against Sinjar carried out in 1837 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 necessary means of subsistence. In the second half of the 19th century agriculture started to recover mainly because of improved public security which was largely a result of the Ottoman policy of
centralisation. Thus before World War I the southern agricultural belt extended without interruption from Balad to Sakiniyya. 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 plain as a result of widespread disruption caused by military operations. The mandate period was relatively peaceful and by the 1930s agriculture had not only fully recovered but new areas were also put into cultivation in the north. The marshlands around Khatuniyya and al-Hawl in the north-west started to produce wheat and barley, although still insufficient for local needs.79

The greatest bulk of goods exported outside Sinjar represented the surplus of the agricultural and pastoral produce of the tribes which the local traders would exchange for goods not available in the Mountain like sugar, coffee, dates, cloth and spirits.80 The tribesmen would often buy goods on credit from Muslim and Christian merchants settled in big villages and pay back their debts after the harvesting or sheep-shearing.81 The circulation of locally produced goods for internal consumption did not generally require the presence of middlemen external to villages and tribal groups. 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. For example a great deal of Yazidi, Muslim and Christian sedentaries who owned sheep, especially in eastern Sinjar, would entrust their flocks to semi-nomadic tribal units living in the west such as the Samuqa, Qiran and Haskan. 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.82

The growth of an extra-tribal economy which intensified during the period of the mandate coincided with the penetration of urban capital in the form of investments both in agriculture and stock-farming made by Christian and Muslim merchants often dependent on influential traders residing in Mosul. Their numbers increased in the second half of the 19th century alongside their mercantile activities
which were conducted mainly from Balad Sinjar. South Sinjar, where extensive agriculture prevailed, was particularly affected by the partial commercialisation of the production of wheat, barley and especially cotton. Grains generally represented a profitable investment for the cultivators which explains the large amounts of wheat and barley grown in Sinjar throughout the Ottoman period. Grains were easily marketable, constituted staple food for the cultivators and could be used for the payment of taxes. The Ottoman practice of collecting revenues on agricultural produce and animals continued until 1925 when the British started to introduce cash collections.83

By contrast, after the 1850s it seems that cotton production in Jabal Sinjar developed primarily as a response to market forces as increasing textile production in Mosul called for large supplies of cotton for Mosulawi manufacturers. Although a great deal of cotton yarn was imported from Europe (because of lower prices resulting 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 £70 and £80 the batman.'84

The growth of urban investment in agricultural activities linked to the production of cotton, and to a lesser extent to that of wheat and barley, is indicated by the acquisition of water mills on the part of those traders who controlled the marketing of agricultural produce. By the late 1920s in the town of Balad Muslim Mosulawi traders owned 6 out the 7 major mills. In the 1930s and 1940s it seems that cotton production in the northern Jazira increased further as a result of the substantial demand of the home market which suffered from reduced imports.85

Stock-farming was also affected by the emerging merchant capital. The Sinjari pastoralists controlled this economic resource whose importance had grown in strength in the second half of the 19th century. After 1850 the increasing European demand of wool and mohair and the 'insatiable appetite for meat' developed by Ottoman Syria and Egypt created a constant tension between groups living in the rural hinterland of Mosul and urban based traders who became increasingly eager to obtain wool and meat from pastoral communities. While
in the 18th century Ottoman officials would seize Sinjari sheep in exchange for the payment of taxes, in the 19th century livestock became a very profitable investment for the Mosulawi trading class. Christian and Muslim merchants of Mosul increasingly looked at Jabal Sinjar as one of their major supplier of wool and meat given the large quantities of livestock owned by the local population. Investment in herds involved a minimum outlay of initial capital and required less labour input as the entrepreneur would usually employ local tribes to shepherd his livestock, usually the semi-nomadic groups of western Sinjar.

It seems that between the 1870s and the beginning of World War I the pastoral economy of Jabal Sinjar grew faster than agriculture, significantly reflecting the general trend of the Mosul province. During the period of the British mandate large numbers of cattle and sheep shepherded by Yazidi tribes were owned by Mosulawi merchants who often had their representative in Balad Sinjar. Some of them had established over time exclusive relations with certain Yazidi villages or tribal groups like the Muslim dealer Fathi 'Abd al-Rahim who dealt extensively with the Samuqa and the Haskan tribes. It also seems that a considerable proportion of the flocks grazed by the Shammar tribe north and south of Sinjar belonged to agents of Mosulawi traders based in Balad Sinjar. The town had also developed as an important regional centre for sheep trading and rental of pack animals.

In north Sinjar and in the inner districts of the Mountain where intensive agriculture prevailed it does not seem that the Mosulawi traders were in a position to directly control production. The Yazidi peasantry cultivated figs, tobacco, lentils and grapes on terraces and gardens cut into the steep slopes of the Mountain. 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. Despite the predominance of intensive or extensive agriculture the Sinjari villagers tended to diversify their production. 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 thus guaranteeing their inhabitants a better subsistence threshold. Wheat and barley were also
The Other Kurds

cultivated in the villages located on the steep slopes of the Mountain, on small patches of land at the bottom of narrow valleys.

By contrast, the people of the lowlands who devoted themselves predominantly to growing crops often had their plantations of fruit trees on the closest suitable ground. Agricultural villages situated on the hills like Halika, Jafriyya and Majnuniyya had their gardens on the adjoining mountain slopes. Rich centres like Bara and Jaddala developed a close partnership with smaller neighbouring villages where their gardens were often concentrated. In particular Jaddala was an extreme example of the extent to which villagers felt it necessary to own their private gardens. The garden-resort of Hassina 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 Jaddala had become the headquarters of the Fuqara' tribe.

The presence of a diversified agricultural economy which was often associated with animal husbandry contributed to reducing the dependence of the cultivators on the fluctuations of regional markets. Especially in those areas of north Sinjar where production for subsistence paralleled production for the market, the cultivators were generally able to strengthen traditional patterns of land tenure despite the threat of land appropriation on the part of merchant capital. In south Sinjar the situation was more complicated as urban investment and the application of the 1858 Land Code contributed to an extreme fragmentation of property, thus in some cases substantially affecting the position of the villagers. By the late 1920s returns from trade allowed Salim al-Hajj Hamu al-Ibrahim, a Mosulawi landlord, to acquire several villages inhabited by Muslim and Yazidi Kurds. However, this seems to have been the exception rather than the rule as the majority of the villages owned by merchants in Jabal Sinjar in the 1920s were inhabited by Arab Muslim groups. They were located in the far south-eastern corner of the Mountain, in proximity of the Jazira plain, and their inhabitants worked as tenant farmers for local entrepreneurs.

In Balad Sinjar Muslim traders had the biggest share in the ownership of public services like inns, shops, coffee-shops, baths and mills. Figures for 1932 related to the ownership of commercial activities in
the town bear witness to the fast economic development of the Muslim merchants during the period of the mandate, especially at the expense of the Christians. Mosulawi Muslims also owned most of the houses which represented another profitable source of investment. If compared with population statistics related to the same period it seems that 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 people in check by refusing to provide housing according to their personal interests.  

The considerable economic interests of the Mosulawi trading elite in Jabal Sinjar became an important issue in regional politics during the period of the British mandate. In the 1920s the Mountain, although de facto administered from Mosul, was claimed by the French mandatory administration as part of Syria. In 1932, before the final arbitration under the aegis of the League of Nations for the delimitation of the border between Syria and Iraq, many Sinjari traders insistently voiced their desire for the inclusion of the Mountain in Iraq on the grounds of their considerable economic interests. While Sinjari trade with Mosul prospered under colonial rule and furthered the integration of Jabal Sinjar into the regional and national markets the presence of a provisional border with Syria running very close to the Mountain had a considerable impact on the free circulation of Sinjari goods towards the Syrian Jazira. The partition of the former provinces of the Ottoman Empire between the newly-created states of Syria and Iraq, for example, paralysed the commercial route which linked Mosul to the Syrian town of Dayr al-Zawr via Balad Sinjar until 1923.  

A comparison of Iraqi and Syrian statistics concerning custom duties levied on goods crossing the border is not a reliable basis for establishing the volume of trade between the Sinjaris and the inhabitants of the closest Syrian market towns of Dayr al-Zur and Hasaka. First, in the early 1930s, 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 in their dealings with Sinjar in a crucial moment of the border dispute. 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 Jazira had definitely declined as a result of the high import duties levied both by Syria and Iraq on goods crossing the border. Relations between the Sinjaris and people living in the Syrian part of the Jazira were discouraged by the British authorities who viewed the new French-created Syrian towns of Hasaka 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. Those Christians who had settled in Balad Sinjar after the Turkish persecution of 1914/1915 were looked upon with equally great suspicion. Nonetheless it seems that after 1923 prominent Christian traders very close to the Fuqara’ chief Hamu Shiru started to increase their contacts with the market town of Hasaka, mainly as a result of growing discrimination on the part of the Muslim administration of Sinjar. Najm ‘Abdullah who controlled the camel transport for Sinjari products started to employ Bedouin tribesmen to carry out extensive wheat and flour trade with the Syrian Jazira.

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 Jazira. 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 Syria. 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 middlemen or commission agents both in Mosul and Balad and also take the increased cost of transport into account. We can assume that this had particularly negative repercussions on the pastoral tribes of west Sinjar which lived with the tribes of the Syrian Jazira without particular restrictions.

While the local trading class seem to have prospered in the second
half of the 19th century it is not clear the extent to which Yazidi tribal leaders benefited from the economic developments of the period. Certainly in terms of land appropriation they did not take advantage of the land reform as much as the Mosulawi trading class. As is clear from southern Iraq, the acquisition of property rights was determinant in changing the socio-economic and political standing of tribal leaders. In Jabal Sinjar the majority of tribal leaders did not have sufficient capital for investment nor did they enjoy the support of the Ottoman government. In any case they would rather use their surplus to purchase military equipment or luxury items. This continued even during the mandate when in the context of an increased monetarised economy Yazidi tribal chiefs used their cash primarily to purchase arms and ammunition. Only in exceptional cases was cash used in land transactions. However in the 1920s generous British subsidies allotted to selected Yazidi leaders in exchange for administrative duties and political support contributed to enlarge their patronage network. Hamu Shiru was able to extend his lordship among the Arab tribe of the Albu Mutaywid some of whose members had worked as share-croppers for the Fuqara’ since the 1890s. Shaykh Khalaf al-Haskani exacted a share on the produce of a considerable number of villages which had not been under his jurisdiction before 1920. He also acquired the ownership of large numbers of livestock which he had either bought or acquired through his religious influence.

Land Disputes During the Mandate

The substantial increase of population which occurred in Jabal Sinjar between 1830 and 1930 due to migrations, improved public security and the substantial agricultural development of southern Sinjar created a great deal of pressure on land and resources. In the 1830s, soon after the bloody campaign of Hafiz Pasha, which resulted in large scale deportations of Yazidi, Kurdish and Muslim villagers, a British observer stated that there were 6200 inhabitants in Sinjar. By 1921, according to a rough census of the population of the Mosul vilayat carried out by the British authorities, there were 20,000 Sinjari Yazidis in the province. More detailed estimates for 1932 calculated that 28,775
people were settled in the Mountain.\textsuperscript{100} The commercialisation of agriculture and the consequent expansion of agricultural production in the second half of the 19th century allowed a fast population growth in the most important villages of southern Sinjar. The town of Balad, which in 1835 was almost deserted, had approximately 2000 inhabitants by 1903. In the 1930s their number had increased to 3840 inhabitants, mainly Muslims and Christians, while the Yazidis had moved to the outskirts of the town. Similarly the Arab village of Wardiyya, located south of Balad which some families of Qirani Yazidis had occupied permanently just after 1917, experienced a substantial expansion as one of the strongholds of the Fuqara* tribe.\textsuperscript{101} Dissent concerning the right of exploitation of agricultural land was a result of this demographic expansion. Land conflict was also exacerbated by the confused distribution of title deeds in the late Ottoman period and by the support granted by the Iraqi government to Bedouin claims over Sinjari land.\textsuperscript{102}

Between 1923 and 1932 the acquisition of permanent land rights inside Sinjar was increasingly on the agenda of many Yazidi tribal leaders and affected their relations with both the British mandatory authorities and the Iraqi government. By the end of the British mandate the Yazidi chiefs had not emerged as the landed classes of the region unlike what happened in many tribal areas of southern Iraq. Although some of them acquired landed properties, these were purchased through cash transactions rather than constituting particular concessions on the part of the government in exchange for administrative duties or political support. Further, it was difficult for local leaders to consolidate their authority as landlords because of the extreme fragmentation of the Yazidi tribal system, the absence of groups of inferior status within the tribes and the emphasis on military prowess on single households.

The majority of the land cases documented in British archives were not subject to customary and tribal law but were dealt with within the frame of the old Ottoman Code of Civil Procedure which continued to be applied to Jabal Sinjar throughout the mandate. Thus many land disputes did not fall under the separate tribal jurisdiction enacted by the British in the rural areas of Iraq following the issue of the Tribal Disputes Regulations in 1916. The adoption of these procedures for
Communities and Tribes

land settlements in Jabal Sinjar was partly a result of the confused situation of land tenure inherited from the Ottoman period. Furthermore, and more importantly, the application of the Ottoman Code of Civil Procedure was decided on the basis of the inter-communal, rather than inter-tribal, character of land claims which came to assume marked political implications.

The majority of land disputes involved Yazidis and Muslim Arabs as the latter had been the main beneficiaries of the distribution of ownership certificates in the late Ottoman period. Yazidi claims were by and large supported by the British who had relied on selected Yazidi tribal leaders to consolidate their presence in the Mountain since 1919. By contrast, especially towards the end of the mandate, the Iraqi authorities tended to favour a more substantial Arab presence in Sinjar on the assumption that a larger Arab population was likely to counterbalance the influence exercised by the mandatory power on many Yazidi tribes. Thus to a certain extent attempts at resolving land disputes reflected changing political concerns, especially after 1925 when Britain delegated increasing authority in both political and administrative matters to the Iraqi government.

The role of the government as mediator between different groups of claimants and the politicisation of the land question in Jabal Sinjar are exemplified by the dispute for the ownership of the village of Jaddala, the headquarters of the Fuqara’ tribe. In the 40 years preceding the arrival of the British, Arab tribesmen who had settled in Sinjar from the areas around the Khatuniyya lake obtained from the Ottomans the title deeds for almost all the arable lands of Jaddala, whose former Yazidi cultivators had exploited without no official recognition from the Turkish government. In the course of time land holdings in Jaddala became very fragmented partly because the land was divided among the heirs of the original Muslim owners and partly because some of it was acquired by Muslim notables residing in Balad or in Mosul.103

At the beginning of World War I a substantial number of Muslim cultivators still settled in the village of Khatuniyya joined their fellow tribesmen in the Yazidi Mountain, thus increasing the Muslim population of both Jaddala and of the neighbouring village of Wardiyya. When the British arrived in 1919 Colonel Leachman, the first political
officer of Mosul, gave the village of Jaddala to Hamu Shiru as a reward for the support he had given against the Ottomans. The Muslim tribesmen were then forced to leave their lands: some of them went back to the tribe’s headquarters in Khatuniyya while others were temporarily resettled in neighbouring villages. A conflict ensued between the Yazidi Fuqara’ and those Arabs from Khatuniyya who had chosen to stay in Jaddala as they felt that the eviction of their fellow tribesmen represented a violation of the rights they had acquired over time on the village. After 1925 their chief ‘Askar started legal action against the Fuqara’ tribe. He was financially supported by a pro-Muslim lobby which emerged in Jabal Sinjar since 1923 in close connection with the local administration. In 1927 Jaddala was legally restored to its former Arab occupants and, although title deeds were issued in the name of ‘Askar and his tribesmen, the Fuqara’ headed by Hamu Shiru did not abandon their properties.

By and large until 1932 both the British and the Iraqi authorities attempted to maintain the status-quo in the village in order not to jeopardise public security. However, as after 1928 the resentment of the Arab tribesmen grew in strength, in 1930 their leader ‘Askar was offered the Sinjari village of ‘Ayn al-Hasan whose land in Ottoman times was owned by the state (miri). However, Hamu Shiru was asked to pay the Khawatina the compensation for the difference in the cash value between the two villages thus recognising ‘Askar as the legal owner of Jaddala. By 1932 the dispute was not settled and the Fuqara’ had to sustain onerous legal expenses which very much contributed to weaken the personal power of Hamu Shiru. While in 1940 the village of ‘Ayn al-Hasan was registered in the name of the Khawatina tribesmen no tapu deeds were issued for Jaddala despite the complaints of the local British representatives. The village was still occupied by the Fuqara’ on the bases of tasarruf arrangement, a usufruct of land granted by the state.

The dispute over the ownership of the village of Jaddala assumed great significance in the relations between Arab Muslims and Yazidis living in Sinjar and between the Yazidi tribes and the Iraqi administration. It strengthened a general anti-Arab feeling among the Yazidi tribes. The Kurdish population of Sinjar started to perceive the increasing danger of a process of government-supported Arab
colonisation of the Mountain which culminated in the mid-1930s when the government allotted plots of Yazidi land to the Shammar tribe after the enforcement of universal conscription. Furthermore, despite the land settlement of 1932 which attempted to define property relations on the basis of the various economic groups involved, until the early 1940s the Jaddala case constituted the precedent which defined the land policy of the government in Jabal Sinjar. This policy was based on land exchanges between the claimants: for reasons of public security the Yazidis were generally allowed to keep their villages inside Sinjar while the Arab Muslims were given miri lands not occupied by Yazidis. However, while title deeds were usually issued in favour of Arab tribesmen the Yazidis continued to cultivate their land on usufruct.107 The Iraqi government did not fulfil Yazidi wishes except in cases where the claimants were able to pay cash for the land. Certificates of ownership were therefore issued only exceptionally when wealthy tribal chiefs were involved in the disputes. This was the case of Shaykh Khalaf al-Haskani who in 1930 had the village of Juhbal, on which he already exercised virtual usufruct, alienated to him against payment of a considerable amount of money. Furthermore in 1928 Khudayda, the son of Hamu Shiru, purchased the village of Wardiyya from the government.108
III

Colonial Rule

Colonial Rule and Rural Communities

The nature of the presence of Great Britain in the three former Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul is central for an understanding of the interaction between state and local society in the rural areas of northern Iraq during the years of the British mandate (1920–32). British tribal policy, the adoption of Air Control, and the rationale of the administration of the new state at a local level were particularly relevant to changes which affected rural communities. Although local socio-economic and political realities could vary substantially, these policies were applied with a certain degree of uniformity in the areas which in 1920 came to constitute the modern state of Iraq under British mandatory control.

Anglo-Indian troops had occupied southern Iraq in 1914 and slowly advanced towards the northern areas. The city of Mosul was captured at the end of 1918, very shortly after the armistice of Mudros which marked the downfall of the Ottoman Empire and the end of the military operations of World War I in the Middle East. Since 1920 the presence of Great Britain in the region developed within the frame of the mandate system which the European Powers had established in the Middle East in the aftermath of World War I under the direct supervision of the League of Nations. European mandates combined two conflicting ideas of government which had a profound and long-lasting impact on the political and socio-economic development of these areas. Largely inspired by the principle of self-determination
Colonial Rule

formulated by President Woodrow Wilson the mandate system recognised the right to independent political development of the local populations. However, it simultaneously legitimised colonial rule as the frame within which state formation had to be implemented.

The progressive establishment and consolidation of local ruling elites was the moral imperative and the political necessity of mandatory rule. To this end Great Britain pioneered the adoption of a treaty system which defined Anglo-Iraqi relations and which allowed the progressive delegation of administrative and political power to the local government. At the same time this treaty system enabled the mandatory power to retain a considerable political and military influence in the region after the termination of the mandate in 1932. In the aftermath of World War I British political and military control over Iraq was secured by the stipulation of the 1922 Treaty, later ratified in 1924, which was to last for 20 years. The 1922 Treaty made provisions for the establishment of a system of advisorship which permeated all levels of Iraqi institutions and which allowed Great Britain to control the Iraqi army whose development was delayed until the early 1930s. Instead the Royal Air Force was put in charge of internal security and defence until the termination of the mandate in 1932. In 1926, soon after the inclusion of the Mosul province in Iraq, a new treaty was signed with the understanding that in 1928 the question of recommending Iraq's admission to the League of Nations would be taken into consideration by the mandatory power. Finally, the 1930 Treaty paved the way for Iraq's independence in 1932 while stipulating the maintenance of a number of air bases in the country. In 1921 Faysal b. Husayn, son of the Sharif of Mecca, became the King of Iraq and the head of a parliamentary monarchy which came to embody the western-style Iraqi state. In 1925 Iraq acquired a constitution and a parliament.

In the years of the British mandate, relations between the colonial state and local society were affected by the often contrasting agendas of the mandatory authorities and the new ruling elites who were mainly Sunni Arab. Many of them, like the king himself, were of extra-Iraqi origin and thus had the extremely difficult task of legitimising their position in the country. To a great extent two centres of state power were established in the country, the British mandatory
administration and the Iraqi political elites. They worked within the institutional framework of the colonial state which was embodied in the parliamentary monarchy led by King Faysal.\(^2\) Mechanisms of state power became increasingly identified with its Sunni elites, especially in the second half of the 1920s when Britain’s concern to leave Iraq became apparent. The political developments of the period had a profound impact on inter-communal relations and fostered the emergence of a number of different and at times contrasting trends. Although Sunni Islam continued to legitimise the monopoly of political power in a manner similar to that of the Ottoman period, the social and political meaning of religious affiliations became contextualised within the realities of an emerging modern nation-state and thus underwent remarkable change. Religious solidarities among the non-Muslims became highly politicised mainly as a result of British colonial policies which, by and large, made use of religious loyalties to counterbalance the influence of the ruling elites, themselves defined by strong group cohesion based on religious affiliation. At the same time ethnic and sectarian divisions among the Muslims assumed different meanings in comparison with the late Ottoman period. The development of a Kurdish national movement and the reworking of sectarian antagonism between Sunni and Shi‘i groups are undoubtedly the most illuminating examples. The impact of communalism on Iraqi political development became closely linked to the persistence of other loyalties which were not directly dependent on the religious sphere, especially kin ties which encouraged the reproduction of traditional patronage networks at the level of tribe, village community and urban neighbourhood in the newly created arenas of local and national politics.

The instrumentalisation of tribal solidarities in the rural areas became particularly central to colonial rule and as such of particular relevance for the political and social development of the period. British policies vis-à-vis the Iraqi tribes embodied the essentialist notion of ‘tribes’ as categories which stood in opposition to ‘states’. By 1916 the mandatory government had institutionalised the status of the Iraqi tribes by issuing the Tribal Disputes Regulations which legalised tribal and customary law. By enforcing these the British created a dual administrative and legal system which separated designated tribal regions
from the urban areas. As the Tribal Disputes Regulations were made law by their incorporation into the 1925 Constitution some of their provisions remained in force until the downfall of the monarchy in 1958. The creation of a dual system of administration for urban and tribal regions was primarily the result of the need to control public security in the rural areas with the minimum employment of British administrative and military personnel. It was also a reflection of earlier perceptions of tribes and tribal societies conveyed by 19th and early 20th-century western ethnography and historiography on the Middle East which greatly contributed to create the myth of tribal wilderness and splendid isolation.

Under the provisions of the Tribal Disputes Regulations the British started subsidising, on a more or less regular basis, influential leaders of Iraqi tribes whose authority was widely recognised at a local and often regional level. Thus 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. While in the Tanzimat period the Ottoman government had succeeded in weakening the bases of tribal authority in southern Iraq, in the Kurdish areas of the north tribal leaders very much strengthened their power. After the downfall of the emirate system which was completed by the mid-19th century a wide process of retribalisation had occurred in Kurdistan. This process tended to empower chiefs at the level of relatively small tribal units who had been formerly integrated into the military cadres of the Kurdish emirates.

To a great extent, in the 1920s, the retribalisation of Kurdish society served British interests as the organisation of the tribal areas of the Mosul province followed the scheme adopted in southern Iraq since 1916. However, British tribal policies in the Kurdish areas were largely unsuccessful. Before 1925 Kurdish reluctance to accept British rule was partly a result of anti-British propaganda fuelled by Kemalist Turkey in the context of the Anglo-Turkish dispute for the control of the vilayat of Mosul. Furthermore many Kurds viewed British control in stork contrast with promises of Kurdish autonomy made by Great Britain in the aftermath of World War I. Thus the mandatory
authorities had often conflictual relations with important Kurdish chiefs who adopted a particularistic and pragmatic attitude vis-à-vis the establishment of a state administration in the areas they controlled. Leaders such as Shaykh Mahmud Barzinji, who acted as governor of Sulaymaniyya in 1919, would take advantage of Anglo–Turkish rivalries and of the emergence of Kurdish national solidarities to pursue policies independent from the mandatory power.

British tribal policies developed as a function of the system of informal control which the colonial power adopted in Iraq. This system was determined by the nature and contingencies of the presence of Great Britain in the region. After October 1922 the adoption of the air scheme strengthened British commitment to this course of action as it inaugurated Air Control in the rural areas of the country. The Royal Air Force remained in charge of Iraqi internal security and defence until the termination of the mandate in 1932. Air Control had a great impact on British tribal policies in northern Iraq and to a large extent supported their aims and achievements. This was especially so between 1919 and 1925 when various air operations were carried out in the Kurdish areas to defeat rebellious Kurdish leaders. The tactics employed by the RAF 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. Clearly these tactics had wide psychological implications for the tribesmen. As British airplanes were too powerful an enemy, the tribesmen were compelled to flee their villages in search for shelter. Further, air power contributed to undermine the confidence of entire tribal units by denying their prerogatives to direct military confrontation, warfare and loot.

The enforcement of tribal policies and Air Control often succeeded in increasing the power of selected tribal leaders who forged tight links with the representatives of the mandatory administration. However, some of these leaders generally found themselves increasingly at odds with the establishment of a local administration which after 1921 was placed under the control of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior. This is one particular, and indeed very interesting, instance in which the contradictory nature of mandatory rule became apparent at a local level. This is evident in cases where the status, position and affiliation of
particular leaders and groups were not attuned to new practices of government and ideologies of colonial control.

The progressive devolution of administrative and political power to the local government, which the British consistently implemented between 1921 and 1932, became an evident source of friction in the rural areas unless those tribal leaders subsidised by the British could be successfully integrated in the new administrative structures. Soon after the British occupation of Mesopotamia there were 96 British political officers and assistant political officers in the region who replaced the Turkish administrative officials. Following the National Government Proclamation of July 1921 the British political officers and assistant political officers were progressively substituted by Iraqi personnel as they became available. In the same year the general administrative scheme of Iraq was revised following the previous Turkish organisation: the country was divided in 10 liwas (provinces), 35 qadhas (districts) and 85 nahiyyas (sub-districts). Part of the British officials who had previously occupied executive posts came to occupy advisory positions. They became divisional advisers to the Iraqi mutasarrifs (provincial governors) or assistants to the divisional advisers. In early 1923 the designation was changed in that of administrative inspectors who were placed under the control of the British adviser to the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, thus reflecting the establishment of a system of advisorship which continued to function after 1932.

Until 1927 Iraqi officials operated under the 1864 Turkish Vilayat Law which granted them executive powers in the general administration of the districts. After 1921 British administrative inspectors continued to follow local affairs mainly through a network of informants dependent on the RAF command of Baghdad. These informants, called Special Service Officers (SSO in the archival correspondence), could also be members of the same communities which the RAF controlled. Their reports had a decisive impact on the formulation of mandatory policies in the rural areas of Iraq. In 1929 the power of British officials was further reduced as a result of the provisions of the decree of Naji al-Suwaydi’s cabinet. This decree granted Iraqi provincial governors the right to scrutinise all official correspondence between administrative inspectors and the British high commissioner,
the head of the British mandatory administration based in Baghdad.6

Tribal Policies in Sinjar

Jabal Sinjar was included in the Occupied Territories of Mesopotamia in early 1919 a few months after the British occupation of Mosul. In 1917, when British soldiers were still fighting the Turks to gain access to northern Iraq, the strategic importance of the Mountain became clear to the British military High Command whose staff was directing the military campaign from Baghdad. Jabal Sinjar represented an ideal logistical base to launch an attack against the Ottoman army from the Nusaybin front if the planned assault on Mosul from Kirkuk failed. 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 and a British official to the Mountain which was still nominally under Ottoman control. By the end of 1917 the Chief political officer in Baghdad had entered negotiations with Hamu Shiru, Paramount Shaykh of Sinjar, whose anti-Turkish fervour by then had become legendary in the northern Jazira. In 1914/1915 he sheltered Christian refugees who had escaped Ottoman and Kurdish persecutions and in 1917 he led a mixed Yazidi tribal force which raided Turkish convoys and military posts on the route to Nusaybin creating serious disruption to Turkish communication lines north of the Mountain.7 In addition he had fiercely resisted the last Ottoman attack on Jabal Sinjar in 1918 when Turkish troops, using the neighbouring settlement of Tall 'Afar as a logistic base, besieged the Mountain and briefly occupied a significant numbers of villages in southern Sinjar.8

Hamu's pro-British enthusiasm, as well as the widespread feeling of isolation and fear among the population of Sinjar which was to be besieged by the Ottomans a few months later, 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, co-operate with you and became subject to you
... we cannot operate alone for we fear the Turks, who hate us very much owing to our rebellious attitude towards them ....

Given the strength of pro-British feeling shown by the Fuqara' leader in the months before the British occupation of Mosul Hamu Shiru was appointed by the British Hakim of the Mountain in early 1919, a few months after the British entered Mosul. He was put in control of both administration and public security for a monthly salary of Rs 600 and was assisted by a group of local levies who acted as his personal gendarmes. Under the new arrangement Jabal Sinjar was placed under a tribal jurisdiction similar to that adopted by the British in southern Iraq. However, given the unavailability of British personnel, the local Turkish official was not replaced by a British assistant political officer as generally happened in the headquarters of the old Ottoman districts. This allowed the Fuqara' chief to act as sole representative of the British military government throughout 1919. At the beginning of the 1920, following the administrative reorganisation of the northern Jazira, Sinjar was made dependent on the British political officer based in the neighbouring Turkoman settlement of Tall 'Afar in an attempt to promote a joint administration of the two communities.

During 1919 Hamu Shiru ruled Sinjar almost autocratically with British support. As he was assisted by local levies subsidised by Great Britain, the Fuqara' leader succeeded in keeping in check tribal security and in deterring the influence of pro-Arab propaganda coming from Syria which attempted to undermine the consolidation of British rule in the Jazira. This propaganda which ultimately aimed at the establishment of an Arab government in British controlled Mesopotamia was carried out by officials linked to the Sharifian government of Damascus led by Faysal b. Husayn who became King of Iraq in 1921. Although in the plans of the Sharifians Jabal Sinjar represented an ideal logistic base to occupy Mosul, Hamu’s loyalty to the British shifted their attention to Tall ‘Afar where widespread anti-British disturbances broke out in July 1920. The local British assistant political officer who since the beginning of the year was also responsible for the administration of Sinjar, was killed by Bedouin tribesmen with the support of the local population. After the intervention of the British
army in July Hamu Shiru, who had not been involved in the disturbances, supported British military operations in the area and took advantage of the general chaos to take up arms against the Arab tribe of Albu Mutaywid, the only group living in Sinjar who had supported the insurgents. Their villages were burnt down and grazing grounds destroyed by the Fuqara' chief.13

The Tall 'Afar uprising developed in the context of the 1920 tribal insurrection which involved one-third of the population of the Iraqi countryside. This insurrection marked a turning point in British policy vis-à-vis the Occupied Territories. It changed the course of British involvement in Mesopotamia as it jeopardised the British position in the country soon after the award of the mandate in San Remo in April 1920. In August a provisional administrative reorganisation of the Jazira was implemented. Jabal Sinjar was constituted as an independent administrative unit and divided into two sub-districts: nahiyya Sinjar, which included the south of the Mountain, and nahiyya Shimal, whose headquarters were located in the village of Karsi. The population was placed under the administration of Arab officials and the town of Balad became the permanent headquarters of a qaimmaqam dependent on the Iraqi Mutasarrif of Mosul who since the autumn of 1921 replaced the local British political officer.14

The Iraqi Administration and the Christian Question

The first qaimmaqam of Sinjar under mandatory rule was Yusuf Rassam, a member of a prestigious Chaldean Mosulawi family whose entrepreneurial activities extended to the whole province. In the past members of the Rassam family had entertained close relations with Great Britain and had become involved with the missionary activities of the Church of England in northern Iraq. In the mid-19th century a Christian Antun Rassam served as British vice-consul in Mosul and his brother Hormuzd participated in the expeditions of the archaeologist Henry Layard.15 Yusuf Rassam was appointed qaimmaqam of Sinjar by the British authorities of Mosul who in 1920 still controlled the administrative machinery of the Occupied Territories. The choice of a Christian official whose family was linked to Great Britain can be
explained by the necessity of making the new administration as accept­able as possible to Hamu Shiru whose position under the new administrative arrangement was rather unclear. In July 1922 Rassam was dismissed and replaced by his Muslim colleague of Tall ‘Afar, Ibrahim Effendi who retained his office until 1927 when he was charged with the illegal appropriation of land which was placed under the control of the baladiyya (municipality) of Sinjar. Yusuf Rassam was then reappointed and administered the Mountain until March 1929 when another Christian, who had served as chief of the administration in the Shaykhan district, replaced him.

After 1921 Hamu Shim nominally retained the title of Hakim of Sinjar as he continued to be subsidised by the British until the end of the mandate. However, the qaimmaqam, as the local representative of the Iraqi administration, became the official intermediary between the local population and the government in the area. Although Hamu Shiru still acted as arbiter in local disputes, his authority was progressively restricted to the context of his tribe and of those groups he had come to control by force of arms or by political allegiance. Clearly, the role of the Fuqara' chief was progressively relegated to that of mere contender in local tribal politics.

The Christian qaimmaqams of Sinjar were generally assisted by Arab personnel of extra-Sinjari origin. After 1921 each qaimmaqam, as chief executive official of the district, 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). The additional four non-official members of the council were chosen among the local non-tribal communities. Christian officials were generally perceived as being sympathetic, if not close, to the mandatory administration and to Hamu Shiru given his close links to the local Christian groups.

Throughout the mandate the Yazidi population and many of their leaders believed that the presence of Christian officials was the most acceptable administrative arrangement for Sinjar under Iraqi control. 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 education which had long been sanctioned by religious tradition and scrupulously
enforced by the Yazidi religious classes. In the 1920s only a few Yazidi adults were able to read and write. Although in 1918 the British political officer of Mosul opened a school in Sinjar, the institution was attended almost exclusively by Christian and Muslim pupils.\textsuperscript{19} This might have been partly why Hamu Shiru never attained any official position in the local administration. The Yazidi ban on education also prevented the members of the community from being represented in the \textit{majlis baladiyya} of Balad Sinjar which by 1930 included Arab Muslims of non-tribal background, who most likely belonged to the local trading community, and a few Christians. Although the 1927 Provincial Administration Law guaranteed non-Muslims proportional representation in the local administration, it seems that by 1931 only two Yazidis were serving on a district council in the Mosul province, most probably in the Shaykhan area.\textsuperscript{20}

Given the unavailability of Yazidis suitable to fill posts in the local administration in 1931 the British Colonial Office attempted to find a solution to the thorny issue of the administration of Sinjar after the termination of the mandate. The British government suggested the creation of a permanent Christian \textit{qaimmaqam} in the Yazidi areas in order to avoid friction with the local population. The proposal was included in a draft which the Colonial Office sent to the Iraqi authorities as a broad outline of the declaration which the representative of Iraq should present for the country's admission to the League. The creation of a Christian administrative unit seemed rather anachronistic as it recalled specific administrative solutions adopted by the Ottomans in Lebanon in the 19th century. It would have enforced sectarian and particularistic identities at a time when Iraqi independence was made conditional on the attainment of a satisfactory degree of national cohesion.\textsuperscript{21}

The development of a Christian question linked to the presence of Great Britain is clearly indicated by the appearance of organised pro-Muslim propaganda in Jabal Sinjar which aimed at the establishment of a pure Muslim administration in the area. Since 1921 this propaganda was carried out by a secret association based in Balad Sinjar known to the local British informants as al-‘Usbat al-Islamiyya (the Muslim League). The ‘Usba included a number of officials and members of the local police force who were all Arabs of extra-Sinjari origin.
At least until the mid-1920s the propaganda carried out by the Muslim League in Jabal Sinjar did not display any specific Iraqi nationalist orientation. It was more representative of attempts at strengthening religious solidarities among certain sections of the local Muslim population rather than enforcing loyalty to the Iraqi state. The activities of the League have to be primarily understood as an attempt to undermine the position of Hamu Shiru and of Great Britain in the area, especially towards the end of the mandate when a Christian autonomous movement which developed in the Mosul province increasingly sought the support of local Yazidi leaders. In 1928 the two chiefs of the Habbabat tribe, 'Atu and Matu, who had a long standing feud with Hamu Shiru, started a ‘policy of terror’ against the Sinjari Christians associated with the Fuqara’ leader. Apparently instigated by the League, they commissioned the assassination of prominent Christian traders who in 1919 had acted as close advisors of the Yazidi Hakim. In 1931 the Christian qaimmaqam and his assistant in the northern districts escaped a similar fate when shots were fired at their houses.

The escalation of this sectarian violence resulted in a decrease in the popularity of Hamu Shiru among the local Christian communities, especially those who had arrived in the Mountain during World War I. These Christians were increasingly attracted by French plans to create a permanent Christian settlement in the Syrian Jazira which was progressively placed under French mandatory control. Although it does not seem that during the mandate many Christians left Sinjar, French propaganda gave a substantial contribution to mounting inter-communal tension in the Mountain. Sectarian turmoil was also fuelled by increasing land disputes which antagonised Muslims and Yazidis. The ongoing controversy concerning the ownership of the village of Jaddala reinforced suspicions of unfair treatment meted out by judges to Yazidi claimants in local civil courts where the case was still being discussed. By 1931 land cases had increased to such an extent that the Yazidi leaders specifically requested that all arable land controlled by the Kurdish tribes should be placed under the supervision of a Yazidi religious council.

In the 1920s the gradual encroachment of the authority of both the mandatory power and the Iraqi government in Jabal Sinjar resulted in conflict along communal lines. A new arena for the
development of local politics emerged in Balad Sinjar as it became the centre of the Iraqi administration. This arena became the stage of conflicts among different groups whose interests were based in the town, as exemplified by the growing confrontation over the issue of the nature of Sinjari administration.

Sectarianism can explain a number of local conflicts which occurred in Jabal Sinjar in the 1920s. However, these conflicts expressed socio-economic and political tensions which developed in Balad Sinjar among trading classes, tribal leaders and members of the local administration. Although the town had become an influential venue for the development of tribal politics in the rural areas, religious propaganda never affected tribal cohesion. Sectarianism was primarily a matter of high politics which informed relations between the tribal elites and other interest groups. Tribal leaders continued to represent their tribal constituencies as a whole when dealing with the colonial state. They were primarily concerned with the preservation of land under the direct control of the tribes and the maintenance of acceptable levels of surplus to be reinvested in productive activities such as agriculture and stock-farming. In November 1930 all the leaders of the Kurdish tribes of Sinjar forced the members of the majlis al-baladiyya to support a petition to the Iraqi government protesting against the violent and extortionate behaviour of a number of government officials and policemen in the rural areas.²⁶

A major bone of contention was taxation, especially the new regulations concerning the estimation and payment of taxes which together with a general decrease in food prices had contributed to a worsening of the economic position of the cultivators. After 1925 increasing tax collections in cash provoked widespread turmoil among the rural communities of Sinjar, especially in the north where cash circulation was very limited. In the late 1920s the situation deteriorated 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 assessment of agricultural production calculated on the basis of the extent of the cultivated land and the number of ploughs owned by the cultivators. Thus 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 assessments 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. Although the application of the new regulations was gradual and not uniform Hamu Shiru informed the British 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.

Tribal Affairs: The 1925 Disturbances

The administrative arrangement of 1921 did not allow the local authorities to control effectively the rural areas of northern Sinjar. Although the Iraqi official posted in the northern village of Karsi could count on a permanent police post based in the neighbouring Yazidi settlement of Mamisi, public security was difficult to control given that local groups were well organised militarily and that access to many villages was difficult because of the geographical configuration of the area. Therefore the Iraqi qaimmaqam based in Balad would supervise tribal affairs by means of the periodical summons of Yazidi chiefs in the town. If on the one hand this amounted to the government's recognition of their authority on territory and tribal populations, on the other it increasingly linked the development of tribal politics to the new political arena which was emerging in Balad Sinjar.

The development of tribal affairs during the period of the mandate was profoundly influenced by the major tribal rearrangement which had occurred in the 1910s. By 1916 there existed an increasing awareness of religion as a factor shaping tribal politics as a result of the emergence of the Fuqara' tribe and of the Yazidi revival indirectly promoted by the religious policies of the Ottoman government. In this period tribal rivalries started to be increasingly expressed in religious terms, that is in the confrontation between a 'Yazidi' and a 'pro-Muslim' coalition. In the context of Sinjari tribal politics 'pro-Muslim' meant a particular attitude of the tribes vis-à-vis the Ottoman
government rather than indicating any measure of political domi­nance of their Muslim sections. In other words, ‘pro-Muslim’ was indicative of the tendency of certain tribes to make use of the support of the government against centres of local tribal authority.

At the beginning of the 1920s Hamu Shiru, who was the head of the so-called ‘Yazidi’ coalition, was still supported by large sections of the pastoral tribes of the Qiran and Samuqa. His contender was the Mihirkani chief Dawud al-Dawud, the leader of the ‘pro-Muslim’ alliance whose family in the late Ottoman period had often sought the support of the government. Dawud controlled the north-east of Sinjar and was supported by the Haskan and Musqura tribes living in the northern areas. Only the Habbabat chiefs who lived in Balad Sinjar, and especially ‘Atu and Matu, had severed their relations with Hamu Shiru as their activities against the local Christians would indicate. They started to turn to Dawud al-Dawud hoping to regain their past influence on the capital of the Mountain. The attitude of Yazidi leaders vis-à-vis these alliances was pragmatic and by and large reflected political and socio-economic realities. For instance, although the Haskan leader Shaykh Khalaf was a Yazidi man of religion and controlled a tribe which was entirely Yazidi, he sided with Dawud al-Dawud. Similarly, tribes such as the Musqura, which had a substantial Muslim population and a Yazidi lay leadership, identified with the interests of the ‘pro-Muslim’ coalition mainly in opposition to the growing political authority and economic power of Hamu Shiru and of the Fuqara. The alliance between the Fuqara’ leader and the pastoral tribes of the Qiran and Samuqa can be explained by the importance these pastoral tribes came to assume in the sheep and wool trade in the last quarter of the 19th century, which was conducted from Balad Sinjar and controlled by traders close to the Hakim.

During the mandate the two main tribal coalitions did not change substantially. However, while the ‘Yazidi’ coalition supported by Hamu largely identified with the British, the old ‘pro-Muslim’ group led by Dawud became increasingly at odds with the imposition of any kind of state authority. By and large its raison d’être was to antagonise the Fuqara’ leader. In this connection Dawud’s alliance could be better defined as an ‘anti-Shiru’ coalition.

In 1919 Hamu Shiru retained extensive control over southern Sinjar
given the special position granted to him by the British military government after the occupation of Mosul. Village heads had become increasingly linked to the Hakim who was able to enforce their loyalty and obedience through a group of *shabana* (local levies) subsidised by the British. As they were recruited from Hamu’s followers they practically operated as his personal gendarmes and constituted the only police force in the Mountain.  

However, by March 1920 when Sinjar was made dependent on Tall 'Afar, the number of local levies was drastically reduced and a permanent garrison which included Arab soldiers of non-Sinjari origin was established in Balad Sinjar and in the northern village of Mamisi.  

By 1921, following the establishment of the Iraqi administration in Balad, Hamu Shiru was compelled to move back his headquarters to the villages of Jaddala and Bardahali which became the strongholds of the Fuqara' tribe in the following years. Hamu’s weakened position had the immediate effect of mobilising his tribal contenders and especially Dawud al-Dawud whose authority had not been formally recognised by the British. As early as 1922 the Mihirkani chief interpreted vague promises on the part of the qaimmaqam Yusuf Rassam to transfer a part of Hamu’s subsidy to him as an indication of the future dismissal of Hamu Shiru from the office of Hakim. As a result Dawud mobilised his tribal forces against Hamu’s headquarters in Jaddala and Bardahali creating a great deal of concern among the British and Iraqi authorities which led to the dismissal of the qaimmaqam.  

By 1924 Dawud al-Dawud and Shaykh Khalaf of the Haskan tribe, who continued to foment sedition among the tribes of northern Sinjar, were compelled to face the growing coercive power of the administration. Their forced detention in Mosul for a couple of months for security reasons made them turn to Hamu Shiru in an attempt to form a new coalition in defiance of the authorities. After various attempts on the part of the new qaimmaqam Ibrahim Effendi to persuade Dawud to abandon the project, the Mihirkan chief was summoned in Balad. Dawud’s obstinate refusal to report to the headquarters of the district compelled the Iraqi authorities to ask for the assistance of RAF planes in August 1924 in order to force Dawud to comply with the instructions of the government. As the RAF refused to intervene, mainly on the grounds that aerial action could not be taken unless
the local police force had proven incapable of dealing with the situation, gendarmes were sent to Dawud's headquarters in the village of Zarwan in early September.32

The despatch of Iraqi policemen had the immediate effect of mobilising all the enemies of Hamu Shiru who started to help the Mihirkan. In Balad, 'Atu and Matu, the two 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', and Shaykh Khidr of the Qiran incited their followers to support the Mihirkan. Given the resistance of Dawud's supporters the police was not able to reach Mihirkani lands and at the end of September 1924 Dawud was still in Zarwan waiting for further developments. By the end of October, after the Iraqi authorities of Mosul had tried to negotiate a temporary truce between Dawud and Hamu, the Fuqara' chief started to mobilise his followers against those tribes and tribal sections who had supported the Mihirkan during the September disturbances.33

In the following months as tension between the two parties escalated in the northern district the fragmentation and segmentary character of Sinjari tribalism came dramatically to the fore. Two of the most important tribes of Sinjar, the Haskan and Qiran, started to split allegiances following internal disputes for their leadership. Among the Haskan the situation was particularly difficult: while the legitimate leader Shaykh Khalaf sided with Dawud, his main contender Kimmo 'Emoka turned to Hamu Shiru hoping to mobilise the Fuqara' on his side. In December, when minor fighting occurred in the village of Sinuni where both leaders lived, Dawud al-Dawud, sent a tribal contingent to help Khalaf and his supporters. At the same time Hamu Shiru took advantage of the situation: he sent an ultimatum to Dawud and started to organise a tribal force against the Mihirkan.34

By mid-March 1925 northern Sinjar was in turmoil and the hostilities started to affect the southern district, especially the villages inhabited by the Qiran tribe. A feud between Shaykh Khidr and a minor agha of the tribe, Bakr Husayn, which had started in the spring of 1924, provoked armed clashes among the followers of the two leaders. Hamu Shiru intervened on the side of Bakr Husayn and, as it had happened with the Haskan, Shaykh Khidr asked for Dawud al-Dawud's
help. At the beginning of April it was obvious that the tribal sections who had supported Dawud were getting ready to launch an attack against Jaddala where Shiru had concentrated his tribal forces. Dawud had started to withdraw towards Mihirkan with his armed tribesmen, a village located in a more protected area of his domains. His main supporter Khalaf Haskani had negotiated a temporary truce with his tribal contender.

By mid-April the situation had become so critical that RAF planes started to drop messages on a number of villages located in Mihirkani lands, successfully stopping operations against Hamu Shiru. On 18 April the villages of Mihirkan and Zarwan were heavily bombed although 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. While aerial action was taken against Dawud, Shaykh Khidr and Shaykh Khalaf started attacking Hamu in Jaddala from the villages of Sakiniyya and Sinuni which were bombed on 19 April. Shaykh Khidr immediately surrendered, Shaykh Khalaf fled to the north but Dawud remained in Mihirkan, which was bombed again on 24 April. By the beginning of May all the chiefs except Dawud had accepted the terms of the government. The bombings had proved to be extremely effective in securing the co-operation of the tribesmen who immediately deserted their leaders and fled to more secure areas of the Mountain.

The measures taken by the Iraqi government and the British authorities after the termination of hostilities aimed at restoring order and preventing further outbreaks of tribal warfare. The 1925 disturbances had convinced the authorities that the co-operation of the local leaders had become essential to control the tribal areas of the Mountain. The settlement of the disputes among tribal sections directly involved in the fighting was implemented under the supervision of the British administrative inspector of Mosul, following the procedures of the Tribal Disputes Regulations. Fines were imposed on the chiefs who had sided with Dawud. The inhabitants of Mihirkan and Zarwan were heavily penalised in an attempt to force them to hand Dawud al-Dawud over to the authorities as he was still at large in northern Sinjar. At the beginning of May they were asked to pay Rs 5,000 within four 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 was taken to Mosul where he was detained for a couple of weeks and then exiled to Nasiriyya in southern Iraq where he remained until 1928. To a great extent, while Dawud al-Dawud was held responsible for the Yazidi revolt, the leaders who had supported him, especially Shaykh Khalaf and Shaykh Khidr, were treated favourably by the administration in an attempt to win their future support. In 1925, after the termination of the disturbances, the government recognised Khalaf as the legitimate owner of the village of Juhbal by issuing tapu deeds in his name.

The 1925 tribal hostilities had clearly shown the extent to which Hamu Shiru had become unpopular both among large sections of the local leadership and the population. The resentment of the villagers was channelled against the Fuqara’ chief rather than against the local authorities as it emerges from a report sent by the chief police inspector to the Mutasarrif of Mosul during the first outbreak of hostilities at the end of 1924. He 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.’ Under these circumstances the Fuqara’ leader 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 subsidised as Hakim of Sinjar in 1919. The political fragmentation of Sinjari tribalism, which was a legacy of the Ottoman period, and the presence of the Iraqi administration prevented the creation of a paramountcy under a single leader. Interestingly the 1925 disturbances also indicated that tribal antagonism developed exclusively along segmentary rather than confessional lines despite attempts on the part of the Muslim League to spread its propaganda among tribal sections which included Muslims.

By 1925 the majority of Yazidi tribesmen did not yet have a clear concept of the presence and authority of the government and this is perhaps the reason why their resentment focused almost exclusively on Hamu Shiru. The Iraqi authorities were still very much perceived, especially by the Yazidi population living outside the administrative centres, as an extraneous power which induced fears of taxation and conscription. Dawud al-Dawud himself perhaps gave the best example of this attitude in a letter sent to the mutasarrif and the administrative
inspector of Mosul 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 kodak (animal tax) nor for other tax.' By contrast in the 1920s Great Britain started to be viewed as an important actor in the development and solution of tribal conflicts given the impact of both Air Control and the Tribal Disputes Regulations whose application was supervised by British officials.

The 1925 disturbances cannot be considered as the by-product of a popular movement against the administration although the colonial state had played a crucial role in strengthening local centres of tribal power. The local and inter-factional character of the revolt were emphasised in the accounts of the events of 1924 and 1925 which came from British or Iraqi government sources. In the same documents, the extent of the military operations, which is clear from RAF records, is suspiciously minimised. In Great Britain the Colonial Office was reluctant to present the public with detailed reports of the aerial action undertaken in Sinjar mainly because RAF bombings had encountered much criticism in the press and had raised a number of parliamentary questions in Great Britain. 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.

Tribal Authority

The development of Yazidi tribal affairs in the first half of the 1920s which culminated in the 1925 disturbances indicates that tribal dynamics in Jabal Sinjar were dictated by political and social solidarities which existed at the level of the bavs (clans). The bavs as enlarged family networks constituted the bases of a nesting segmentary organisation which converged in the fluctuating political organisation of the Yazidi ‘ashira. Political authority at the level of the single tribes was maintained by consensus rather than by coercion. The institutionalised system of consensus in the form of a tribal majlis has been studied by the Kurdologist Roger Lescot who observed and
described Yazidi tribalism in the 1930s. According to him tribal leaders acted as mere delegates of the chiefs of the clans who elected them democratically.44

Lescot’s description of the Yazidi tribes conveys a model of political organisation which seems rather static if considered in the light of the tribal developments of the 1920s. The system of segmentary opposition which dominated Yazidi tribalism is captured very well in times of conflict, particularly in the sources concerned with the mandatory period. These sources were produced by RAF observers who were well acquainted with Yazidi tribal realities. The extreme fragmentation of the tribes which resulted from segmentary opposition made the position of Yazidi tribal leaders very unstable as their authority largely depended on the behaviour and political attitude of their followers. In this connection these leaders played the role of intermediaries among interest groups rather than providing a focus for communal representation as suggested by Lescot.

However, while the bav system continued to pose a challenge to tribal legitimacy, the maintenance of tribes as viable political units was essential, especially in the face of external threats.45 The absence of a mechanism of legitimation based on strict genealogies made the position of Yazidi tribal chiefs more dependent on their military resources, economic power and political skills. Groups were often co-opted into the sphere of influence of particular chiefs by promises of economic reward (allotment of land and water) and by appeals to common solidarities, usually kinship but in the latter part of the 19th century religion came to acquire a prominent role in the process. Groups could also be driven towards particular leaders by conflicts which occurred within the tribes under which they lived. The background of the most important leaders of mandatory Sinjar, and especially of those belonging to the religious classes, illustrates the nature of their political legitimacy in a tribal context. This legitimacy was linked, at least at the beginning of their careers, to their religious status. By the time the British arrived in the Mountain in 1919 the only lay chieftain who played a prominent role in tribal politics was Dawud al-Dawud of the Mihirkan tribe, the leader of a tribal dynasty who had a long-standing reputation in the Mountain. Information on Yazidi tribal leaders is primarily collected from oral sources and
an approximate dating can be assumed from the general context.

Shaykh Khalaf al-Haskani

Shaykh Khalaf’s father was a Yazidi man of religion, a Shaykh belonging to the Siraj al-Din family. Shaykh Nasir arrived in Sinjar in the second half of the 19th century from the Shaykhanli village of Ba‘ashiqa most likely as a result of Ottoman religious persecutions. He settled among the Haskan tribe and when he died his son Khalaf replaced him according to his will. Khalaf started his ascendancy to the leadership of the Haskan tribe in the rich village of Sinuni, the economic centre of the Haskan lands and the residence of the legitimate Haskani tribal agha Kimmo ‘Emoka. He slowly gathered a small group of fervent followers around him, recruited both among the Haskan and other 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 which had became 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 1930s Khalaf controlled 100 families in Juhbal while in Sinuni, Kimmo relied on the support of 60 families of Yazidis. Although Shaykh Khalaf gained an established reputation by pursuing a policy of territorial expansion in northern Sinjar which secured his authority over sections of other tribes settled in the area, he did not manage to unify the Haskan under his leadership because of the opposition of Kimmo ‘Emoka. Furthermore it seems that even among his followers in Juhbal, the position of the shaykh was often threatened by internal jealousies given the fairly heterogeneous composition of his tribal supporters which included two large Haskani bays, the Evdelian and Mille Osmana.
The Other Kurds

Shaykh Khidr Qirani

The other tribal leader of Shaykhanli origin who also belonged to the group of the shaykhs was Shaykh Khidr b. 'Atu whose father had come from the Shaykhanli village of Basufan at the same time as Khalaf’s father. Shaykh Khidr, who belonged to the Fakhr al-Din family of shaykhs, established himself among the semi-nomadic tribe of the Qiran and took permanent residence in the village of Sakiniyya. 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 World War I 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 Hakrashiyya and the Mala Salu. Shaykh Khidr’s tribal leadership was challenged on many fronts. Apart from the internal opposition from the leaders of some Qirani bav which was fomented by the followers of the ‘legitimate’ young agha, he was bitterly criticised by some shaykhs belonging to the Mand family mainly on the grounds of his lack of piety and religious zeal. He was in fact accused of giving 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, Shaykh Khidr was held responsible for the killing of many Yazidis which gave him the opportunity to get hold of their lands and properties. During the mandate he came to control sections of the Samuqa, Haskan and Mihirkan.

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 Dinadiyya tribe based in Shaykhan. It is possible that this Shaykhanli connection was created in order to legitimise his status as a man of religion vis-à-vis his followers. Soon after his arrival in Sinjar, probably 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 1870s 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 Dinadiyya, the two extra-Sinjari tribal groups recently settled in the Mountain with whom Hamu was (or claimed to be) more closely related. A Sinjari tradition states that Hamu became a faqir because he married the sister of Faqir Hasan Jindi thus implying that his father had not joined this priestly order.

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 1920s and 1930s 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. In the beginning of the 1930s Edmonds noted that in Sinjar the only lay members who could join the religious group of the faqirs belonged to these two tribal groups. Among the various fractions of the Fuqara’, especially those who emphasised 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. In Sinjari tradition the Fuqara’ is considered essentially a tribe and his leader Hamu Shiru is primarily remembered as a tribal warrior. Interestingly, a contemporary informant states that the Sinjari faqirs had no religious status and that they were a social and political unit before Hamu’s time. This
could be a reflection of the great tribal ethos which still surrounds the 1920s and which centres around the Fuqara' leader.\textsuperscript{56}

The cases of Shaykh Khidr and Shaykh Khalaf, who acquired temporal power while retaining their spiritual authority, are good examples of the extent to which members of the shaykhly class 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. The fact that Yazidi shaykhs were traditionally involved in the solution of tribal disputes and dealt with daily matters affecting the believers not only helped them to consolidate their authority among different groups but also made more acceptable their new position as temporal leaders. A Sinjari informant denies the religious background of Shaykh Khidr and Shaykh Khalaf most likely because their lives became inscribed in the tribal tradition of the mandatory period.\textsuperscript{57}

To a great extent, in the case of the Hamu Shiru, tribal ethos was not compatible with his religious position as the Yazidi faqirs drew legitimation from the maintenance of a ‘holy’ pattern of behaviour which included physical seclusion and detachment from worldly affairs. Clearly this clashed with the daily duties of the Fuqara’ leader which included a readiness to resort to arms as a necessity of establishing, extending and defending his political and economic influence. During the mandate the Fuqara’ were the most militarised group of the Mountain partly because they had accumulated large quantities of arms and ammunition during the military operations of World War I and partly because Hamu Shiru was very keen on using his substantial cash reserves to buy weapons.

During the mandate the existence of two opposing coalitions in inter-tribal context (Hamu Shiru v. Dawud al-Dawud) contributed to the polarisation of responses among the sections of the same tribe as clearly indicated by the 1925 disturbances. Further, state intervention challenged more consistently the authority of Yazidi tribal leaders. Government authorities forcibly detained chiefs outside Sinjar for long periods thus alienating them from their people and from local politics. During the mandate Hamu Shiru, despite the fact that he was initially supported by Great Britain, found himself increasingly at odds with the local state administration which periodically detained him
in Mosul for periods which could last for many months. In the course of the 1920s his notoriously despotic attitude, which was accentuated by these forced detentions, created increasing dissension among the Fuqara’ and other tribal groups, especially the Musqura whose leader was deposed by Hamu at the beginning of 1923. Dawud al-Dawud, who was held responsible for the 1925 disturbances, was exiled for three years in southern Iraq.

For Shaykh Khalaf and Shaykh Khidr the situation was somewhat different. Their special status as temporal leaders of religious background and their recent ascendency to local tribal politics made them particularly vulnerable to internal opposition as a number of groups under their control continued to recognise the authority of the lay agnas who had ruled the Haskan and Qiran until the last decades of the 19th century. The former tribal leaders of the Haskan and Qiran continued to claim the right to rule their kinsmen, backed by the minor lay chiefs of some of the bavv. After the 1925 revolt Shaykh Khidr and Shaykh Khalaf started to be consistently supported by the administration. Given the growing importance of the border dispute between Iraq and Syria in the second half of the 1920s, the two leaders became central to the nation-building policies of the colonial state as they controlled western Sinjar which was claimed by the Franco-Syrian authorities. Although they were never directly subsidised by the government these two shaykhs obtained the certificates of ownership of important villages they controlled in exchange for cash payments in order to consolidate their position among their tribes. Further, it seems that as early as 1924 Shaykh Khalaf was granted a robe of honour, supposedly as a reward for his loyalty to the local authorities but in reality as an encouragement to strengthen his links with the state administration.

As the background of the three religious personalities which dominated Yazidi tribal politics in early modern Iraq indicate, by the beginning of the 20th century the bases of solidarity among the Haskan, Qiran and Fuqara’ tribes relied upon a mixture of kinship ideology and religious loyalties. In the 1920s the new political meaning which religious and ethnic affiliation was assuming among many rural communities of northern Iraq did not affect these tribes as it does not seem that any of their internal conflicts developed along
sectarian lines (particularly Muslim v. Yazidi sections). What is quite noticeable is the appearance of a new ‘style’ of leadership which marked the careers of Hamu Shiru, Shaykh Khalaf and Shaykh Khidr which was accentuated, but not created, by the colonial state. A number of factors accounted for this, especially the fact that their families did not belong to the local tribal aristocracy. As a result of this they became naturally inclined to rely more extensively on outside support. They developed a pragmatic attitude vis-à-vis power and authority and recognised very quickly the realities of the day-to-day state administration. Their ‘style’ of leadership clashed with a more traditional approach to power and authority such as that adopted by the Mihirkani chief Dawud al-Dawud. Dawud considered the new leaders as parvenues in the tribal milieu, as he was the most powerful representative of the old tribal aristocracy.

The life and activities of the Mihirkani chief embodied, somewhat romantically, the traditional tribal ethos: bravery, pride, impulsiveness, a certain lack of pragmatism and a stubborn refusal to come to terms with state power. An indication of the contempt with which Dawud al-Dawud, in the early 1930s, viewed the new tribal elites is the fact that he considered Hamu Shiru a ‘beggar’ who first had lived on the alms of the commoners and later on the support of the British and of the Iraqi government. Although in the last years of Ottoman rule he had become the leader of the pro-Muslim coalition and thus inclined to seek the support of the Ottoman government, during the mandate his relations with both the British and the Iraqi administration were extremely tense, primarily because the British started subsidising his enemy Hamu Shiru. Dawud would refuse to report to Balad and to Mosul and to have anything to do with representatives of the administration. He preferred flight and military confrontation to political negotiation which by contrast engaged Hamu Shiru, Shaykh Khalaf and Shaykh Khidr on many fronts.

For many Yazidis Dawud became the symbol of the community’s resistance to any imposed authority, at a time when Jabal Sinjar was increasingly coming to terms with state power. Although he was sent into forced confinement in southern Iraq for three years after the 1925 disturbances, he was not removed permanently from Sinjar given the widespread reputation he enjoyed among the Yazidi communities of
Iraq and Turkey. His popularity increased enormously in 1935 after he led an anti-conscription revolt against the government which resulted in his temporary settlement in Syria.
The RAF and the Mosul Dispute

Between 1921 and 1925 British policies in Jabal Sinjar reflected the prominent role played by the Royal Air Force in defending, supporting and consolidating mandatory rule in northern Iraq which Great Britain had de facto occupied in 1918. Especially after 1923 the considerable employment of RAF planes and personnel in the areas of Yazidi settlement made a substantial contribution to the implementation of the Greater Iraq scheme which purported the permanent annexation of the vilayat of Mosul and of its Kurdish districts in the Iraqi state. Air Power became central to legitimise a de facto British control of the northern provinces which until 1925 was challenged by the Kemalist government. It was especially the fear of possible Turkish military penetration from the north which prompted the close monitoring on the part of the RAF of border areas and Kurdish tribal affairs. Although Jabal Sinjar was located outside the region claimed by the Kemalists, which included the city of Mosul and its northern and eastern districts inhabited mainly by Kurds and Turkomans, the Yazidi Mountain became of utmost strategic importance for the RAF Command in Baghdad as it was located in the proximity of the provisional north-western border with the Turkish Republic. This interest also accounts for the great deal of intelligence produced by local RAF informants on the Yazidi tribes which in the period under consideration became easy targets of Turkey's anti-British propaganda.
If on the one hand Anglo-Turkish rivalry over the Mosul province led to close RAF supervision of Yazidi affairs, on the other the Mosul dispute clearly constrained RAF interventionist policy in Sinjar as it is indicated by the delayed deployment of British aircraft during the development of the 1925 disturbances. Yazidi tribal unrest occurred at a very important juncture of the dispute given that in June 1924 the question of the delimitation of the border between Turkey and Iraq was deferred to the League of Nations. By January 1925 an international commission had started to tour the Mosul region in order to enquire about the political attitudes and the wishes of the local population. In September 1924 the RAF Command in Baghdad ignored the request of RAF intervention put forward by the Iraqi Mutasarrif of Mosul who was attempting to force Dawud al-Dawud to abandon the idea of an alliance with Hamu Shiru. The deployment of aircraft was delayed until the following April primarily because the boundary commission was expected to tour the Mountain at the beginning of 1925. Clearly British military intervention would have jeopardised the acceptance of British and Iraqi rule on the part of large sections of the local population. Even when the British administration was compelled to intervene militarily in April 1925 it did so reluctantly fearing that the Turkish government would use bombings as evidence that the population of Sinjar was reluctant to recognise Iraqi sovereignty.

Between 1921 and 1925 the Kemalists made several attempts to make contact with the Yazidis of Sinjar in order to gather the support of some local chiefs. 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. In 1923, as a result of increasing Kemalist propaganda which targeted tribes hostile to Hamu Shiru, the RAF Command ventilated came up with 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 conceived in the context of the creation of a Central Tribal Force which had to serve as an additional fighting unit to protect the provisional western borders of Iraq. In late 1925, after the final resolution of the Mosul dispute awarded the province to Iraq, the RAF put
forward a more detailed project for the formation of a Yazidi tribal levy. The Yazidi force had to be raised on a tribal basis with the cooperation of Hamu Shiru, Shaykh Khidr and Shaykh 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 100 men who were to receive monthly payments through their tribal chiefs. It is most likely that this plan was conceived in view of the future integration of Yazidi units in the Iraqi army in the general climate of optimism which preceded the ratification of the 1922 Anglo–Iraqi Treaty.5

These two projects aroused old fears of conscription among the Kurdish population of Sinjar who refused to comply with RAF instructions. Members of Yazidi tribes refused to mix with Bedouin tribesmen in army units and despised the idea of staying away for long periods from their womenfolk and villages. Furthermore, 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. Clearly, the enrolment of Yazidi tribesmen in fighting units was perceived as an attempt on the part of the government to interfere in tribal affairs and to weaken group cohesion. Only in 1936 (and with modest results) was the Iraqi government able to conscript Yazidis in the Iraqi national army by employing the nisbi system according to which tribal chiefs were allowed to select the recruits according to a precise ratio of the tribal population.6 The failure of the RAF project concerning the formation of Yazidi levies at the end of 1925 can also be attributed to a reversal of concerns on the part of the mandatory power. By and large, in the second half of the 1920s, Great Britain progressively abandoned master plans of recruitment of tribal levies in the region in view of the future consolidation of the Iraqi army.7

The Border Between Iraq and Syria: Anglo–French Policy

In 1919 the whole of Jabal Sinjar was de facto included in the Mosul vilayat under British administration and two years later established as an independent administrative unit under the control of the Iraqi
government. However, in western Sinjar the administrative arrangements were rather confused, especially in the lands occupied by the semi-nomadic tribes of the Qiran and Samuqa. After 1919 the administration of the western portion of the Mountain together with the Arab town of Khatuniyya 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-World War One rearrangement of the former Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. In the northern Jazira, whose Syrian section was gradually being occupied by the French authorities after the award of mandate over Syria to the French government in 1920, precise administrative boundaries were not actually drawn up until the early 1930s. The development of Yazidi tribal affairs during the period of the mandate and the influence of Great Britain in the area were greatly affected by this border dispute which created continuous tension between the representatives of the British and French mandatory governments whose attitudes vis-à-vis the Kurdish and Arab communities living in Jabal Sinjar were greatly affected by the colonial policies 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 were therefore substantially influenced by other international developments. Both governments realised that a definitive settlement of the border 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. Furthermore the French colonisation of the north-east of Syria was completed only in 1930 with the creation of the sanjaq of Jazira. It is mainly for these reasons that the fixing of the Syro-Iraqi border was not implemented until the early 1930s although from the beginning of the 1920s 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 took into account British and French interests in the area which, at least until 1925, mainly focused on containing the
expansion of Kemalist Turkey on the northern borders of both Syria and Iraq.

After the award of the mandates at San Remo and the outbreak of the Iraqi revolt, in October 1920 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. The development of tribal mobilisation in the Jazira during the Iraqi revolt of 1920 had clearly shown the extent to which the lack of control of tribal movements could be beneficial to elements hostile to the consolidation of both British and French rule in the area.

According to the section of the 1920 Convention dealing with northern Jazira, 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. In practice this agreement did not provide the two mandatory powers with a viable scheme for administration of the Jabal and the town of Albu Kamal, located some 200 km. south-west of Sinjar in the middle of the Jazira desert; both were now divided between Syria and Iraq although they had always represented compact socio-economic and political 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 the precise portion of the Mountain which was to come under the administration of the Franco-Syrian authorities. Although 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, a clear demarcation of the frontier was only implemented for that section of the border running from the Mediterranean to Imtan, south of the Jabal Druze.

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 (fixed by international agreement in 1929) 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 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 compensation for the loss of the Mosul vilayat, the French were given a 23.75 per cent 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 strategic 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.’

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 Antar, located west of the Khatuniyya 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. 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 mutasarrifiyaa of Dayr al-Zawr, agreed with the British 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. 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 Jazira already occupied by the Franco-Syrian authorities which centred around the main commercial centre of Dayr al-Zawr.

The French high commissioner opposed Dobbs' proposal of a temporary fixing of the Sinjari border through informal 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 concessions in the Transjordan section of the border, especially in the Yarmuk valley. 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. It was commonly, although erroneously, believed that the sub-soil of west Sinjar 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.

After 1923 the Yazidi villages of western Sinjar, inhabited by members of the Samuqa and Qiran tribes, and the town of Khatuniyya continued to be administered as part of Iraq. The local officials based in Balad collected revenues, as they had done since 1919, and regularly summoned the village heads in the headquarters of the district in order to supervise local affairs. However, the arbitrary character of the Anglo-French administrative settlement in western Sinjar favoured French interference in Yazidi affairs, especially among the Samuqa and Qiran tribes and the Muslim population of Khatuniyya. Repeatedly during the mandate the Franco-Syrian authorities of Hasaka attempted to levy taxes from Samuqa and Khawatina tribesmen. Furthermore, no permanent police or military posts could be established west of the 1920 Convention line which obviously posed several problems for the maintenance of public security in the disputed area. It also 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 an RAF base in the area to control the movements of Turkish troops was rejected by the Franco–Syrian authorities on the grounds that it represented a territorial violation.17 Between June 1922 and August 1923, an Iraqi and a Syrian police post were in turn established in the town of Khatuniyya and withdrawn as a result of specific requests from the two high commissioners.18

As a result of the border dispute the Iraqi administration faced great difficulties in controlling public security in the area lying west of the 1920 Convention line which constituted approximately one third of the Mountain. Both the RAF and the Iraqi police forces were not allowed to carry out policing duties. During the 1925 tribal disturbances RAF operations could not reach villages west of the 1920 Convention line thus allowing followers of Dawud al-Dawud to seek shelter there after the bombings. Whenever an agreement with the Franco–Syrian counterparts was reached by the British authorities, military operations in the disputed area were often delayed with a consequent prolongation and extension of hostilities. In the second half of the 1920s, when Bedouin unrest started to affect substantially Jabal Sinjar, negotiations between the two mandatory governments proceeded at a slow pace. In particular it seems that the British attempted in any possible way to avoid French involvement in Sinjar thus preferring to limit the employment of the RAF for aerial demonstrations along the 1920 Convention line.

In some cases French involvement could not be avoided. For example in October 1926 when Bedouin tribesmen belonging to the Tayy started to loot Haskani villages. On that occasion the local administration attempted to send Iraqi gendarmes from Karsi, the headquarters of the northern district, in order to evacuate Tayy tribesmen from Yazidi grazing grounds. However, it soon became clear that such an operation would have required the backing of both the RAF and of an additional police force approaching Tayy camps from the west.19 Thus a full aerial intervention was carried out in January 1927 after frantic negotiations with the French high commissioner. By then many of the Tayy tribesmen had already withdrawn into Syrian territory with looted animals and properties from Sinjar.20
Border Disturbances: Yazidis and Bedouins

Until 1925 the Anglo-Turkish dispute over the Mosul vilayat had dominated Anglo-French policy towards Sinjar which was strategically located in the proximity of the provisional Turkish frontiers. Once internationally recognised borders were drawn between Iraq and Turkey, the attention of the two colonial powers turned towards the control of Bedouin tribes moving in the Jazira in order to assure the maintenance of public security along the provisional Syro-Iraqi border where tribal unrest had intensified since the beginning of 1925. Increased tribal bellicosity was partly a result of the new geo-political circumstances determined by the fixation of the frontier between Turkey and Iraq which shifted the centre of tribal conflict southwards along the provisional borders with Syria. British and French interference in the power structure of Bedouin tribes intensified in this period and resulted in a growing awareness on the part of selected tribal leaders of the opportunities offered by British and French support to extend and consolidate their influence in the region. This clearly impinged upon the fragile socio-economic and political relationship which had linked Bedouin groups to settled and semi-settled communities living in the area.

After 1925 the disruptive effects of Bedouin encroachment on land occupied by agricultural communities had negative repercussions on the attitude of these groups vis-à-vis the Iraqi and Syrian administrations which were increasingly perceived as unable to protect their interests. In this connection the protection of the sparse settled and semi-settled communities of the northern Jazira became central to both British and French concerns. Communities like the Sinjari Kurds had been already incorporated in the administrative machine of the new colonial state created by Great Britain and as such represented important points of reference for the nation-building process at a local level. If on the one hand in the Jazira Bedouin leaders became instruments of British and French tribal policies, on the other the same policies were detrimental to the stability of the administration of its settled and semi-settled areas as they encouraged Bedouin unrest. This was particularly evident in the Syrian section of the Jazira where since the mid-1920s conflicts of socio-economic and political
character between Bedouin and settled communities were very much enhanced by French policies of sedentarisation and extension of the agricultural frontier. This entailed the creation of large settlements of non-Arab and non-Muslim groups, especially Christian and Kurds, which came from Turkey and Iraq.

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 Jazira. In fact the presence of an artificial boundary placed in the middle of land which was considered as common property of the tribe offered the tribesmen almost endless opportunities to avoid the imposition of the authority of the Iraqi and Syrian administrations by moving into 'their own' tribal territories located on the other side of the provisional frontier. The British officer 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 ...

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. It has also to be pointed out that in the mid-1920s the first solution, which provided for the creation of tribal 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-man's land' would have facilitated Turkish intrigue among the tribal population.

By 1925 the control the Syrian government exercised over the Bedouin tribes moving in Syrian territory north and west of Sinjar was loose. Until 1930 the French did not succeed in establishing a permanent military presence in the north-east of Syria as a result of the Franco-Turkish disputes over the Bec du Canard area. In 1920 the French had created the Contrôle Bedouin, a permanent police force in charge of tribal security which included Camel Corps officered by French personnel. However, by 1925, given the difficult position of the French in the area, the majority of the police forces east of the Euphrates included tribal levies still under the command of Bedouin chiefs, especially the Shammar. By contrast, the British and Iraqi authorities were in a far better position to deal with local unrest. Apart from the presence of the RAF they could count on relatively well-established administrative posts in Jabal Sinjar and Tall'Afar where police forces were stationed on a permanent basis.23 By and large no definitive steps were taken until the mid-1930s by the French and British mandatory administrations to solve the problem of Bedouin control along the Syro-Iraqi border mainly because a definitive solution required a clear delimitation of the frontier line which was tantamount to a clear definition of British and French spheres of influence in the region. 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 outbursts of tribal bellicosity which involved Syrian tribes and Iraqi settled communities or vice-versa.

In the second half of the 1920s some groups of Sinjari villagers and tent-dwellers belonging to the Haskan and Qiran tribes whose lands
were bisected by the provisional border were increasingly affected by Bedouin raids. Internal rivalries among the Shammar played a prominent role in the development of widespread tribal hostilities around Sinjar as this tribal confederation played a paramount role in local politics. Conflict among the Shammar would involve the majority of the Jazira tribes which were linked to Shammar factions by more or less stable political alliances.

During the mandate, the history of the Shammar moving around Jabal Sinjar was marked by the bitter confrontation between 'Ajil al-Yawar, leader of the 'Abda clan, and Daham al-Hadi, chief of the Shammar Khurusa. In the 1920s the development of this confrontation, which had started in previous decades, bears witness to the central role played by British and French tribal policies in determining new tribal rearrangements and in encouraging Shammar encroachment on Yazidi lands. In 1920 the British appointed Daham al-Hadi paramount Shaykh of the Shammar moving in Iraqi territory. However, in August 1921 when Faysal became King of Iraq, the paramountcy of the Iraqi Shammar was transferred to Daham's enemy 'Ajil al-Yawar who had long standing relations with the Hashemite King. Subsequently Daham took refuge with the Khurusa clan whose tribal land lay across the provisional Syro-Iraqi border. In 1923 he started to be subsidised by the French in order to patrol the Syrian section of the Mosul–Dayr al-Zawr road which crossed southern Sinjar.

Relations between the inhabitants of Sinjar and the Shammar were of mutual dependence rather than submission, although many Shammar leaders in the past had attempted to establish some sort of lordship over Yazidi land. Towards the end of the 19th century some Sinjari tribes would occasionally shepherd Shammar flocks in exchange for arms and ammunition which were smuggled in the Jazira by powerful Shammar leaders. Some traders settled in Balad were essential to the development of the Shammar economy as they controlled the Sinjari section of the commercial route between Mosul and Dayr al-Zawr which was heavily reliant on camel transport. Merchants obtained camels, manpower and political support from the Shammar in exchange for the concession of the rights of supervising the transportation of particular bulks of goods. After 1925 the Shammar chief 'Ajil al-Yawar started to use his influential position as
protegé of King Faysal to develop plans for the colonisation of Sinjar. During the mandate Shammari encroachment on Yazidi lands was minimal given the presence of RAF forces in the area which successfully deterred Bedouin bellicosity. Only after the enforcement of universal conscription in 1934 did ‘Ajil succeed in occupying some areas of Sinjar with the connivance of the Iraqi government which was increasingly eager to support plans for the colonisation of Kurdish controlled areas. Throughout the 1920s ‘Ajil’s ambitions vis-à-vis Sinjar were also kept in check by his enemy Daham al-Hadi who patrolled the Mosul–Dayr al-Zawr route on behalf of the French mandatory government. Daham and his followers would carry out periodical raids into the Mountain and then withdraw into Syrian territory in an attempt to antagonise ‘Ajil’s ambitions.25

In the second half of the 1920s, signs of changing relations between the Bedouin tribe of the Tayy and the Haskan Yazidis became apparent. The Tayy, a Bedouin group which came under Syrian jurisdiction after 1920, had established close socio-economic and political relations with the Haskan and Qiran Yazidis since the establishment of the tribe in the northern Jazira at the beginning of the 19th century. Tayy tribesmen would share Yazidi grazing grounds in the winter in exchange for protection against Bedouin incursions.26 In 1926/1927 they started to intrude Haskan pastures in western Sinjar. It seems that, apart from the new geo-political arrangements determined by the fixation of the border between Syria and Iraq, an exceptional shortage of fodder put the Bedouin economy under serious strain. As crops and grazing grounds in the flatlands around Sinjar were badly damaged by locusts Shammari and Tayy tribesmen turned their attention to the hilly districts of Sinjar where damage to cultivation had been more limited.27 As the Haskan Yazidis put up fierce resistance against Tayy intrusion, Tayy tribesmen retaliated by destroying grazing grounds and threshing floors and looting considerable numbers of animals, taking advantage of the new border arrangement which allowed them to withdraw into Syrian territory without being chased by the Iraqi police.28

The resentment of the inhabitants of western Sinjar was increasingly channelled against the local authorities who were unable to ensure the restitution of properties. Sinjari tribesmen often applied
to the Iraqi qaimmaqam in Balad, hoping that the new government would provide assistance in recovering their looted animals. 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 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. Although informal meetings between Syrian and Iraqi officials occurred between 1923 and 1926 to solve the matter, no permanent arrangement was reached.29

By the end of 1926 Shaykh Khalaf Haskani, whose tribesmen had been most affected by Bedouin raids, started to put much pressure upon the local Iraqi authorities by threatening to actively support French claims over western Sinjar if the government was not able to negotiate the restitution of sheep looted from the villages he controlled. As tribal disturbances had also increased along the southern section of the provisional border in January 1927 a conference was held at Dayr al-Zawr with the participation of Iraqi and Syrian representatives for the purpose of organising a commission to settle standing claims between tribes and sedentary communities of the Mosul and Dayr al-Zawr provinces.30 The idea of settlement under the supervision of the local mandatory authorities on both sides represented an extension of the Tribal Disputes Regulations which were widely employed in Iraq. To this end, in 1926, the British Residency in Baghdad drafted an agreement with the representatives of the Syrian government.31 The Dayr conference proved effective in dealing with disputes involving Sinjari tribesmen but did not prevent further outbreaks of hostilities. It was only in 1934, two years after the border between Syria and Iraq was fixed, that definite steps were taken to create permanent committees for the solution of disputes involving border tribes which became increasingly under the control of the new state administrations. This was especially so in the Syrian section of the Jazira where a consistent programme of sedentarisation of its Arab population started to be implemented by the Syrian government after independence. In the Sinjar area this committee was chaired by the Qaimmaqam of Sinjar and the French intelligence officer of the Syrian
town of Hasaka and proved to be particularly effective in settling trans-border claims which by the 1940s had considerably decreased.

Kurdish Trans-Regional Identities

The creation of the state of Iraq as a territorially defined political entity and the location of Jabal Sinjar along its borders with both Turkey and Syria not only created widespread concerns for the maintenance of tribal security but also determined growing fears for the increasing politicisation of transregional identities. In particular Kurdish political mobilisation represented a threat to the still fragile ‘integrity’ of the state of Iraq given that large Kurdish communities lived in neighbouring Turkey, Syria, and Iran.

The presence of national boundaries in the areas of Yazidi settlement did not have any immediately disruptive effects upon the close relations which had linked the various Yazidi groups living in the region for at least six centuries, relations which were generally of a 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. The existence of religious solidarities which encompassed the areas of Yazidi settlement in southern Kurdistan under Iraqi, Turkish and Syrian control was not considered per se subversive. However, the politicisation of the Kurdish question and the threat posed to British policies in northern Iraq by emerging Kurdish solidarities alerted the British and Iraqi authorities of Mosul. This was particularly so after 1925 when the Turkish authorities started to take very strict measures against Kurdish visitors from Iraq, largely as a result of the tribal uprising led by the Kurdish leader Shaykh Sa‘id of Palu in eastern Turkey. Although it seems that there was no British or Iraqi
involvement in the development of Kurdish anti-governmental resistance in eastern Turkey, contacts between Iraqi and Turkish Kurds were generally considered detrimental to public security.\textsuperscript{32} In October 1925 a group of Sinjari priests started a tour of Yazidi villages in the Viranshahir area. They were seized by the Turkish authorities and imprisoned in Severek. In the same month five Yazidi qawwals left Sinjar to parade the standard among Yazidi groups living among the Milli tribe in Turkish territory. They were also imprisoned by the Turkish authorities and subsequently tried.\textsuperscript{33}

To a great extent by the second half of the 1920s the realities of day-to-day administration became part of the lives of many Sinjaris. While state power was slowly being recognised, the Yazidis' identification with emerging Kurdish solidarities was problematic as a result of both historical factors and of the lack of a clear agenda vis-à-vis the Yazidis on the part of the majority of Kurdish national activists. An analysis of the various forms in which Kurdish national mobilisation developed in Iraq, Turkey and Syria in the period under consideration clarifies further the last point.

By and large by the mid 1920s two major trends had emerged. The first was linked to the shaykhly milieu within which, in the second half of the 19th century, had emerged many temporal leaders. In the 1920s Shaykh Mahmud Barzinji and Shaykh Ahmad of Barzan in Iraq and Shaykh Sa'id of Palu in Turkey succeeded in mobilising large numbers of tribesmen against state administrations through large patronage networks. These leaders made extensive use of religious symbols linked to the Sunni milieu. Although the overtones of their uprisings were Pan-Kurdish, their scope was generally limited to the context of their tribal domains and strongly identified with Islam.\textsuperscript{34}

The second major nationalist trend of the period developed among educated Kurds who often had tribal backgrounds but had served in various capacities in the Ottoman administration. By the second half of the 1920s these notables attempted to shape ideas of Kurdish self-determination disjointed from the particular setting of the tribal milieu, especially in Iraq and Syria. Within the particular framework of mandatory Iraq a substantial section of these Kurds supported the creation of a Kurdish autonomous entity under British control, thus viewing the mandatory power as central to the fulfilment of Kurdish
aspirations. In 1929 six Kurdish deputies in the Iraqi parliament headed by Isma'il Bey Rowanduzi, Kurdish deputy for the Arbil district, submitted a memorandum to the Iraqi prime minister in which they put forward a project for the formation of a Kurdish province which included 'Aqra, Dohuk, Zibar, 'Amadiyya and Zakhu.35

Clearly forms of 'tribal' nationalism with their extensive use of Sunni symbolism could not appeal to the majority of the Iraqi Yazidis as Yazidi identity had grown in strength out of a long-standing confrontation with Sunni Islam. For the time being ideas of Kurdish self-determination coming from Kurdish intellectual circles seemed equally unacceptable. Sophisticated ideas of political decentralisation and administrative autonomy attracted almost no support from men of religion, tribal aghas and tribesmen who were illiterate, had no representation in urban areas where the movement was based, and were still attached to particularistic tribal and religious loyalties. Further, it seems that Kurdish propagandists from both sides had very confused ideas about the place occupied by the Iraqi Yazidis in the future of an independent or autonomous Kurdistan.

The 1929 proposal for the formation of a Kurdish administrative unit did not mention either Sinjar or Shaykhan. Two months later a proclamation of The Society for the Independence of Kurdistan, a new Kurdish society based in Baghdad, stated explicitly that Kurdistan would include the Yazidi communities of Sinjar. A vague appeal calling for the inclusion of the Sinjariis in a semi-autonomous Kurdish state within the Kingdom of Iraq also appears in another proclamation dated 1931, probably written by Shaykh Ahmad of Barzan.36 The support the Sinjari Yazidis could have held out to 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 Kurdish nationalists had not shown much interest in the Iraqi Yazidis indeed until the 1960s, at least within Iraq. This is confirmed by Major Noel, the British envoy to Shaykh Mahmud then regarded as the future king of Kurdistan, who as early as 1919 remarked:

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 ...37

To be effective a pan-Kurdish message among the Yazidi tribes would have had to have adapted itself to more local interests in order to respond more sensitively to aspirations of tribes and tribal leaders. In this connection the activities of Hajo Agha, a Yazidi tribal leader who settled in the Syrian Jazira in the late 1920s, are particularly illuminating. Hajo was the chief of the Heverkan confederation, a heterogeneous tribe which included Christians, Yazidis and Muslims. The confederation numbered approximately 1,800 families distributed in 150 villages centred around the capital of the Jabal Tur, Midyat. The Jabal Tur, or Tur ‘Abidin as it was usually called by its Arab Christian settlers, was a plateau located between Mardin and Jazira 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 also substantial among the Durkan (120 Yazidi and Muslim families), the Dasikan (900 Yazidi, Muslim and Christian families) and the Alian (1200 families of Yazidis, Christians and Muslims).38 In the second half of the 19th century a Yazidi section of the Heverkan called Mala ‘Uthman achieved supremacy over a considerable number of Havarkan tribesmen under the leadership of Hasan Agha. Taking advantage of the military operations of World War I in the Jabal, Hasan Agha’s great-nephew Hajo III seized the town of Midyat and unified the whole tribe which was subsequently joined by a considerable number of Christians who, in a similar fashion to Hamu Shiru in Jabal Sinjar, sought protection from Kurdish persecution.39

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 the 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 Shaykh of the Jabal, subsidised 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.40 In the first stage of his interest in Sinjar it
is not entirely clear whether he acted primarily as an intermediary of the Turks. However, since he was Yazidi himself, Hajo was in a position to gain the confidence of the Yazidi leadership. 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 governments. However, from his correspondence with Shaykh Khalaf Haskani 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 another tribal insurrection after the tribal disturbances of early 1925.

Yet it is in the context of his rebellion against the Turkish government, which broke out a few months later around Midyat, that his interest in the political attitude of his Sinjari co-religionists has to be situated. Hajo, who became well known as a pragmatic and skilful political leader in the following years, was probably trying to demonstrate his loyalty to the Turkish government and at the same time was attempting to secure possible future military and logistic support in Sinjar which could assist his plans against the administration. Hajo's uprising in the Jabal Tur started in March 1926 and was directed against the Turkish government. His rebellion did not have the political impact of the uprising of Shaykh Sa'id since it covered a very limited area, involved less tribal forces than those mobilised by the Shaykh of Palu and was short-lived, lasting only ten days. Eventually the Turkish army forced him to cross the border and retreat into Syria. French intelligence sources reported various attempts to send some auxiliary tribal forces from Sinjar, probably on the part of some Yazidi leaders of north Sinjar. However, no major group of Yazidi tribesmen seems to have left the Mountain for Turkey during the rebellion.

Hajo's settlement in the French Jazira marked a turning point in the history of the transhumant Kurdish tribes in the area. On the 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 Jazira as their new homeland. On the other hand Hajo could initiate more coherent organised 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. As a British officer reported in May 1928: 'The Officer (French, based in Qamishli) gave me the impression that the attempted co-ordination of the various tribal shaykhs whether in Syria, Iraq or Turkey was undertaken more and more in Kurdish circles ...' And: 'Hadjo Agha is in close touch with the internal organisation of the nationalist movement and has a channel of communication with tribal leaders ...' It was in this way that Kurdish nationalist propaganda started to arrive in Sinjar, directly or indirectly promoted by the activities of the Yazidi Heverkani chief who since 1928 became the member of the Aleppo branch of Khoybun, a Kurdo–Armenian nationalist association based in Beirut which attempted to promote a transnational mobilisation of the Kurdish tribes of Syria, Turkey and Iraq. Khoybun can be considered the first nationalist association born in a Kurdish intellectual milieu which attempted to find widespread support among the tribes by employing tribal leaders as its main propagandists. To a great extent the activities of Khoybun in the Jazira were encouraged by the French mandatory authorities who were eager to support the creation of separate identities in the rural areas of Syria to counterbalance the growing influence of the Arab nationalists in the main urban centres. In this connection Khoybun propaganda in Jabal Sinjar, which was also favoured by the unclear border arrangements, became part of French attempts to attract the settlement of increasing numbers of Kurds, Christians and Armenians in the Syrian Jazira.

Between 1926 and 1929 Jabal Sinjar sheltered increasing numbers of refugees coming from the Jabal Tur as a temporary halting place on their way to Syria. While the Christians were soon allowed to settle around Balad under the protection of Hamu Shiru the situation was more complicated in the case of the Kurds. Their settlement was firmly discouraged by the Iraqi authorities on the grounds that this could jeopardise relations with their Turkish counterparts after the final settlement of the Mosul dispute had provided for the enforcement of
strict border regulations. In December 1925 a prominent Kurdish Yazidi chieftain of the Heverkan tribe, Shamsadin Agha, who was the most loyal supporter of Hajo Agha, had arrived in Jabal Sinjar with 60 families and asked to settle permanently in the Mountain. A few months later, given the resistance of the Iraqi authorities, he was forced to follow Hajo in Syria who himself soon after the outbreak of the rebellion in Jabal Tur had asked unsuccessfully for permission to settle permanently in Sinjar appealing to his Yazidi identity. In November 1926 another Heverkani chief who led the 'Umaryan section of the confederation settled in Sinjar with his relatives for a couple of months after he had applied to the French authorities in the Jazira for permission to settle permanently in Syria.49

By 1928, when it became clear that Khoybun had started to operate among the Sinjari Yazidis as a first step to extend its influence among the Kurdish tribes of the Mosul province, the Iraqi government started to apply severe restrictions on the issue of visas for any Kurds or Armenians coming from Syria suspected of being connected to the movement.50 Active steps to involve the Sinjari leaders in the activities of Khoybun were taken by Shaykh Mahdi, brother of Shaykh Sa'id of Palu, who had been involved in Hajo’s activities since 1925 and by Vahan Papazian, an Armenian activist member of the central committee of Khoybun of Aleppo. Shaykh Mahdi’s mission to Sinjar in 1926, which primarily aimed at mobilising the Yazidi tribes for a Kurdish insurrection in the Ararat area of Eastern Turkey, was largely unsuccessful. By contrast Vahan Papazian, who visited Sinjar in 1927 in an attempt to establish new Armenian settlements in Iraq, was welcomed by Hamu Shiru. The Fuqara' chief declared his willingness to settle up to 1000 Armenian families in the village of Khana Sur close to his headquarters in Jaddala. Although there are no further reports on this episode it is likely that Papazian’s project was never implemented following the progressive deterioration of Kurdo–Armenian relations within Khoybun.51

Hamu Shiru’s relations with Hajo Agha seem to have been rather strained especially after 1929 when the Heverkani leader, following a reorganisation of the group, became a permanent member of the Hasaka section of the organisation and thus operated very close to Sinjar.52 Hajo Agha kept in close contact with Isma‘il Beg Chol, a
member of the Yazidi princely family settled in Jabal Sinjar, who was corresponding regularly with Khoybun members in Syria. In 1929 Isma'il got in touch with the Yazidi Mir of Shaykhan trying to win his support on behalf of the Syrian based nationalist movement. Although in October 1930, shortly before the dissolution of the organisation, a Khoybun informant reported that Khudayda Hamu Shiru, Shaykh Khidr Qiran and Shaykh Khalaf Haskan were permanent members of the society in Sinjar, it seems that the organisation had not received any practical support from these leaders.

In Sinjar responses to Khoybun propaganda show that local contingencies and personal rivalries played a crucial role in determining the attitude of local leaders. Khoybun provides an interesting example of the ways in which the Iraqi Yazidis could be successfully integrated into a Kurdish national project by means of a nationalist ‘acculturation’ of the tribes disjointed from local centres of tribal and religious authority linked to the Sunni milieu. The text of the oath of allegiance to the organisation which Isma'il Beg Choi circulated in Sinjar illustrates the kind of nationalist jargon employed by Khoybun which still accommodated a strong tribal symbolism. It read as follows:

I do hereby swear on my honour and religion that from the date of my signing this undertaking to a period of two years I do not use arms against any Kurd unless an attack is made by him on my life and honour or upon the lives and honour of those whose safety I am responsible by family or national obligation. I do postpone by the expiry of these two years all blood feuds and other disputes and do my utmost to prevent bloodshed among two Kurds on private matters. Any Kurd who acts in contravention of this undertaking is regarded a traitor of his nation and the murder of every traitor is a duty.

However, Khoybun’s shortcomings became most apparent, in Sinjar as elsewhere, as tribal barriers proved to be particularly resilient to abstract ideas of the nation albeit formulated in terms consistent with tribal realities.
Communities, the League of Nations and Minorities

By the late 1920s the perception of a number of ethnic and religious groups under Iraqi sovereignty became contextualised within the frame of the colonial state as indicated by the development of a 'minority question'. The process by which this question came to monopolise Iraqi politics in the last years of the British mandate, especially between 1930 and 1932, indicates that an official discourse about minorities was monopolised by the colonial power and by the League of Nations. The difficulty of coming to terms with Iraq's racial, linguistic and religious diversity within the legal and political framework of a modern nation-state was recognised before 1930. However, the emergence of the minority question was primarily a reflection of British concerns to relinquish her mandate over Iraq which became apparent in the second half of the 1920s. In July 1927 Great Britain promised King Faysal support for the candidature of Iraq to the League of Nations in 1932 which was tantamount to the recognition of Iraqi independence. By 1929 the British authorities officially informed the Iraqi government of their decision to terminate the mandate. Finally, in 1930, Great Britain signed a new treaty with the Iraqi government which defined the future relations between independent Iraq and the colonial power. By 1932 the mandatory power had to ensure that Iraqi nation-building was advanced enough to
qualify for full membership in the League of Nations which supervised the Iraqi mandate through the Permanent Mandate Commission. After 1930 local tensions were increasingly labelled by Great Britain and the League in terms of minority/majority opposition. This served two important goals. First, this opposition rather paradoxically showed that Iraq had reached some sort of national development as the very notion of minority implied the consolidation of modern political institutions in the region. Secondly, a precise focus on minority/majority opposition set a clear agenda for the intervention of the League in Iraqi affairs in the last two years of mandatory rule.

As independence drew closer, the direct involvement of the League in Iraqi affairs, which started during the development of the Mosul dispute, became increasingly consistent. The principles which guided the delimitation of national borders in the region were inspired by a growing awareness of minority issues. These principles underlined the responsibilities of national governments vis-à-vis the population they came to rule by international law. For instance, the inclusion of the Mosul vilayet in Iraq was made conditional on special provisions for the safeguard of Kurdish rights in the area under Iraqi control. The same concerns guided the League's involvement in the fixing of the border between Syria and Iraq. By 1930 minority issues featured prominently in the agendas of the Permanent Mandate Commission and of the mandatory power as clearly indicated by the annual reports presented by the British government to the League. In this connection it is quite indicative that the signature of the minority declaration by the Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Sa'id in May 1932 effectively terminated the British Mandate.

A number of local groups became particularly receptive to the activities of the League which often contributed to stir up troubles against the local administration. The Iraqi government and the nationalists viewed with great suspicion the political developments which surrounded the minority question as they considered it as a means through which Great Britain fomented anti-government resistance in order to retain her influence in key areas after independence. In government and nationalist circles the term ‘minority’ started to be increasingly identified with British imperialism thus paving the way for the deep mistrust with which many groups, and especially the
Christians, were viewed in the post-colonial period. The role played by the League of Nations in minority affairs was rather controversial. In an important sense the League through the Mandate Commission interfered with the process of self-government in Iraq although ironically it claimed to defend its future interests. The League contributed to affect the minorities’ self-perception and encouraged their awareness of separation. At the same time it lacked the means to enforce loyalty to the Iraqi state as it operated outside its institutional framework. It granted many communities official instruments which allowed them to bypass the local government, in particular the right to petition directly the Permanent Mandate Commission in order to express their grievances against the Iraqi administration.

The Iraqi minorities were identified on the basis of their religious and racial difference. Shari'a provisions concerning non-Muslim communities were rephrased within the legal system of the colonial state and thus contributed to define the concept of religious minority in legal terms in the context of modern Iraqi legislation. Although the Iraqi constitution of 1925 sanctioned the equality of all non-Muslims and granted them rights of political representation in parliament (which by 1927 were extended to provincial councils), relations between certain religious groups and the state continued to be regulated by the Ottoman Millet Law which allowed ahl al-kitab communities (Christians and Jews) to retain a high degree of autonomy. In 1921 the millets were renamed Spiritual Councils and thus integrated into the Iraqi judiciary. The execution of the provisions under the new order was however made dependent upon the enactment of special legislation which was issued in 1930 for the Christians and in 1931 for Jewish and Armenian Orthodox communities. The Spiritual Councils, like the old millets, granted selected religious groups the right of managing the personal status of their members and of keeping separate educational institutions. They also allowed the separate administration of pious foundations and charitable bequests. In the field of education the provisions of the 1930 Education Law which aimed at the creation of a unified curriculum damaged the position of communal schools, especially at village level. Although heterodox religious groups like the Yazidis were not recognised by the state, they were allowed to profess their faiths without any particular restrictions.
As religion had defined the development of local political and social dynamics for centuries, diversity based on racial and linguistic affiliation had been less influential in defining group relations. Race as a determinant political and ideological factor was slowly promoted by the League and the British in the course of the 1920s as a reflection of the typically western experience of national development on ethnic bases. Generally speaking Iraqi racial minorities enjoyed far less constitutional protection than those religious communities which were under Spiritual Council regulations. The Iraqi government recognised Kurdish cultural specificity in 1931 with the promulgation of the Local Languages Law which made Kurdish the language of the administration, courts and instruction in areas mainly inhabited by Kurds. Although in principle the Local Languages Law represented a very important step for the recognition of Kurdish aspirations, in practice its achievements were limited. First, the lack of standardisation of the Kurdish dialects hindered the implementation of this law since the very inception of its application. Secondly, language, rather than race, was made the criterion of the choice of governmental officials in the Kurdish areas, thus creating much criticism on the part of Kurds aspiring to fill government posts in the northern districts.7

The Iraqi minorities came to be primarily concentrated in the north (Kurds, Christians, Yazidis and Turkomans) with the exception of Baha'ī, Sabean, Jewish and Christian communities which lived in Baghdad and neighbouring districts.8 The definition of Iraqi minorities did not take into account a set of communal solidarities which actively opposed the consolidation of the colonial state. As such the Shi'i populations of southern Iraq were not treated as a minority given that they were both Arab and Muslim.

Attempts at Yazidi Religious Reform: The Anti-Emirate of Sinjar

In the colonial period Yazidi tribal leaders became central to British policies in the rural areas and thus of particular relevance to the process of nation-building. The Yazidi tribes of Sinjar did not face major challenges to their existence in the 12 years of mandatory rule although their socio-economic and political structures were affected by new
geo-political realities, especially by the fixation of international borders. By contrast by the early 1930s Yazidi religious solidarities were widely affected by the process of definition of clearer legal and political boundaries between the state and religious communities. The religious establishment of Shaykhan became particularly vulnerable to the political developments of the late 1920s and early 1930s. By then the state had taken no specific legal measures to recognise Yazidi communal laws which regulated matters concerning personal status. This was mainly on the grounds that the previous Ottoman legislation which was based on shari‘a provisions denied any legal status to the community because of their heterodox religious beliefs.

At the beginning of the 1930s, in the wider context of the development of the minority question, the existence of the Yazidi Emirate of Shaykhan was jeopardised as a result of the close scrutiny under which the Iraqi authorities had placed the Yazidi Mir Sa‘id Beg in the previous decade. As Sa‘id Beg was not granted any legal recognition as spiritual head of the community within the frame of communal representative institutions such as the Spiritual Councils, the close relations existing between the Yazidi mir and the Mosulawi authorities aroused much suspicion, especially in Jabal Sinjar, where between 1930 and 1932 widespread anti-mir demonstrations occurred. Popular discontent was skilfully manipulated by local tribal leaders, especially Hamu Shiru and Shaykh Khidr, who promoted a movement of religious reform aimed at transforming the nature of the Yazidi Emirate and the management of Yazidi religious affairs.

The events of 1930–32 cannot be considered merely as a by-product of the effervescence of Iraqi communalism as a result of the political developments of the period but have to be understood in the context of changes which occurred in the last decades of Ottoman rule. At the end of the 19th century the religious revival promoted by Sinjari tribal/religious leaders, especially by Hamu Shiru, contributed to create a strong feeling of religious localism among the Sinjari tribes which developed further during the mandate. Although the prestige of the Shaykhanli Emirate was very much weakened after the conversion to Islam of Mir Mirza Beg in 1892, the encroachment of the Ottoman government in the power structure of the Yazidi religious institution increased after the application of the Tanzimat reforms to
the Mosul province. In this period the authorities of Mosul often interfered in the election of new mirs in order to gain control of the religious core of the community. The rise to power of Mir Sa'id Beg after 1907 indicates the extent to which opposing factions within the mir’s household sought the support of the Ottoman government to legitimise their claims to leadership. In doing so they clearly provided continuity to Turkish involvement in Shaykhanli affairs. When Sa'id's father 'Ali Beg was murdered in mysterious circumstances in 1913, 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 Shaykhan 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 Beg became the new Mir of the Yazidis under Ottoman protection and Isma'il made his way to Jabal Sinjar where he resided during the mandate. From here Isma'il continued to challenge the position of the acting mir and that of the Fuqara' leader Hamu Shiru mainly using his status of member of the princely family.9

In the 1920s the mir's dependence on the government grew in strength alongside a general reluctance on the part of the Sinjari leaders to provide political and economic support to the Emirate of Shaykhan. Clearly the fact that Jabal Sinjar lacked local religious, political and socio-economic institutions directly controlled by and dependent on Shaykhan very much contributed to the independent development of this important area of the Yazidi 'religious periphery'. Furthermore the constraints imposed by nation-building played a central role in strengthening the separation between the two groups. In the 1920s Jabal Sinjar became central to the maintenance of British rule in north-western Iraq given its exceptional strategic position. By contrast Shaykhan did not receive much attention in British circles as
indicated by the absence of specific tribal and communal policies for the area. Unlike its neighbouring Kurdish districts, Shaykhan was relatively peaceful during the mandate as indicated by the scarce activities of the RAF in the area. Since the administrative reorganisation of 1921 the Shaykhan district became increasingly under the control of the Mosulawi authorities without any major British interference. After 1925 the Iraqi government transferred Muslim and Christian officials who had served in Shaykhan to Sinjar in a clear attempt to promote a joint administration of the two areas with a view to extending further the influence of the Yazidi Mir Sa‘id Beg among the tribal leaders of the Mountain.¹⁰

The mir and the religious oligarchy of Shaykhan adopted a more passive attitude vis-à-vis the imposition of state authority, at least in comparison with the Sinjari leaders. In October 1930 Sa‘id Beg wrote a document in support of the Iraqi administration whose overtones probably reflect the influence that ‘some Iraqi nationalists’ had started to exert on the religious chief. This document was widely circulated among the Iraqi Yazidis and read as follows:

We, the Yazidi Nation, are in a state of quiet enjoyment and comfort and receive nothing from the Arab government except justice and therefore we want to remain under Arab protection.¹¹

In the course of 1930 some Yazidi commoners from Sinjar and Shaykhan started to send petitions to the Iraqi authorities of Mosul and to the local British representatives. Complaints focused on the allegedly immoral conduct of Mir 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 [it] is red and, above all, upon the arrack when it is white.’¹² The mir was also bitterly criticised for having neglected his duties vis-à-vis the sacred buildings of the shrines of Shaykh ‘Adi and Shaykh Shams which were reported to be in a general state of decay. Although these accusations were perhaps rather excessive they
reflected a widespread concern on the part of the Yazidi commoners for the increasing dependence of their spiritual leader on the support of the Iraqi administration. By and large sections of the Yazidi population of Sinjar perceived the Iraqi authorities as continuing old Muslim policies of assimilation of the community, especially in relation to their interest in the Shaykhan Emirate.\textsuperscript{13}

By 1930 the mir’s financial situation had indeed become very precarious, as shown by the heavy debts he had contracted with Mosulawi moneylenders. Various sources would confirm that Sa‘id Beg increasingly required the financial and political support of the local Iraqi authorities in order to keep in check the ambitions of other members of his household. Although the mir’s personal inclinations towards alcohol and female company might have played a role in his precarious financial situation, undoubtedly a general decrease in religious revenues which started at the beginning of World War I lay at the root of much of his troubles. In the 1920s it seems that only three of the seven images of the Peacock Angel which were used for the collection of alms and were kept in the mir’s palace in Ba‘adri toured the Yazidi districts. These were the Tawus ‘Bizrab’ which toured the Shaykhan district three times a year, the Tawus ‘Anzal’, usually brought out twice a year to collect alms in Jabal Sinjar and a third image of the Peacock which reached Syria and some areas of eastern Turkey.\textsuperscript{14} The fact that collections could only be carried out in these three areas was a result of the restrictions on travel after World War I especially in Turkey, Iran, the Caucasus and Armenia as a result of the politicisation of the Kurdish question. Revenue from offerings of the pilgrims who visited the Yazidi shrines of Shaykh ‘Adi and Shaykh Shams al-Din had also decreased for the same reasons as after the fall of the Ottoman Empire pilgrimages to the sanctuaries were less frequent, especially among those believers who lived outside Iraq. Hence after the arrival of the British the income of the princelyabayt al-mal was considerably reduced and the importance of Sinjar for the mir’s treasury had grown in strength in comparison with previous periods. The Mountain was the richest and most populated Yazidi district where the standards were still paraded which provided stable revenue of approximately Rs 14,000 per year.\textsuperscript{15}

Between October and December 1929 the situation was precipitated
by rumours that official proceedings were being started by the Iraqi government to transforms Shaykh 'Adi into a Muslim *waqf*. The authorities circulated much propaganda to the effect that Shaykh 'Adi was a Muslim saint and his shrine should have catered for the needs of the Muslim community. The British did not have much control over *waqf* policies which were under the tight supervision of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior. Under the Ottomans the revenues of the sanctuary of Shaykh 'Adi, which belonged traditionally to the *mir* and to his household, were considered as a customary right acquired over time by the Yazidi community. In 1894 two years after 'Umar Wahbi Pasha’s army had swept into the Lalish valley, the Ottoman authorities took the first step towards the granting of *waqf* status to Shaykh 'Adi by replacing its Yazidi religious personnel with Muslim priests. After the shrines were restored to Mir 'Ali Beg in 1907 no action was taken by the authorities to regularise the legal position of Shaykh 'Adi’s customary beneficiaries through the issue of title deeds in the name of the *mir*, his family or of the Yazidi community as a whole. In the period of the mandate the revenue of the sanctuary of Shaykh ‘Adi was still considerable although, as already mentioned, less substantial than in the Ottoman period. In 1931 the British authorities estimated that the keeper of Shaykh ‘Adi collected a sum of Rs 40,000 per year in alms. In 1926 some Yazidis of Shaykhan (it is not clear whether the *mir* or members of the religious classes) attempted to register the shrine and the neighbouring lands in the name of the community, perhaps encouraged by the recent visit of the League of Nations commission in charge of delimiting the frontier between Turkey and Iraq. Its members gave assurances to the Yazidi leaders concerning the future religious freedom of the community under Iraqi sovereignty.

In early 1930 allegations of misuse of Yazidi religious revenue which came from Sinjar represented an ideal opportunity for the local tribal leaders to come out publicly against Mir Sa’id Beg and to put forward a claim for a share in the control of the Yazidi alms. In October Shaykh Khidr of the Qiran tribe voiced the dissent of ‘certain inhabitants of Sinjar and Shaykhan’ 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 Shaykh ‘Adi
to include himself, Hamu Shiru, the head of the Yazidi religious class of the Kochaks residing in Bahzani and three prominent shaykhs from the village of ‘Ayn Sifni in Shaykhan. Significantly members of the princely family were excluded. By December all the leading Sinjari tribal leaders officially asked the Iraqi authorities in Mosul to remove Sa‘id Beg in a petition signed by Hamu Shiru, his son Khudayda, Shaykh Khidr Qirani, Shaykh Khalaf al-Haskani and by ‘Atu and Matu, the two chiefs of the Habbabat tribe who had decided to join the anti-Sa‘id faction after an attempt to gain the support of the mir against the Fuqara’ leader in late 1929.19

When in early 1930 news that official proceedings were being started by the government to transform Shaykh ‘Adi into a Muslim waqf became more insistent many Yazidis, especially in Jabal Sinjar, started to publicise the idea of the creation of a Yazidi religious endowment by registering the shrine in the name of the community. Sinjari leaders proposed the creation of an enlarged Yazidi fund which besides the shrine included all arable land located in the Mountain. This project attracted widespread support among the tribal population. The inclusion of land 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 land exploitation especially in the light of the increase of land disputes with Arab tribesmen in peripheral areas of the Mountain.20 Although the Shaykh ‘Adi affair was clearly used by the Yazidi leaders to further their personal interests in Sinjar, it increasingly acquired anti-Sa‘id tones as the mir was thought to be involved in the plans of the government. In reality it seems that his position was rather unclear given that towards the end of 1930 Sa‘id Beg visited Sinjar to convince the local chiefs to support an application to the Iraqi authorities for the registration of the shrine in the name of the community.21

The proposal for the creation of a committee in charge of managing Shaykh ‘Adi’s funds, which Shaykh Khidr put forward to the British in 1930, resulted in a heated debate among the religious classes on the suitability of reforming the Yazidi religious institution controlled by the mir and his household. However, as it became clear, the reform advocated by the Sinjari leaders had contradictory aims. The creation of a committee could be viewed as a step towards a more egalitarian
and consensual management of Yazidi religious affairs but at the same time could work in favour of the Sinjari leaders who had largely inspired its establishment. In December 1930 the British authorities backed Shaykh Khidr’s proposal and discussed the creation of a Yazidi religious council modelled on the already existing Spiritual Councils. By including representatives of Sinjar and Shaykhan this council would enable the community to reach an agreement on the election of their religious leader and on the control of their financial affairs.

Within a couple of months the Sinjari chiefs, 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 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.

The particularistic and local concerns of the Sinjari leaders became apparent in June 1931 when Hamu Shiru presented the British authorities with his own candidate for the mirship, Husayn Beg, a cousin of Sa‘id. The issue of the independent management of Yazidi religious affairs thus became overtly linked to a direct challenge to the Shaykhanli establishment. Husayn fitted in well with the agenda of the Sinjari leaders. As a member of the princely family renowned for his piety and excellent moral character, Hamu’s candidate would have been acceptable to both commoners and religious classes. Further, as after 1925 Husayn had become increasingly passive and secluded, he could have been easily used to control a Yazidi religious council if one was ever to be formed. By 1932 a wide consensus was reached in Sinjar on the suitability of Husayn as the custodian of the religious interests of the local community. It was also decided that the future mir who still lived in Shaykhan was to reside in the village of Jaddala, one of the strongholds of Hamu Shiru, which would become the seat of the Yazidi Emirate.

Plans for the creation of a new emirate in Jabal Sinjar under the direct control of Hamu Shiru have to be understood in the context of developments which affected the position of the Fuqara’ leader in the
Mountain in the second half of the 1920s. First Hamu Shiru’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 an 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. Secondly Hamu Shiru, by championing the Yazidi cause and presenting himself as the custodian of the religious and economic interests of the community, could protect and consolidate his position in the Mountain on the eve of the termination of the mandate. He could also establish links with the Iraqi administration after independence if the religious council was institutionalised. The existence of a puppet mir in Shaykhan manipulated by the Iraqi authorities would have eventually allowed the government to extend its influence in Sinjar with obvious negative repercussions for the position of the Fuqara’ leader still considered the best ally of Great Britain in the region.

The removal of the Yazidi mir had important implications for the whole Yazidi community as it contravened one of the most important Yazidi dogmas, that of the divine nature of the Yazidi religious leader as representative on earth of Malak Tawus. The recognition of Husayn Beg as new mir could have been the beginning of change in the customary practices which had monitored relations of power in the Yazidi religious establishment for centuries. It would have excluded the princely family from the election of the mir and it would damage the position of those upper echelons of the Yazidi clergy which were heavily reliant on the mir’s household. Indeed the changes advocated by the Sinjari leaders were likely to have far reaching repercussions on the stability of the community. By mid-1931 tensions between the two factions escalated to the extent that propaganda in favour of the new Yazidi mir began to affect the Shaykhan area where the great majority of the representatives of the religious classes resided. Earlier in May Shaykh Barakat b. Shaykh Nasir, a prominent local leader who
had begun to support the Husayn Beg party, was murdered by a group of qawwals still loyal to the mir.²⁸

By and large the heads of the religious classes came out publicly in support of the mir and drafted a document known as the Shaykhan Memorial which they presented to the British and Iraqi authorities in Mosul. The Memorial spelled out the religious laws of the community, especially for what concerned the rules which regulated the appointment of the mir and the most prominent members of the religious classes.²⁹ The document calls for the maintenance of a strict Yazidi code of conduct as a way to preserve the emirate system. However, an equitable solution of the dispute required some sort of external arbitration, especially on the thorny issue of the destiny of Sa‘id Beg.

The Parading of the Peacock

The dispute over the control of Yazidi religious revenue between the pro-Husayn and pro-Sa‘id factions expressed a struggle between competing claims of religious legitimacy and for the first time in the history of modern Iraq prompted the direct mediation of the state in Yazidi religious affairs. The existence of a new emirate in Jabal Sinjar needed some sort of recognition on the part of the government although, as mentioned earlier, no established procedures were available given that the community’s position vis-à-vis the state was not institutionalised. Throughout 1931 the control of the Sinjar standard (sanjaq), the bronze effigy of Malak Tawus which the Mir of Shaykhan toured twice a year in the Mountain, became central to the legitimisation of Sinjari claims to the control of both alms and of the emirate system. The standard, as embodying the power of Malak Tawus, was a crucial symbol of Yazidi communal identity, a powerful mixture of spiritual and earthly authority which provided financial support to the emirate. At the beginning of 1931 a number of Shaykhanlis petitioned the government to stop the yearly parade of the Shaykhan standard in their villages on the grounds that they refused to pay their alms to a mir who was no longer acting in accordance with the ‘true spirit of Malak Tawus’. Although the local authorities issued orders to stop the Shaykhan tour the standard reached the village of Bahzani
on 17 April where the mir himself supervised the collection of the alms. At the same time Hamu Shiru and Shaykh Khidr threatened 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.30

The Iraqi authorities summoned the Sinjari chiefs in June to work out an arrangement which would allow the collections to be carried out regularly in the Mountain. 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. The Sinjar tour started at the beginning of July but after a few days the standard had to be brought back to Mosul because of the presence of Iraqi officials among the collection party which aroused much suspicion. The government planned to register all the collections and then to hold in trust the monies of the faithful in the provincial treasury of Mosul and await further developments.31 The peacock remained at the government headquarters of Mosul for several months. The resentment of the tribal chiefs and the population of Sinjar many times threatened to degenerate into armed confrontation with local government officials.

In the meantime British efforts to convince the government to give immediate instructions for the formation of the Yazidi religious council intensified. Faced with considerable pressure from the British authorities in October 1931 the Iraqi minister of interior officially informed Mir Sa‘id Beg, who was paying a short visit to Baghdad, that the government was ready to fulfil Yazidi aspirations for the achievement of a tighter and more egalitarian control of their religious affairs. On that occasion he also alluded to investigation underway into the conduct of the mir.32 More importantly it was the petition that Hamu Shiru and Shaykh Khidr sent to the League of Nations in 1931 which convinced the Iraqi authorities to come to terms with the pro-Husayn movement. This petition, written on behalf of the population of Sinjar, demanded that the League place the Mountain under French administration at a time when an international commission was deciding the final delimitation of the border between Syria and Iraq. Once again fearing the consequences which anti-Iraqi demonstrations by the local population would have on the future of
Jabal Sinjar, the government handed over the peacock to the Fuqara' chief thus recognising Husayn as the custodian of the religious interests of the Sinjari community. This was particularly important as the international commission for the delimitation of the border between Syria and Iraq was expected to tour Sinjar between March and May 1932. In February 1932 when the Fuqara' chief handed in the peacock to Husayn's deputy in Sinjar, (his brother Saydu), the believers of Sinjar proclaimed Husayn their new mir in absentia.33

The recognition of Husayn as legitimate representative of the aspirations of the inhabitants of Sinjar had the immediate effect of restoring order in the Mountain and convincing the local leaders to repudiate their 'disloyal' intentions towards the administration. In March the authorities convinced Hamu Shiru to postpone the first yearly tour of the peacock, as they were determined to avoid any embarrassing demonstrations on the part of Sa'ïd's supporters.34

However, the Iraqi government was deliberating avoiding any definite commitment with both factions and promised to support Husayn provided that he did not take permanent residence in Sinjar. They clearly wanted to promote the continuation of the emirate in Shaykhan but were not in a position to implement any clear cut policy to this end until the fixation of the border between Syria and Iraq and the termination of the British mandate, both scheduled for October 1932.35 By the beginning of the summer 1932 relations between Husayn, who was still in Shaykhan, and the Sinjari leaders deteriorated probably as a result of the intensification of the power struggle within the mir's household. In fact during 1932 three other rival claimants to the mirship appeared, each of them trying to seek the support of the government. Despite the weak position of the Mir Sa'ïd Beg, his close links with the local authorities allowed him to retain office after the termination of the mandate in October 1932.36

The death of Hamu Shiru in 1933 weakened the position of the Fuqara' tribe although his capable son Khudayda was recognised by the Iraqi government as Paramount Shaykh of Sinjar. The Sinjari leaders' attempts to control the appointment of the Yazidi mir and the religious revenues of the community were crushed by the lack of consistent British support and of favourable political circumstances after the termination of the mandate. Events after 1932 show that to a certain
extent fears that Shaykhan would become an instrument of state control over the community, which had catalysed much resentment in Jabal Sinjar, were justified. Although the emirate survived, by 1933 Yunis 'Abbawi, a Mosulawi landowner who had extensive properties in Shaykhan, came to play a prominent role in Yazidi affairs as the intermediary between the local Yazidi community and the Iraqi administration despite Mir Sa' id Beg retained his formal position. 37

From the perspective of the Iraqi and British authorities the election of a new mir in Sinjar who was not recognised by an agreement legitimised by Yazidi religious law would have established a local centre of religious power likely to create a dangerous fissure in the community. The Iraqi government did not take any steps which might have led to the dismissal of the Mir of Shaykhan but for some time it allowed the chiefs of Sinjar to hope for the permanent establishment of the mirship in the Mountain. In the last months of the mandate it was essential for the Iraqi administration to avoid any friction with the minorities whose affairs were under the League’s scrutiny.

The role of the British is rather interesting and reflects their involvement in the solution of the border dispute between Syria and Iraq which they regarded central to British imperial interests in the region. This dispute was referred to the League of Nations in October 1931. Subsequently the League appointed a frontier commission with the understanding that it would start to tour the disputed area in February 1932. 38 Since 1929 the British and French mandatory administrations which controlled the Jazira had started to support their respective claims to the western portion of Sinjar through correspondence exchanged between the two high commissioners in Beirut and Baghdad, or during informal negotiations. It is clear from the documentation presented by the French government to the boundary commission that the French presented the area as economically dependent on Syria, generally stressing the close socio-economic links existing between the Yazidi tribes settled in the west and the Bedouin tribes which were under Syrian administration (mainly Jawala Tayy, Jubur and Shammar moving around Dayr al-Zawr) and emphasised the lack of common political organisation among the Yazidi tribes who lived in the Mountain. As far as their relations with the Mir of Shaykhan 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 easily be split between two different state administrations.39

By 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 the lives of the local population, especially from a religious point of view.40 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 maintenance of their religious identity or to the fulfilment of their religious duties.

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 Shaykhan but also making clear demonstrations against the Iraqi government. At the beginning of 1932 the Iraqi authorities realised that in order to keep the western portion of Sinjar in Iraq they had to show the League that they intended to fulfil 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 and to a certain extent of the British vis-à-vis Husayn has to be viewed. At times this attitude contradicted all the previous interventions of the government in Sinjar which had tended to strengthen the links of the local population with Shaykhan and weaken the power and authority of the majority of the local Yazidi chiefs.

The report of the Frontier Commission was presented to the League Council in October 1932 in the same session that the admission of Iraq to the League was discussed.41 The measures taken by the Iraqi government in Sinjar had the 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 its western end, the Jabal Jariba, 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 Albu Kamal and the entire basin of the river Khabur were included in Syria.

The Politicisation of Communalism

In the 1920s the presence of the colonial state and the increasing role assumed by the League of Nations in Iraqi affairs offered many groups new models and opportunities of communal mobilisation. In particular the articulation of more or less coherent ideologies of group self-determination, especially attempts at defining an Iraqi/Arab national identity in opposition to colonial occupation, fostered the development of new forms of resistance to the colonial state on the part of local communities, which reflected upon the developing arena of both national and regional politics. At the beginning of the 1930s the development of a discourse about Iraqi minorities, especially on the part of the League, made a substantial contribution to the widespread politicisation of communalism. Political mobilisation became particularly apparent in the northern areas where the majority of Kurds and Christians were concentrated. Developments which affected the north were central to Iraqi nation-building as the Mosul province was still in a delicate position in the regional context, despite the fact that it was awarded to Iraq in 1925. The fixation of its western borders with Syria was still awaiting international arbitration and the possibility of a trans-national mobilisation on communal bases, especially of Kurdish groups, represented a tangible threat to the stability of the Iraqi state.

The political mobilisation and ideological effervescence of the Iraqi minorities in the period 1930/1932 was clearly rooted in forms of communal identification which were in place before the arrival of the
British. Groups had also developed complex patterns of relations with the state traditions which ruled the areas. These patterns were deeply embedded in the historical experience of the communities. The Iraqi Christians had a strong communal ethos which over time was nurtured by their special status as protected communities and by their close contacts with Europe, especially through the activities of Christian missionary establishments. The Kurds had retained various degrees of political and cultural solidarities based on the long-lasting state tradition of the Kurdish emirates which the Ottomans had crushed by the mid-19th century. By the early 20th century emerging nationalisms within the Ottoman Empire, especially Turkish and Armenian, had a strong influence on the Kurds. An emerging group of Kurdish intellectuals, who belonged to the Ottoman administrative and military elites, developed into a modernist intelligentsia which became central to the formation of a Kurdish nationalist ideology in the monarchical period. In the 1920s the development of political solidarities among the Iraqi Christians was primarily linked to the activities of some western-educated members of the Assyrian community, a Christian group which had arrived in Iraq after World War I and which in the 19th century had extensive contacts with Anglican missionaries.

The presence of modernist elites which was a legacy of the pre-colonial era did not provide cohesion to the development of both Kurdish and Christian mobilisation in the 1920s. First, the power base of these activists was two narrowly defined, as they lacked the means of attracting the support of large numbers of individuals. Secondly, ideas of self-determination and national symbols were often appropriated by religious and tribal elites. These symbols and ideas were re-framed accordingly, often in line with specific socio-economic and political interests. The majority of the Kurdish and Christian propaganda of the period used extensively the term ‘nation’ to indicate an ill-defined political community whose cohesion rested primarily on primordial loyalties. However, the idea that shared solidarities, especially those based on race and territorial contiguity, were the bases upon which groups could aspire to independent political development, was gaining ground considerably.

The League played a determinant role in promoting this idea
through the activities of the boundary commissions which toured the area in 1925 and in 1932. The League, while acting as arbitrator for the fixing of the provisional northern and western borders of Iraq, publicised race as the most influential criterion which determined the inclusion of communities within the boundaries of a certain state. Clearly, it contributed to strengthening the idea that there existed a direct relation between group specificity and territory. Further, and perhaps more importantly, the commissions carried out extensive surveys on the history and society of the area by directly interviewing local groups. Interviews, which were held both individually and collectively, increased people's awareness of the new political developments. They also contributed to create a stronger sense of group solidarities. The resolution of the 1925 border dispute made the award of the Mosul province to Iraq conditional on promises of the safeguarding of minority rights on the part of the future administration. These promises represented the bases upon which especially between 1930 and 1932 Kurds and Christians intensified their efforts to respond to Iraqi independence.44

During the period of the mandate the Kurdish and Christian inhabitants of northern Iraq continued to respond to a variety of centres of traditional power and authority, from tribal and religious leaders to local notables and feudal landlords. Movements of resistance to the imposition of state authority generally centred around charismatic personalities such as the two Kurdish tribal and religious leaders Shaykh Mahmud Barzinjia and Shaykh Ahmad of Barzan (who were also feudal landowners) and the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church Ishai, the Mar Sham'un XXI. These leaders had changing relations with the mandatory power which acted as a buffer between them and the central government. Britain consistently attempted to co-opt them into the state administration as a way to control their constituencies. Shaykh Mahmud, Shaykh Ahmad of Barzan and Mar Sham’un employed a variety of nationalist symbols in the struggle against the British and the Iraqi government. The movements they supported were generally an expression of the traditional social order and lacked a clear ideological underpinning able to appeal to large numbers of individuals outside their extended patronage networks.

Large numbers of Kurds and Assyrian Christians were also more
or less tightly tribally organised and the system of segmentary alliance and opposition contributed further to the fragmentation of their political allegiances. In this connection the powerful Kurdish tribe of the Jaf was traditionally opposed to Shaykh Mahmud but a number of sections would occasionally support him. Similarly, the Assyrian tribes displayed conflicting loyalties vis-à-vis the Assyrian Patriarch Mar Sham'un. After their arrival in Iraq the Assyrians had kept their divisions in independent tribes (Upper Tiyari, Lower Tiyari, Tkhuma, Baz, Jilu and Diz) together with the control over a number of groups which submitted to their authority and before World War I lived scattered in the Hakkari region and in the Urmia plain. In the first half of the 1920s many tribesmen often sided with the Assyrian military chief Agha Petrus Ellow who claimed to represent the interests of an enlarged Christian nation.45

Although a number of Kurdish nationalist circles had emerged during the years of the mandate, especially in Sulaymaniyya, the Kurdish intelligentsia was not able to organise a political agenda which could effectively represent Kurdish aspirations at a national level. Many Kurds who were involved in different capacities in the administration of Kurdish areas or were members of the Iraqi parliament were of moderate views and considered Iraq as the institutional framework within which Kurdish self-determination had to be implemented.46 Both the ‘nationalists’ and ‘moderates’ did not liaise effectively and, more importantly, they had scarce communication with tribes and tribal leaders who generally looked at these ‘urban’ Kurds with suspicion. An interesting indication of the divisions that constrained Kurdish mobilisation against the British and the Iraqi state is provided by the failure of the activities of the Syrian based Kurdish nationalist organisation Khoybun in northern Iraq. Between 1928 and 1930 Khoybun, which attempted to bridge the gap between the tribal world and the Kurdish urban elites, produced much propaganda to this effect with limited results. The development of a cohesive Kurdish movement within Iraq was also constrained by shifting British policies vis-à-vis Kurdish self-determination which had become clear after 1925 when British pledges to Kurdish autonomy were progressively abandoned.47

Developments which affected the Iraqi Christians in the period of
the mandate are less known but directly relevant to the development of Yazidi affairs. A Christian movement was per se very divided given the existence of various Christian denominations which in the 19th century received consistent support from different European powers. Further, during the mandate this division was strengthened by the presence of groups of Assyrians (or Nestorians) who arrived in Iraq during World War I mainly from the Hakkari region which after 1925 was permanently included in the Turkish Republic. At the beginning of 1915, when the Russian army occupied the area, the Assyrian tribes openly defied the Ottomans by supporting the invaders. When the Russians were compelled to retreat from the Hakkari mountains 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'quba, some 50 km. north of Baghdad. In the 1920s and early 1930s the Assyrians became the most controversial and politicised Christian group in Iraq given the close links they established with the mandatory power especially through the enrolment of many Assyrian tribesmen in the Levies. As early as 1922, one year after the British decision to recruit the Assyrians in the Iraqi Levies, half of the contingents included Assyrians the majority of whom were concentrated in the vilayat of Mosul.48

The emergence of a ‘Christian’ nationalism presented a series of structural constraints given that the Christians were primarily a religious community. In the 1920s ideas of Christian self-determination started to be promoted by sections of the Assyrian community primarily as a result of their peculiar position in Iraq. Especially towards the end of the mandate some Assyrian lay leaders, fearing the consequences of Britain’s withdrawal from the country, re-framed ideas of self-determination which had started to gain ground among the community during and in the aftermath of World War I. In this context they started to promote the idea of an enlarged Christian nation which included all the Christian groups, the Yazidis and the Jews living in the region. The unity of the non-Muslim populations of northern Iraq legitimised the establishment of a Christian autonomous entity
which would have secured for the Assyrians the acquisition of land inside the country. This form of 'Christian' nationalism first publicised by some Assyrians and later endorsed by a number of Chaldean Christians clearly assumed a more ideological and territorial dimension than the various Kurdish attempts at political mobilisation in the same period. Many Kurdish responses to nation-building, at least until the late 1930s, were mainly conducted by the force of arms as they were largely monopolised by traditional tribal elites. In the period between 1930 and 1932 various military actions against the administration were undertaken by both Shaykh Mahmud and Shaykh Ahmad of Barzan although a group of urban activists engaged in direct negotiations with the League.49 By contrast the Assyrians used more consistently diplomatic and political channels, at least until Iraq was under mandatory control.

The peculiar circumstances of the development of the Assyrian question, the close historical and socio-economic links between Christians and Yazidis and the latter's lack of identification with the emerging Kurdish national movement determined the involvement of the Yazidi leaders of Sinjar in projects for the establishment of a Christian autonomous entity in the region. The Assyrian vision of an enlarged Christian nation suited the agenda of the tribal leaders of Sinjar, who at the same time were expressing their particularism vis-à-vis the Shaykhanli Emirate. Further, the most prominent Yazidi chiefs of Sinjar used Assyrian claims to self-determination as a channel of communications with the League of Nations at a time when British influence in communal affairs was decreasing.

The Assyrians needed the support of as many people as possible to legitimise the existence of a Christian nation, which in real terms had little territorial continuity given the sparse settlement of the Iraqi Christians and scarce unity of purpose. In this context, this particular strand of 'Christian' nationalism developed by inclusion and it came to incorporate the Yazidi Kurds. An interesting parallel to this 'inclusive' territorial nationalism, as developed by the Assyrians, is provided by a Kurdo-Christian autonomous movement which had a relevant impact on Syrian politics in the mid-1930s. This movement, in a way similar to that promoted by the Assyrians in northern Iraq, developed
among heterogeneous immigrant populations which attempted to assert their permanent rights on land, resources and independent political development before the end of French rule.\textsuperscript{50}

From the Yazidi perspective the politicisation of communalism in northern Iraq consolidated patterns of exclusion from mainstream Kurdish politics and society which were clearly in place in the 19th century.

The Christian Nation and the Iraqi Yazidis

To a great extent developments which affected the construction of a specifically Christian political identity during the mandate were influenced by the exceptional condition of the Assyrian settlement in Iraq and by the close relations the community had developed with the mandatory power. Between 1919 and 1924 a number of unsuccessful attempts were made to repatriate the Hakkari tribesmen to their original homes in Turkey. For some time the majority of religious and tribal leaders of the community gave priority to this option as they hoped to regain the virtually autonomous status they had enjoyed under the Ottomans. After a first settlement scheme in the ‘Amadiyya area proposed by Colonel Leachman, the political officer of Mosul, had failed in 1919, the Assyrian leader Agha Petrus Ellow, a commander of a Levy battalion who flamboyantly claimed to have guided the Assyrian nation during the war, unsuccessfully attempted to repatriate some sections of Assyrian tribesmen to Hakkari in 1921.\textsuperscript{51}

In 1925 the definitive fixing of the Turco-Iraqi border under the aegis of the League of Nations 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 World War I 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 to implement a coherent and definitive settlement scheme. Among these reasons was the increasing difficulty of dealing with the various groups of Assyrians, especially those following the patriarch which included the most extremist elements, the beginning of the development of a strong anti-Assyrian Iraqi/Arab nationalism 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. Between 1927 and 1928 a British officer was put in charge of devising a settlement plan subsidised by the Iraqi government. Although, according to unofficial statistics, by 1930 only 1,500 Assyrians remained to be settled it seems that this figure did not include all those Assyrians who were settled on land privately owned whose position was still very precarious. In late 1932 in the region of Mosul and Arbil 2,200 families of Assyrians were settled in 118 villages of which 80 were the property of local landowners, mainly Kurds. In August 1932 the last attempt on the part of the British authorities to settle the Assyrians in the Baradost district failed mainly because of the inability of the government to exert effective control in the area which was mainly inhabited by Kurds and controlled by Shaykh Ahmad of Barzan.52

British policies vis-à-vis the Assyrians constrained further Kurdo-Assyrian relations which had deteriorated dramatically after the Christian massacres of the last decades of Ottoman rule. During the mandate Assyrian Levies had been systematically employed by the British to quell Kurdish rebellions and by 1933 the Iraqi government was consistently using Kurdish irregulars to stop the bellicosity of Levies’ contingents.53 The Assyrian quest for land in northern Iraq clearly added a further dimension to Assyrian/Kurdish animosity as indicated by the harsh reaction of Shaykh Ahmad of Barzan to the implementation of the settlement scheme in the Baradost area. Unfortunately no precise information on the attitude of Yazidis is available. As early as the autumn 1921, when the scheme for repatriation devised by Agha Petrus Ellow with British support had failed, 7,450 Assyrians were settled in the Kurdish districts of Dohuk, Zakhu
and 'Aqra which were also inhabited by Yazidi groups. 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 Tkhuma sections, 200 Assyrians were temporarily settled in the Shaykhan district which, by November 1928, had become the permanent residence of 500 Assyrians mainly belonging to the Baz, Jilu and Thkuma tribes. In the 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 Yazidi Mir Sa'id Beg, while in the village of Baristak they occupied the landed estates of Yunis 'Abbawi, the Muslim protegee of the mir. In Jabal Sinjar there is no evidence that any significant migration of Assyrians occurred except for those Nestorians who had arrived in the Mountain in 1915/1916 as a result of Ottoman and Kurdish persecutions. Although the settlement of Assyrian groups in the Yazidi areas north of Mosul did not encounter major opposition on the part of the local Yazidi communities, it seems that during the 1933 Assyrian massacres many Yazidis joined the Kurdish irregulars in pillaging Assyrian villages.

As early as 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 temporarily settled in northern Iraq. As may 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 the Mosul province (Chaldeans, Jacobites and Syrian Orthodox), the Yazidis of Sinjar and, rather surprisingly, the Maronites (a branch of the western Syrian church not represented in Iraq). The confusion which started to surround the term Assyrian after World War I clearly reflected the new political agenda of some Western-minded members of the community. While in the 19th century Assyrian was employed to denote the Old Church of the East (the Nestorians) as opposed to the uniate branch of the Chaldeans, at the end of the 1910s it started to be used to indicate their nation in a wider sense, that is to include all the ethnic group of Semitic origin which was represented historically by the Eastern
The 1919 proposal can be explained by the fact that the destiny of those Assyrian tribesmen who had recently arrived in Iraq was still very uncertain and in the general confusion their leaders 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 protection was assuming in the Assyrian pursuit of some sort of national independence. Moreover, it provides evidence of an early 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 Ellow and by a relative of the Christian Qaimmaqam of Sinjar, Hormuzd Rassam. Agha Petrus and Hormuzd Rassam engaged themselves in active propaganda for the creation of an Assyrian Christian enclave in the Mosul province which would also include all its indigenous Christian and Yazidi populations. It was mainly the failure of the 1919 and 1921 repatriation plans that served as a trigger for the circulation of pro-Assyrian propaganda among the non-Muslim communities living in the area under British control. In 1922 maps were already circulating in Mosul of a future Assyrian state 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.

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 district on the grounds of the ethnic, cultural and religious unity of its inhabitants and excluded the predominantly Kurdish areas of Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyya. Agha Petrus was particularly concerned with substantiating claims of the cultural unity of the region in racial terms following principles widely
publicised by the League. Thus, the Assyrian leader claimed that the local non-Muslim populations were all of 'Assyrian' origin. By Assyrian Agha Petrus was referring to the Assyrian Empire which flourished in northern Iraq in the first millennium BC. Ironically 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 1840s and later by some Anglican Missionaries, especially Rev. Wigram, head of the Assyrian Mission in Urmia. In defining the Yazidis Layard included all the inhabitants of Sinjar among the supposed descendants of the old Assyrians mainly on the basis of their physical resemblance with the heads of men portrayed in the Assyrian reliefs perhaps echoing a common belief among the Chaldean priesthood that the Yazidis were of 'Assyro-Chaldean' race.

A mixture of modern nationalism, the manipulation of historical traditions and elements of communal ethos combined to legitimise the existence of a Christian nation which did not take into account historical, socio-economic and political realities. The local Christian sedentary communities, despite doctrinal and ideological tensions which in the 19th century were made more acute by the presence of European missionaries, had shared their land and villages for centuries, although it seems that at least in the late Ottoman period their political allegiances were much divided. The Iraqi Yazidis, especially in Jabal Sinjar, had become over time bound to Christian groups by strong economic and political links which to a great extent were strengthened by Ottoman policies. By contrast, the Assyrians were not integrated into the local economy and society. Growing tensions developed between the local population and the Levies who often responded to popular resentment vis-à-vis the Assyrians by force of arms. Apart from doctrinal affinities with the other Christian groups, the Assyrian Church constituted an 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, Jacobite and Roman Catholic Churches. Furthermore, it seems that there was not a consistent religious network which linked members of the Assyrian priesthood with those of other
denominations.\textsuperscript{59}

Despite the universalist claims of Petrus' propaganda his movement created much dissension even among the group he claimed to represent. He soon lost much credit vis-à-vis the Iraqi Assyrians and the British authorities. Firstly he obstinately refused to recognise the authority of the Nestorian Patriarch Ishai, the Mar Sham'un XXI, who controlled large sections of the Assyrian tribal population. Petrus claimed that the Mar Sham'un was only the leader of a 'poor denomination' and thus not suitable 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, Agha Petrus quickly lost British support as he became a 'suspicious and unreliable character' in the eyes of the mandatory administration, allegedly in contact with Turkish, and especially French, agitators.\textsuperscript{60} Agha Petrus' contacts with some French missionaries provoked much apprehension in the Foreign Office which was particularly concerned with the growing French influence in Mosul, especially through the activities of the local Dominican mission. The British government 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, that is to the Mosul plain.\textsuperscript{61} Although in 1925 Agha Petrus was still politically active in favour of the non-Muslim minorities, he had suddenly disappeared from Iraq in 1923 after he was compelled by the British authorities to leave the country and to settle permanently in France.

The ideas which Agha Petrus had widely publicised in the years 1922/1923 started to circulate after the signature of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930. In the general climate determined by the imminent relinquishment of the mandate plans for the creation of a Christian autonomous entity in the Mosul province were resumed through the activities of The Iraq Minorities (non-Moslem) Rescue Committee, a charitable organisation which referred directly to the League of Nations. 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.\textsuperscript{62}

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 Hormuzd Rassam who had been Agha Petrus' supporter in the early 1920s and Matthew Cope, a British citizen who arrived in Iraq at the beginning of 1930 for a commercial venture.\textsuperscript{63} In July 1930 Hormuzd Rassam established The Iraq Minorities (non-Moslem) Rescue Committee which was based in London with the main purpose of raising funds for the relief of the Assyrians in northern Iraq whose precarious conditions, widely publicised in Great Britain, had a strong impact on British public opinion. The committee, which Rassam chaired, also claimed to work 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 confined to humanitarian goals. In fact a revised charter of the organisation drafted 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. 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 whose administration and internal security would be supervised by the League.\textsuperscript{64}

In April 1930 emissaries of the organisation started to work in northern Iraq, especially among the Christians and the Yazidis. Their agenda was clear: they were determined to collect evidence of the oppressive treatment meted out to these groups by the Iraqi authorities and by the local Arab Muslims, considered the cause of social tensions in the region. Communal leaders were approached by the members of the organisation to gather intelligence on the situation of their people and to obtain their formal support for Rassam's activities
in London. Early in 1931 Matthew Cope, who was co-ordinating the activities of the organisation in northern Iraq, also established contacts with Tawfiq Wahbi, the former Kurdish governor of Sulaymaniyya, in order to discuss a future agreement on the recognition of Assyrian rights in the Mosul area where Assyrian interests clashed with those of the Kurds.65

A number of Mosulawi Christians who had substantial economic interests in Sinjar functioned as intermediaries between the committee and the Yazidi leaders. 'Abd al-Karim Qaragulla, who was one of the main financial supporters of the Non-Muslim Rescue Committee in Iraq, and 'Abdallah Fa'iq Paulus, a Christian lawyer whose activities were concentrated in the Mosul district, played a central role in providing Cope with vital information on the Yazidis. It was Qaragulla and his agents in Sinjar who approached the local Yazidi leaders while Paulus provided Cope with evidence of several abuses perpetrated by the local administration against Yazidis who lived in Shaykhan. Paulus was one of the most popular lawyers among Yazidis and Christians in the Mosul district since he usually defended them in civil 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.

The issue of peasants' complaints was skilfully exploited by the Non-Muslim Rescue Committee. In reality grievances did not have communal bases, as presented by the committee, but in most cases were the result of the economic disruption which had affected all agriculturalists in the province. As discussed in the case of Jabal Sinjar the introduction of new methods of taxation and a slump in grain prices adversely affected the inhabitants of the rural areas in the second half of the 1920s.66

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 Non-Muslim Rescue Committee and reported on the bad conditions of the populations of 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 Hormuzd
Rassam’s personal credentials and reliability thus confirming the pa-
triarch’s support for the idea of Assyrian independence.67 A petition
from Sinjar, most probably largely inspired by Qaragulla, was among
the documentation which the committee was able to produce. Any
attempt at involving the religious leaders of Shaykhan failed as pro-
Christian demonstrations were halted by the *mir* who was clearly
reluctant to hurt the sensibilities of the local authorities at a crucial
juncture of the dispute over the Emirate. In Sinjar the involvement of
the local leaders in the Christian movement, and especially of Hamu
Shiru, dated back to 1923 when the Fuqara’ leader started correspond-
ing with the emissaries of Agha Petrus Ellow. The Assyrian leader told
the British high commissioner that he had received several petitions
from the Sinjari Yazidis who urged him ‘to bring about this autonomy
(i.e. of the non-Muslim populations of northern Iraq) as soon as
possible’.68

The 1931 document presented to the League was signed by Hamu
Shiru, Shaykh Khalaf al-Haskani and Shaykh Khidr of the Qiran tribe.
Its overtones somehow convey the impression that its contents were
modelled on a standard blueprint which reflected the situation in dis-
tricts inhabited by the Assyrians rather than illustrating Sinjari realities.
The Sinjari leaders put much emphasis on the very precarious sani-
tary 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. By contrast, especially in the Mosul plain, the Assyrian
refugees concentrated in malarial, congested or infertile districts which
often had disastrous effects both on the economy and on the health
of the local population. Furthermore, the document did not include
any complaints against the Iraqi administration of Sinjar whose ac-
tivities had represented a focus of resentment for almost a decade.69

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 Choi and expressed their deep concern over the destiny of the shrine of Shaykh ‘Adi, the second was addressed directly to the Permanent Mandate Commission and supported the petition submitted earlier in September. The document addressed more specifically Yazidi matters, complained about the pro-Arab attitude of Mir Sa’id Beg and explicitly recognised Rassam as speaker 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 Assyrian 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 Shaykhan. 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 Shaykhan. On the other hand, the activities of the Non-Muslim 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.

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 Qaragulla exiled to Baghdad. Rassam continued his activities in London until September 1931 when 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. The League rejected Rassam’s proposals, as well as all the other autonomist aspirations of 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.

After the termination of the mandate the legacy of the Non-Muslim
Rescue Committee continued, at least in the minds of the Iraqi nationalists. The widespread anti-Christian feelings which led to the 1933 Assyrian massacres were resumed in 1935 and 1936 after the enforcement of universal conscription. The refusal of the Sinjari Yazidis to enrol in the Iraqi army, which determined a major rebellion on the part of the Mihirkani chief Dawud al-Dawud at the end of 1935, was understood and publicised in government and military circles as a revival of the old conspiracy engineered by non-Muslim groups against the Iraqi state in 1930. Interestingly, in connection with Dawud’s rebellion, the two former supporters of the committee, the Christian merchant ‘Abd al-Karim Qaragulla and the lawyer ‘Abd Allah Fa’iq, were publicly executed in Jabal Sinjar at the eve of the coup d’état of General Bakr Sidqi in 1936.72
Conclusion

The development of Yazidi solidarities during the mandate has to be understood in the context of the persistence of both localism and primordialism which underlined much of the community/state dynamics of the period. The political and institutional development of the Iraqi state and the necessity of stabilising its northern and western borders within an emerging regional state system were central to the articulation of state power in the areas of Yazidi settlement.

In the context of the mandate the Yazidis' attachment to local solidarities resulted in a tension between the political centre and rural periphery. Although this tension did not represent a new development in the relations between local communities and the state, in the 1920s it had a profound impact on the political, institutional and social development of the region which was experiencing the establishment of a modern state administration. Interestingly, among the Yazidis of Iraq localism also affected the communal sphere. In 1930 their attachment to local solidarities started to be expressed in the language and symbols of religious particularism, especially in the enclave of Jabal Sinjar. This particularism was directed against the Yazidi Emirate which was the core structure of the religious polity. The legitimacy of the emirate was challenged by sections of its religious constituency rather than by direct state intervention. However, in the 1920s the development of religious factionalism among the Iraqi Yazidis is an indication of the influence of nation-building on Yazidi religious loyalties. Under Turkish rule, and especially in the second half of the 19th century, Shaykhan was central to the definition of
state policies vis-à-vis the community. These policies centred upon religion, as religious identities crucially defined the interplay between local forces and the imperial administration. In the 1920s Jabal Sinjar monopolised the attention of the colonial power, and to a great extent that of the state, primarily because the control of the local tribes served nation-building interests at local and regional levels. In this connection developments which affected the two main enclaves of Yazidism highlight the ways in which the extension of state power to the rural periphery was not uniform. The progressive establishment of a local administration in Jabal Sinjar and Shaykhan and the lack of a coherent Yazidi policy on the part of the colonial state are indicative of the unfolding tension between two sources of legitimate authority, the British colonial administration and the Iraqi government, whose interplay had a clear impact on Yazidi communal mobilisation. In the arena of national politics the peculiar formula imposed by mandatory rule was enshrined in the dual system of authority represented by the king and the British high commissioner. This formula affected Yazidi communalism by encouraging separatism and fragmentation. The Yazidi case is perhaps indicative of broader trends in the period under consideration. It shows that British policies of divide and rule were not as hegemonic as it is often believed. In early modern Iraq the crystallisation of the political loyalties of ethnic communities was often the result of the interplay between the two centres of legitimate authority which operated within the institutional framework of the colonial state.

Yazidi communal action relied on the persistence of forms of collective identification which rested upon religious practices and socio-economic structures. For example in the course of the development of the anti-emirate affair the bronze image of Malak Tawus provided focus for internal struggle and became the symbol of communal resistance to the state. In the context of the political modernisation of the mandate the persistence of primordialism has also to be understood in the light of the role played by specific structures which encapsulated Yazidi identity in the process of nation-building at the local level. In other words, it seems that, at least for the time being, communal frames, especially the tribes and the religious polity, continued to be viable as long as they could adapt to,
and thus be incorporated into, developing state practices. Colonial policies in Sinjar relied on the support of a number of local tribes which became central to British interests in the area. British policies had to adapt to the particular nature of Sinjari tribalism and generally encouraged a wide process of 'retribalisation'. This is particularly evident in the second half of the 1920s, when the British were increasingly forced to deal with several local leaders to balance local opposition after they had hoped to unify Sinjar under a single paramountcy. During the mandate land policies contributed to cement tribal solidarity. Although Kurdish agriculturalists were seldom granted rights of ownership, they maintained tight links with the land they cultivated. This is partly because Yazidi tribal chiefs did not become an interest group whose allegiance relied primarily on their possession of landed property. They did not acquire extensive landed estates, primarily because the state very seldom made land concessions in exchange for administrative duties. Further, during the mandate the collection of revenue, which was central to the establishment of the economic power of many tribal shaykhs in southern Iraq, was in the hands of governmental officials in the Yazidi areas. This prevented the exploitation of the peasantry along lines similar to that experienced by many tribal communities living in the south. In this sense British tribal policies kept alive the fairly egalitarian nature of Yazidi tribalism which has been extensively outlined in this study and which was already in place in the 19th century. Migrations to Syria which developed in the second half of the 1930s were politically rather than economically motivated as they were triggered by the enforcement of conscription. Further, individual tribesmen and cultivators did not escape from the oppressive treatment of their leaders. Rather they left Sinjar with them as members of tribal sections.

The development of a movement of religious reform which gathered widespread consensus among sections of the community shows that religion provided continuity to Yazidi responses to state authority. Attempts at reforming the Yazidi polity centred upon concepts of Yazidi morality. The promoters of the movement considered the behaviour of the mir and the interest of the Iraqi authorities in the emirate as a renewed threat to the integrity of the religious community. Proposals for the creation of a Yazidi religious council also
reflected a need on the part of the Sinjari leaders to negotiate their position vis-à-vis the colonial state without compromising their legitimacy within the religious community. The Spiritual Councils offered a viable model for the reform of the religious polity along the lines of the communal institutions already in place for Christians and Jews. The creation of a Yazidi religious council would have allowed the institutionalisation of Yazidi practices while offering substantial economic reward and religious prestige to the chiefs who promoted the movement.

The articulation of inter-communal solidarities in the areas of Yazidi settlement relied on political structures and patterns of socio-economic interaction which had dominated the region for centuries. Inter-communal relations in Jabal Sinjar in the 1920s reflected local realities and historical continuities. To a great extent the tribes contributed to maintain a sense of Kurdishness among the Yazidi population of Sinjar as they were multi-confessional units entirely composed of Kurds. In the Ottoman period conflicts of a religious nature characterised relations between the Sunni Kurds living outside Sinjar and the Yazidis. During the mandate tribal realities and linguistic unity, rather than historical memory, gave substance to the Yazidis' membership in an enlarged Kurdish community. The progressive integration of Jabal Sinjar into the market oriented economy which had started in the 19th century furthered links between the Kurdish population of the Mountain, Bedouin groups and the Arab merchant and entrepreneurial classes operating in the region. Areas exclusively inhabited by Kurds, and especially in northern Sinjar, were less exposed to the penetration of merchant capital. Urban investment only gained considerable ground in the southern villages where the population was often mixed. In the 1920s southern Sinjar became the arena where groups experienced more substantial economic and political change. The politicisation of communalism in Jabal Sinjar was related both to the establishment of a state administration in Balad and to the presence of an active Christian merchant community which in the course of the 1920s started to communicate a new language of self-determination to local tribal leaders. On the one hand attempts at imposing over-arching 'Christian' solidarities on the Yazidis confirm the close historical and economic links between the two groups.
On the other it is a striking example of the extreme pragmatism which marked the early development of modern national consciousness in the area. Although Yazidi tribal leaders were not receptive to any nationalist message, they clearly recognised its importance in the political climate of the late 1920s. Inter-communal relations acquired increasing political meaning if they fell into specific spaces of contestation which developed between the colonial state and local society as indicated by the articulation of a Christian question over the nature of Sinjari administration. To a large extent colonial policies in Sinjar, and more generally in northern Iraq, allowed the convergence of Yazidi and Christian interests within the particular frame of mandatory rule; in contrast, they clearly contributed to alienating the Iraqi Yazidis from the emerging 'Kurdish nation'. In 1930 the proposal to create a separate Christian administrative unit in Sinjar while the government was discussing local autonomy for the Kurdish areas is a clear indication of this overall trend.

The history of the Iraqi Yazidis after independence and until the dramatic post-1990 events marks the progressive, albeit reluctant, integration of the community into the modern state. With the creation of the safe haven in northern Iraq in 1992, Shaykhan was included in the areas under Kurdish control while Sinjar remained under Iraqi administration. Although large sections of the community identify with Kurdish aspirations to self-determination, the Yazidis' solidarities vis-à-vis the Kurdish community cannot yet be taken for granted. Rumours concerning the participation of Sinjari Yazidis in the massive military repression (Anfal) carried out by the Iraqi government in Kurdistan in 1991 probably have some foundation. The Yazidis' struggle for the maintenance of their specificity is still expressed in the complex patterns of their relations with the state. History helps to define a past of uncertain Yazidi identities and to relate it to the present. As the present is constructed out of political oppositions defined in ethnic terms, might these uncertain identities be defined as oscillating between Kurdish and Iraqi?
Introduction

1. There is still no satisfactory historiography on the community, either in Arabic or Kurdish, or in Western languages. The most recent book on the Yazidis which has an historical focus is very informative, carefully researched and provides an excellent bibliography for the community. However, it has no clear conceptual framework and deals only marginally with local socio-economic and political realities. See J. S. Guest, *Survival Among the Kurds: A History of the Yazidis* (London, 1993), 2nd ed. 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 Yézidis du Syrie et du Djebel Sindjar* (Beirut, 1938); A. 'Azzawi, *Tarikh al-Yazidiyya*, (Baghdad, 1353 AH); S. Damluji, *al-Yazidiyya* (Mosul, 1949); S. S. Ahmad, *The Yezidis: their Life and Beliefs* (Miami, 1975).


Chapter One

1. Estimates of Yazidi population are confused. Guest gives a total of 200,000 Yazidis (of which approximately 100,000 in Iraq) while Kreyenbroek estimates between 100,000 and 250,000 in Iraq alone. These numbers seem high in relation to earlier population statistics. Guest, *Survival among the Kurds*, p. xiii; P. Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism – Its Background, Observances and Textual Traditions* (Lewiston NY, 1995), p. vii.

2. For a discussion of the debate which concerns the authenticity of the two books see Guest, *Survival Among the Kurds*, pp. 146–63.


7. For details see Kreyenbroek, *Yezidism*, pp. 31–3.


9. This debate has engaged a great number of scholars. As main contributions to the Muslim origins of the Yazidis see: T. Bois, 'Les Yézidis: essai historique et sociologique sur leur origine religieuse,' *al-Machreq* 55 (1961): 109–28/190–242; M. Guidi, 'Origine dei Yazidi e storia religiosa dell'Islam e del dualismo,' *RSO* 13 (1931–32): 266–300; M. Guidi, 'Nuove


12. The earliest official statistics concerning the population of Shaykhan are provided by the 1947 census (1363 Muslim, 8143 Yazidis, 2403 Christians and 163 Jews). Ihsa’ al-sukkan li sana 1947, Wizarat al-Shu’un al-Ijtima’iyya, Baghdad 1954. In the case of the Yazidis these figures are partly confirmed by a British survey carried out in the early 1920s according to which there existed in Shaykhan 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. 310-11. In the same period the numbers of the Christians might have been slightly higher given the provisional settlement of a group of Assyrian tribesmen in the area.

13. There is abundant literature on the issue which is mainly descriptive. For an overall view of the topic see Kreyenbroek, Yezidism, pp. 125-37.


16. Edmonds gives a fairly detailed account of the internal strife among the Chol family which had continued for centuries. C. J. Edmonds, A Pilgrimage to Lalish (London, 1967), pp. 28-30. Some Yazidi traditions state that the Abu Bakr faction acquired permanent rights to the mirship by killing 80 members of the Shaykh Hasan family. Ahmad, The Yazidis: their Life and Beliefs, p. 324. An interesting reconstruction of the genealogy of the various families of shaykhs which goes as far back as the Umayyad Caliph Mu‘awiya I, father of Yazid, and names 'Adi b. Musafir as descendant of Caliph Marwan
I is to be found in Bois, 'Les Yézidis,' p. 113.

17. Ahmad, The Yezidis: their Life and Beliefs, p. 325.
22. Ahmad, The Yezidis: their Life and Beliefs, p. 342; Edmonds, A Pilgrimage, p. 6/35. Very recent developments would indicate that religious transmission is no longer exclusive to the qawwal class. Kreyenbroek, Yezidism, pp. 132-3.
24. Ibid., p. 38; McLeod, 'The Yezidis or "Devil-Worshippers" of Assyria', p. 63.
25. McLeod, 'The Yezidis or "Devil-Worshippers" of Assyria', p. 50. According to a widespread practice inheritance was transmitted only in the male line. It seems, however, that in Sinjar no such strict rules existed and in some cases special provisions were made for women heirs. Edmonds, A Pilgrimage, p. 27; H. Field and G. Glubb, The Yezidis, Sulubba and other Tribes of Iraq and Adjacent Regions (Menasha, 1943), p. 8; Ahmad, The Yezidis: their Life and Beliefs, p. 326.
26. This section will discuss in detail only shaykhs and faqirs as they are particularly relevant to the history of the community during the mandate. Other Yazidi religious groups include the pishmir, the pirs and the kochaks. See Kreyenbroek, Yezidism, pp. 125-37.
30. Edmonds, A Pilgrimage, p. 31
31. 'The Tribes with Their Affiliations' Appendix I to Edmonds, A Pilgrimage, pp. 79-81 dealing with the tribes of Sinjar. According to Edmonds even the Yazidi tribes of Shaykhan, 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 shaykhs.
33. Lescot gives the most useful information about the Sinjari shaykhs
although it is quite fragmentary. Lescot, Enquête, pp. 86–90.


35. 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 organisation. 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 Fuccaro, 'A 17th-century Travel Account on the Yazidis,' pp. 241–53.

36. Lescot, Enquête, p. 88; Ahmad, The Yazidis: their Life and Beliefs, p. 332.


38. Ahmad, The Yazidis: their Life and Beliefs, pp. 336–7; Damluji, al-Yazidiyya, 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. Tfïndji, ‘Note sur les Yézidis’ (typescript, 9pp.), 3–12–1930, p. 4, DOM.

39. Edmonds, A Pilgrimage, p. 7. The Ibrahim Khatni shaikhs constituted a branch of the family of Shaykh 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. Edmonds, A Pilgrimage, pp. 31/35.

40. Sebri and Wikander, 'Un témoignage,' pp. 117–18. Membership in the faqir class was also opened among the small Yazidi tribal community described by Febvre in the 17th century. See Febvre, Teatro, pp. 434–52 and Fuccaro, 'A 17th-century Travel Account on the Yazidis'.


44. It is interesting to remark that between 1715 and 1835 the local authorities launched both from Mosul and Baghdad at least 18 major


46. 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, *Niniveh*, 2:321. 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):393.


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58. 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 and Sluglett, 'The Transformation of Land Tenure,' pp. 493–5. Statements on land conditions in Sinjar are based on *Review of Civil Administration of Mesopotamia*, 1920, pp. 20–1, CO 696/3; memo from Air HQ Baghdad to Counselor HC, 16–3–1927, ref.I/10/1, AIR 23/160.


Chapter Two


30–11–1926, incl in Katchkoul I, SAL colis n.18; letter from Hugueny to Roussel, 26–4–1928, incl in Hugueny Correspondence, SAL colis n.4; T. Bois, 'Apostolat des Yâdîdis' (typescript), 4–1–1933, SAL colis n.12.


8. According to these statistics the population of Shaykhan was as follows: 1363 Muslim, 8143 Yâdîdis, 2403 Christians and 163 Jews. Ihshâ al-sukkan li sana 1947, Wizarat al-Shu’un al-Ijtima‘iyya, Baghdad, 1954.


11. In Shaykhan out of 43 villages 23 were entirely Yâzidi, 11 Christian, 2 Kurdish and 6 mixed, C.400.M.147.1925.VII, p. 34.


13. Damluji, al-Yazidiyya, p. 378. Among the Muslim tribes which migrated to the Mountain there were sections belonging to the Bâni Qashir, Bâni Namîl, Bani ‘Aqil, Bani Taghallub and Bani Kilab.

14. We also have the names of some pious and learned men who devoted themselves to literature and science. The bishop Iyla al-Sinjari in the 8th century and the Mar Musa ibn Kayfa in the 10th century. Damluji, al-Yazidiyya, pp. 475–6/478. Ahmad Beg’s report, p. 6, EDM Box XIX file 5.


19. S. Gamil, Monte Sinjar: storia di un popolo ignoto (Rome, 1900), footnote n.1 p. 26; J. Menant, Les Yezidis, pp. 49–50. Layard reports a similar tradition but according to it the Yazidis arrived in Sinjar from Basra. Lescot was convinced that the first Yazidis settled in Sinjar in the 17th century. Layard, Nineveh, 1:306; Lescot, Enquête, pp. 135–6.

20. Chevallier, Les montagnards, p. 30. H. Pognon, ‘Sur les Yézidis du Sindjar’, ROC series 2/10 (1915–1917): 327–9. According to this record, part of a Syriac manuscript copied by the Chaldean priest Ishak of Bartella in 1874, the decline of Christianity in the Mountain seems to have been provoked by the Patriarch who did not comply with the requests of the Christian notables of Sinjar. 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. 146–7.

21. ‘Les Jesides’ report from the Catholic correspondent from Mesopotamia included in Les Missions Catholiques, 29–6–1879, SAL.


26. Damluji, al-Yazidiyya, p. 513; Ahmad, The Yazidis: their Life and Beliefs, p. 82.

27. 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.

28. 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 docs Syro–Iraqi border commission by British and Iraqi assessors, EDM Box IV file 1.

30. ‘Sinjar Qadha (North/South side) – Populations’, EDM Box IV file 1.


33. Ahmad Beg’s report (Arabic typescript, 29 pp., 1944 c.a), pp. 20–1, EDM Box XIX file n.5.

34. ‘Tribal distribution by families-Sinjar Qadha’ supplement D to note n.18, p. 13, EDM Box IV file 1.


38. The most comprehensive secondary sources on Sinjari tribes are: Lescot, Enquête, pp. 136–7 and Damluji, al-Yazidiyya, pp. 224–42. Primary sources in Arabic are included in Edmonds’ Personal Papers, Box XIX.

39. 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 Koordistan and the Site of the Ancient Nineveh, 2 vols (London, 1836), 2:121. The Qiran are mentioned in the 1880s. Sachau, Reise in Syrien und Mesopotamien, p. 324.
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, *Enquête*, p. 316; Charmoy, *Cheref-nameh*, 1: part 1, 61–2. 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. Charmoy, *Cheref-nameh*, 1: part 1, 169 / 2: part 1, 64.


42. For an account of these military expeditions see Layard, *Nineveh*, 1:275–77.

43. Ahmad, *The Yazidis: their Life and Beliefs*, pp. 79–80.

44. The topic of this section is also discussed in N. Fuccaro, ‘Jawanib min hayat al-yazidiyina fi Sinjar,’ *al-Thaqafa al-Jadida* 265/8–9(1995): 89–100.


47. The name of these non-tribal Kurds varied from place to place. They were usually called *guran, miskin* 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 *miskin* see B. Nikitine, *Les Kurdes: étude sociologique et historique* (Paris, 1956), pp. 124–6; van

48. 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, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p. 61/125. F. Barth, *Principles of Social Organization in Southern Kurdistan* (Oslo, 1953), pp. 35–6.

49. Forbes, *A Visit to the Sinjär Hills*, p. 422; Ahmad Beg report, p. 1, EDM Box XIX file 5. My Yazidi informer from Jabal Sinjar points out that this division had an important doctrinal character which went back to the times of the Shaykhanli ‘Adawiyya. While the Jawana were the supporters of Shaykh Sharaf al-Din and Shaykh al-Sin the Khurkan were the disciples of Shaykh Shams. al-Dinadi, reply to Fuccaro ‘Jawanib’, p. 107.

50. The Fuqara’ are sometimes included in the Khurkan. Damluji, *al-Yazidiyya*, 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. 260–1.

51. He believes that the two sections were involved in bitter confrontation in the 13th century when Sharaf al-Din Muhammad was still alive. al-Dinadi, reply to Fuccaro, ‘Jawanib’, p. 107.

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


54. 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, *al-Yazidiyya*, pp. 230–2.

55. Ahmad Beg’s report, p. 2.

56. Lescot, *Enquête*, pp. 253–5. Lescot mentions the Bahramiyya tribe of which there is no precise record in available sources concerning Kurdish tribes. However Damluji mentions a Dawudiyya tribe living around Diyar Bakr which could be connected to the Da’wudi clan of the Dukhiyan. Damluji, *al-Yazidiyya*, p. 248. The majority of the above mentioned minor tribes had settled quite recently in the Mountain.

57. ‘*Tribal distribution by families – Sinjar Qadha*’, p. 13; Damluji, *al-
Yazidiyya, p. 238-40; Ahmad Beg's report p. 1.


59. For example the Bakiranis, a small Yazidi tribe thought to come from the Shaykhanli Dinadiyya. Damluji, Al-Yazidiyya, pp. 234-5; Lescot, Enquête, pp. 169/258-60.

60. Sources do not agree on the tribal division of the Musqura. Lescot considers the Musqura and the Mala Khalata as two distinct groups whereas Damluji, although he recognises the different origins of the Musqura tribal sections, considers them as one tribe. Lescot, Enquête, pp. 257-8; Damluji, Al-Yazidiyya, pp. 235-7.


63. In 1932 in Bardahali there were 185 Yazidi and 15 Christian families. In the same period Jaddala had 750 Yazidi, 15 Sunni Kurdish and 25 Christian families. 'Sketch map of Sinjar Qadha showing religious distribution' inc in EDM Box IV file 1.

64. Kreyenbroek, Yezidism, p. 129.


66. van Bruinessen, Agha, Shaikh and State, p. 50.

67. Lescot, Enquête, p. 137.

68. The only secondary 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 western Sinjar and is therefore only partially applicable to the sedentaries of the east. Nonetheless his main subdivision can be taken as a point of reference since it seems that the process of sedentarisation did not have any major repercussions on the basic structure of the western tribes. See Lescot, Enquête, pp. 158-66.

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

71. This is the case of the bavs called Korkorkan and Qiran part of the Samuqa tribe and those of the Haskan and Fuqara’ living among the Mihirkanis. See Annexe IV to Lescot, Enquête, pp. 251–61.

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

73. van Bruinessen, Agha, Shaikh and State, pp. 62–5.

74. For a general discussion of the different usages and interpretations of terms describing tribal subdivisions in Kurdistan see van Bruinessen, Agha, Shaikh and State, pp. 59–64.

75. In the 1930s 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.

76. The common ancestor of the Samuqa was a Kombel b. Wuski b. Samuqa 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 Samuqa. Lescot, Enquête, p. 161/167. For the Musqura see ‘‘Asha’ir al-Yazidiyya fi Jabal Sinjar’, (Arabic, typescript 19 pp.) p. 2, EDM Box XIX file 5.

77. Tribal lists referring to the 1920s and early 1930s which include population figures and armed men confirm this. Damluji, al-Yazidiyya, pp. 224–41; Military Report on Mesopotamia. Area 1, pp. 146–9; Tfindj, ‘Service militaire,’ BEY 608.

78. Forbes cites the town of Balad, which was drastically reduced in size, population and productivity after 1832, as the best example of the decadence of southern Sinjar. Moreover he puts much emphasis on the wide extension of the Yazidi gardens in the north, Forbes, ‘Visit to the Sinjár Hills’, pp. 415/422. Southgate, Narrative, 2: 273.

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80. Given the popularity smoking generally enjoys among the Kurds and the lack of tobacco plantations in Sinjar, a certain amount of imported 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.


83. 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.


86. D. R. Khoury, 'The Political Economy of the Province of Mosul', 1700–1850, Ph.D. Dissertation (Georgetown University, 1991), pp. 145/146; S. D. Shields, 'An Economic History of Nineteenth-Century Mosul', Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Chicago, 1986), pp. 143–4/149–53. 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, 18 pp.), 10–12–1935, p. 4, SAL.
87. 'Edmonds' Tour Notes (Sinjar 1930s)', EDM Box IX file 5. British memo to League of Nations, N. E 807/15/89, 27-2-32, EDM Box IV file 1. Merchants specialised in sheep trading were Hajj al-'Azzawi residing in Mosul, Ibrahim b. Yahya al-'Azz and 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.

88. Forbes, 'Visit to the Sinjär Hills', p. 423; fig production in 1927 was estimated at 200 tons, Le Sindjar, note SR Region de l'Euphrate, 14-8-29, p. 5, BEY 1529.

89. Notice sur les populations du Sindjar, BEY 1528; Lescot, Enquête, pp. 133.

90. Hamu al-Ibrahim owned the Muslim villages of 'Ayn al-Shababit, al-Khaban and al-Shura together with the Yazidi village of al-Thalatha, all located in south-eastern Sinjar. He also had a share in the mixed village of Tappa and Hatimiyya. 'Edmonds' Tour Notes (Sinjar 1930s)', 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.

91. 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 and 1 by a Christian. Muslims 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.

92. 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.

93. 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 emphasise the volume of trade Sinjar carried out with Mosul, minimising Sinjari economic relations with the Syrian Jazira. By contrast French Syrian authorities claimed that Syria had always been a privileged market for Sinjari products. 'Economic Considerations: Jebel Sinjar Sector, incl report of the Commission entrusted with the Study

94. Import duties levied in Hasaka on products coming from Sinjar were 11 per cent ad valorem on livestock and wool and 25 per cent ad valorem 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.

95. 'Balad Sinjar' supplement B to Note n.18, p. 1; 'Edmonds' Tour Notes (Sinjar 1930s'), EDM Box IX file 5. For the smuggling activities of the Christian communities of Hasaka 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.


97. '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. 41–2.

98. Tribal Intelligence related to the northern Jazira (in FO AIR/23) confirms this.


102. North Sinjar did not experience comparable economic or demographic growth as it was only marginally affected by the commercialisation of
agriculture given the predominance of intensive forms of land exploitation. The northern village of Kura Samuqa 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 Musqura 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 Jafriyya there had been no major change in the composition and number of their inhabitants for over 100 years. Forbes, 'A visit to the Sinjar Hills', pp. 416–19; 'Sinjar Qadha (North/South sides) – populations'.

104. Secr memo Adm Mosul to SSO Mosul, 8–5–1926, n.C/1874, AIR 23/149.

Chapter Three


2. Although Iraq was technically a mandate I shall use the term 'colonial state' to indicate a political structure which emerged under forms of non-indigenous control as discussed in R. Owen, State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East (London, 1992), pp. 11–23.


9. 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 of British interest in Sinjar during the war as well as
information on the situation in place in the Mountain before the British
occupation of Mosul.
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. 63–4, IO L/P&S/
10/620; Mosul Division report for 1919, by Col. Nalder, CO 696/2; N. N. E.
11. 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.
12. 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.
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. 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. 138–9; 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. Mosul
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 Francaise en Syrie et Liban, 11–1–1922, BEY 2379.
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
Crescent, 1516–1922 (London, 1960); E. Kedourie, ‘Réflexions sur l’histoire
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25. SSO Mosul to Squadron leader G. Reed, 18–5–1931, FH/DO/26, AIR 23/159. In mandatory Iraq the shari'a 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 on the Progress of Iraq 1920–1931, pp. 76–9.

27. Memo SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell Baghdad, 12–8–1925, n./1870, AIR 23/145; memo about taxation in the Mosul province incl in CO/730/162/7.


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


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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.


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

41. Transl secret corr Commandant of police Mosul to Mutasarrif, 8–9–1924, n.64/1, AIR 23/261.


44. Lescot, Enquête, pp. 163–6.

45. Sinjari tribalism fits in particularly well with the model of segmentary organisation proposed by Evans-Pritchard, especially in the light of Gellner's contribution. See E. Gellner, 'Tribalism and the State in the Middle East', in Khoury and Kostiner, Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East, pp. 109–26.


47. Lescot, Enquête, pp. 182/255.


53. Lescot, Enquête, p. 183. That Hamu was a Dinadi tribesman is confirmed by my Sinjari informant, himself from Dinadi tribal background. al-Dinadi, reply to Fuccaro, 'Jawanib', p. 109.

54. Ibid.

55. Lescot, Enquête, p. 183; Edmonds, A Pilgrimage, p. 36.


57. Ibid., p. 110.

58. Corr Fr Consular representative Mosul to Consul Mesopotamia, 9–9–1924, n.67, MAE 22; memo SSO Mosul to Air HQ, 10–2–1923, n.984, AIR...
23/258.


60. Edmonds, A Pilgrimage, p. 63.

Chapter Four


3. Tel 18th Division to GHQ, n.X620, 6–8–1921, AIR 23/256; handwritten rep from British informant, n.d., AIR 23/256; intell rep n.19, Secretariat Br HC for Mesopotamia, 5–8–1921, IO L/P8S/10/962.


5. 'Outline of scheme for raising Yazidi force' incl in AIR 23/423; tel Aviation Baghdad to SSO Mosul, 21–10–1925, n.1./626, AIR 23/423.


8. 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.

9. 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 a few kilometres 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.

10. 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 Francais 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.

12. Despatch from Dobbs to Fr HC, 31-1-1923, n.1643, BEY 1519. For map attached to correspondence see map n. 3.
13. Text of this provisional agreement incl in BEY 1519.
15. ‘Le Sindjar’ SR Euphrate Region, 14-8-1929, n.3.340/DZ, p. 6, BEY 1529.
18. 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.
20. 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:-1/4, 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.

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22. 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.


29. Occasional references to these are to be found in CO 730/108/7.


31. This agreement was modelled on the recent treaty Iraq had signed with Najd. An account of the proposals and considerations of the two high commissioners which led to its formulation 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 Etrangères, 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 Dayr conference, between 1923 and 1927.

32. The main contributions to the study of the 1925 rebellion are: R. Olson, The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Shaikh Said Rebellion, 1880–

33. 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 Dannadiyya (100 families) and the Khaldan (80–90 families with Sunni leadership). Driver, Kurdistan and the Kurds, pp. 27–8.

34. The most illuminating examples are provided by Shaykh ‘Ubaydallah of Nehri (d. 1883) and Shaykh Sa‘id of Palu (d.1925) both Naqshbandis who led two major Kurdish rebellions against the Ottoman and Turkish government. The overtones of the two uprisings were undoubtedly 'pan-Kurdish'. Olson, Kurdish Nationalism, pp. 1–25/91–127.


36. 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 Shaykh Barzan’s appeal incl in BEY 570.


38. 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 Hasaka and Qamishli. For the period under consideration no precise figures are available for the Yazidi community. However, in the 1920s 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. M. Chevallier, Les
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41. Memo SSO Mosul 9–12–1925, n./2043, AIR 23/146; letters from Hajo Agha to Shaykh Khalaf, Husayn Barajas and Ibrahim Qulu incl in memo SSO Mosul to Int, 18–1–1926, n.9/b/916, AIR 23/146.

42. 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 Shaykh Sa’id’s rebellion. See van Bruinessen, Agha, Shaikh and State, pp. 103–4.

43. Information on the rebellion is included in AIR 23/289. See also van Bruinessen, Agha, Shaikh and State, p. 104; C. Kutschéra, Le Mouvement National Kurde (Paris, 1979), p. 100.


45. 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.


52. In 1929 the Central Committee of the organisation was transferred to Beirut. Besides Hasaka, 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.

53. 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 Kamuran 'Ali Badr Khan and Khalil Badr Khan to Isma'il, Beirut 5–4–1929, AIR 23/157. Iraqi branches of the Khoybun were established in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Sulaymaniyya, Zakhu and Rawanduz. Isma'il's contacts with Khoybun continued until the end of the British mandate. In 1932 he received from Kamuran 'Ali Badr Khan, brother of Jeladet 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 *madhabba* [sic]’ 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.

54. Secr corr SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell Hinaidi, 29–10–1930, ref. I/M/33, AIR 23/418.

55. ‘Form of oath. Khoybun Society’ incl in secret memo from SSO Mosul to Air Staff Intelligence Baghdad, 26–2–1930, ref: I/M/42/B, AIR 26/416.

Chapter Five


4. *Report by His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Iraq for the year 1931* and *Report by His Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Iraq for the period January to October, 1932*. In the 1931 Report minorities feature prominently in the section dealing with internal affairs. By 1932 internal affairs were clearly identified with minority issues as indicated by the last annual report to the League before Iraq achieved independence in October 1932.


7. *Report for the year 1931*, p. 19; Text of the Local Languages Law, n.74
of 1931, in Appendix E to Report for the year 1931, p. 73; Sluglett, Britain in Iraq, p. 203.


9. Letter Yusuf Rassam to Colonel Lyon, 1944 c.a, p. 1, EDM box XIX file 5. A full account of the murder of ‘Ali Beg is included in Guest, Survival Among the Kurds, pp. 172–3. Isma‘il Beg Chol was a rather egocentric but interesting character. He wrote a history of the Yazidis which centred on his flamboyant personality. See Isma‘il ibn ‘Abdi, al-Yazidiyya: qadim wa hadithan.


15. The anthropologist Henry Field states that in 1924 Rs 14, 000 were collected from the Mountain. H. Field and J. B. Glubb, The Yezidis, Sulubba and other Tribes of Iraq and Adjacent Regions (Menasha, 1943), p. 7.


25. 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.


32. Rep SSO Mosul to Air HQ Hinaidi, 12–10–1931, I/M/36, AIR 23/159.


34. SSO Mosul to Air Staff intell Hinaidi, 21–2–1932, I/M/31, AIR 23/159.


37. ‘Note sur la question Yezidi’ incl in Memo Delegué Adjoint Dayr al-Zur to Counsellor Fr HC, 6–12–1933, n.2301, BEY 611.

38. ‘Projet de requête commune 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.

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42. The study of the development of a specifically ‘Christian’ nationalism in the Arab provinces of the Empire, possibly inspired by the national movements of Eastern Europe, has been neglected given the prominent role played by the Christians in the articulation of Arab nationalism. This is indeed an interesting agenda for future research. The emergence of a specifically Kurdish nationalist ideology was clearly connected to the influence of Armenian and Turkish nationalisms. See N. Fuccaro ‘Die Kurden Syriens’, pp. 301–26; M. Tayfun, ‘Kürt Teavûn ve Terakki Cemiyeti’, paper presented at the International Conference The Kurds and the City, Sevrès 19/20/21 Sept 1996. For an elegant discussion of the development of a nationalist historical discourse in Iraq see A. Vali, ‘Nationalism and Kurdish Historical Writing’, New Perspectives on Turkey 1996 (14): 45–50.

43. This is clear from the Christian propaganda discussed in the next section. In Kurdish milieux this phenomenon was also evident as indicated by materials included in AIR 23 files which concern the development of the Kurdish question in Iraq and Syria in the 1920s. AIR 23/85–98 (Syrian Desert Reports, 1924–1931); AIR 23/411–419 (Kurdish National Movement, 1924–1932).

44. C.400.M. 147 1925.VII (border between Turkey and Iraq); C.578 M.285 1932.VI (border between Syria and Iraq). Detailed proceedings of the frontiers’ commissions are included in C. J. Edmonds’ personal papers, Boxes I/II/IV/V. According to an unofficial census carried out by the Iraqi authorities between 1922 and 1924 in the Mosul province there were 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. See also ‘A. Al-Hajj, al-Qadiyya al-kurdiyya fi-l ‘ashriniyyat (Beirut, 1984), pp. 29–126.

45. Although specific studies on Kurdish tribal leaders in Iraq have not yet been produced see as main contributions C. Kutschéra, Le mouvement national kurde (Paris, 1979), pp. 56–78/106–112/113–120 and D. McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds (London, 1996), pp. 155–163/178–180. The development of Assyrian communal loyalties within Iraq have been discussed only marginally and generally in the context of the wider political picture of

46. These Kurds were often labelled by more intransigent nationalists as 'colourless'. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 175.


58. Despatch Agha Petrus to Assistant under Secretary of State, 15–2–1923, n.n., CO 730/56. W. F. Ainsworth, 'The Assyrian Origin of Izedis or Yezidis—

60. Conf corr Agha Petrus to CO, 5–2–1925, CO 730/91.
61. Evidence of this is included in vol.21 (1921–22), Archbishop of Canterbury's Papers, Assyrian Mission 1879–1931, LPL. The Assyrian mission which was based in Urmia until the beginning of World War I was the only Anglican establishment in the area. The Mission's 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 Mosul plain.

63. Intelligence on Hormuzd Rassam is included 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.
64. 'Appeal issued by the Iraq Minorities (non-Moslem) Rescue Committee' (Sept. 1930 c.a) incl in FO 371/14524 E 5375. Annex VI to petition by Rassam to Chairman Permanent Mandate Commission, 23–9–1930, CO 730/152/2.


68. Conf corr Agha Petrus to HC, 10–3–1923, CO 730/56.
70. Corr Rassam to FO, 16–12–1930, incl 2 Yazidi petitions (1–11–1930/
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