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THE MAKING OF IRAQI SHI'Ī SOCIETY

FROM ITS OUTSET, Shi'ī Islam was closely associated with Iraq as several of the formative events of Shi'ī history took place there. In A.D. 661 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, the fourth caliph and the first Shi'ī imam, was assassinated in a mosque in Kufa. 'Ali's son Husayn, who laid claim to the caliphate, was killed with his companions in a battle which took place on the plain of Karbala in 680. Many of the twelve Shi'ī imams spent at least part of their lives in Iraq. The four most sacred Shi'ī shrine cities, Najaf, Karbala, Kazimayn, and Samarra are in Iraq. Since the early stages of Islamic history, much of Shi'ī academic activity took place in such centers in Iraq as Kufa, Hilla, Baghdad, Najaf, and Karbala. And finally, Iraq was also once a territory ruled by Shi'ī dynasties, notably, the Buyids (945–1055).

But can all this explain the nature and position of Shi'ī Islam in Iraq as we know it at the beginning of the twentieth century? Can it shed light on how the Shi'īs came to form the majority of the population? The Shi'īs are concentrated mainly in the southern and central regions of Iraq.¹ The rough British census of 1919 put the number of Shi'īs at 1,500,000 out of a total of 2,850,000, that is, about 53 percent of the population. These figures were adjusted in 1932, when their number was put at 1,612,533 out of 2,857,077 Iraqis, i.e., around 56 percent.² The bulk of Iraq's Shi'ī population are Arabs. Persians formed about 5 percent of the Shi'īs in the 1919 census, and Indians less than 1 percent; their numbers have fallen since. With few exceptions, the Shi'īs of Iraq adhere to Imami Shi'ism, and it is with this segment of the Shi'ī population that this study is concerned.

The composition of Shi'ī society, as well as the nature and position of Shi'ī Islam in Iraq on the eve of the formation of the monarchy, were largely the result of the interaction between major events and trends, and between cities and tribes from the mid-eighteenth century. This interaction marked the beginning of a process of Shi'ī state formation in southern Iraq.

¹ In this study, the name Iraq refers to the region consisting of the three Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra. The northern region includes the divisions of Erbil, Kirkuk, Mosul, and Sulaymaniyya. The central region includes Baghdad, Diyala, Dulaym, Hilla, Karbala, and Kut. The southern region includes 'Amara, Basra, Diwaniyya, and Muntafiq. Whereas the Najd part of the Basra province was excluded after World War I, the mountains and the Kurdish region were added during the 1920s to form the modern state of Iraq.

² 1919 Census by Religion, FO 371/4152/175918; Religious Statistics for Iraq, 1 August 1932, FO 406/70.

IRAQ THE FRONTIER

In what sense was Iraq a frontier? It was not just a matter of the distance and isolation which this term brings to mind. For five centuries following the breakdown of the 'Abbasid State in 1258, Iraq did not have a government strong enough to restore its former extensive irrigation systems, or to subdue the Arab tribal confederations that took possession of desolate countryside which had lost its urban focus. Moreover, the development of Iraq between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries had been marked by two other major features. The first was the slow and long drawn-out process of Ottoman conquest, domination, and settlement of the tribal population. The second was the position of the country, and particularly the shrine cities, as a cultural-religious contact zone between the Sunni Ottoman Empire and Shi'i Safavid, and later Qajar, Iran. Thus, Iraq became a region of extensive warfare as the country contained resources which both the Ottomans and the Iranians were anxious to control.

The emergence of Safavid Shi'i Iran in 1501 coincided with the consolidation of the Sunni Ottoman Empire and the subsequent attempts of Selim I (1512–1520) and Suleyman I (1520–1566) to establish their state as a world empire. This created a new reality in Iraq, which became a battle zone between two rival powers. With the outbreak of conflicts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries between the Ottomans and the Safavids, the Ottoman Sultan and the Safavid Shah each referred to himself as the sovereign of Islam. The conflict between them was expressed in terms of Shi'i-Sunni strife, and polemics raged between the two sides.³ Although Iraq became an Ottoman territory following the occupation of Baghdad in late 1533, Ottoman rule of the country until the nineteenth century was often nominal and incomplete, because of Iraq's remoteness from the center of power in Istanbul and Iranian pressures on the country, which included two periods of occupation in 1508–1533 and 1622–1638. These pressures were reinforced by the claim of the Safavids, and their eventual successors the Qajars (1794–1925), that the Shah should be the sole protector of Shi'i interests in Iraq, at the core of which were the shrine cities of Najaf, Karbala, Kazimayn, and Samarra. Until the formation of the Iraqi monarchy in 1921, Ottoman-Iranian rivalry for political, religious, and socioeconomic control turned Iraq into a frontier zone, influencing the composition of Shi'i society and the organization of Shi'i Islam in the country.

The frontier nature of Iraq, and the position of the shrine cities as a magnet which attracted Shi'i believers, help explain the motivation of Persians and Indians in migrating to the country. At the turn of the sixteenth

³ Ann Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam* (Oxford, 1981), 212–13.

century, Iraq's Shi'ī society was by and large Arab. The rise of Safavid Iran exposed Iraq's population to Persian Shi'ī influences. Shi'ī Persian merchants first came to Iraq during the two periods of Safavid occupation of the country, appropriating a good share of the commerce of Baghdad.⁴ Following the first occupation, the Kammuna family, which had held the influential position of *naqib al-ashraf* (head of the descendants of the Prophet) in Baghdad, became connected to the Shah's court in Iran, and was gradually Persianized.⁵ Early in the seventeenth century, there were still no Persians in Basra, the population of which was composed mainly of Arabs and some Turks.⁶ At that time there were a few thousand Persians in such cities as Karbala, Najaf, Kazimayn, and Baghdad. Many of them, however, escaped to Iran following the second Ottoman occupation of Baghdad in 1638, which had resulted in the killing of some 1,700 Persians.⁷ The Persian colony in seventeenth-century Iraq was composed mostly of merchants and other individuals who came to the country in search of economic opportunities. There was no significant number of Persian students and ulama in Iraq at that time since the main Shi'ī academic centers were in Iran.

It was only from the eighteenth century that Persian ulama and students arrived in Iraq on a massive scale. The Sunni-Afghan capture of Isfahan in 1722, and the attempts of Nadir Shah to promote Sunni-Shi'ī rapprochement and to expropriate many of the endowments supporting the Shi'ī clergy in Iran, displaced hundreds of families of ulama, many of whom fled to Iraq during the period 1722–1763. The center of Shi'ī scholarship shifted from Iran to Iraq, first to Karbala and then to Najaf. At that time, the Persian language gained much ground in Karbala, Najaf, Baghdad, and Basra.⁸ For three years, Basra was under Zand control after Karim Khan Zand, the ruler of southwestern Iran, occupied the city in 1776; he introduced Shi'ī-style prayers and Shi'ī Friday-sermons, and struck coins bear-

⁴ Stephen Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Oxford, 1925, Beirut reprint, 1968), 19, 57.

⁵ 'Abbas al-'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh al-'iraq bayna ihtilalayn*, 8 vols. (Baghdad, 1935–1956), 3:315, 342, 354–56.

⁶ Pedro Teixeira, *The Travels of Pedro Teixeira*, trans. William Sinclair (London, 1802), 27–30.

⁷ 'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh*, 4:229, 234–35; Teixeira, *Travels*, 51.

⁸ Rasul al-Kirkukli, *Dawhat al-wuzara' fi ta'rikh waqa'i' baghdad al-zawra'* (Beirut and Baghdad, n.d.), 52–63; Muhsin al-Amin, *Ma'adin al-jawahir wa-nuzhat al-khawarir*, 2 vols. (Beirut, 1981), 2:22–25; 'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh*, 5:269–70, 272, 308; Juan Cole, "Shi'ī Clerics in Iraq and Iran, 1722–1780: The Akhbari-Usuli Conflict Reconsidered," *IS* 18 (1985): 5, 26; Said Amir Arjomand, *The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam: Religion, Political Order, and Societal Change in Shi'ite Iran from the beginning to 1890*, 2d ed. (Chicago, 1987), 215–17; Hamid Algar, *Religion and State in Iran, 1758–1906: The Role of the Ulama in the Qajar Period* (Berkeley, 1969), 30, 33.

ing the names of the twelve imams.⁹ The Persian ulama who migrated to Iraq took advantage of the instability in the country, which was caused by the rise of the Mamluks in 1747 and the subsequent indirect Ottoman rule of Iraq that lasted until 1831. In Karbala and Najaf, the Persian religious families managed to overshadow the Arab ulama and succeeded in dominating religious circles. The struggle between the traditionalist Akhbari and the rationalist Usuli ulama over the methodology of Shi'i law ended with the latter's victory. Many of the Usulis were the Persian ulama who had arrived in Iraq between 1722 and 1763, and they rose to prominence within the Shi'i religious establishment in Iraq following their victory.¹⁰ By the mid-nineteenth century, the Persian ulama in Iraq already controlled most of the Shi'i charitable funds and the madrasas, thereby gaining great power in their dealings with both the Ottoman and the Qajar governments, as well as with the local population.

Indians began to settle in the shrine cities from the late eighteenth century. By the twentieth century their number in Karbala and Najaf alone had reached some five thousand. The rise of the Shi'i state of Awadh (Oudh) in north India from 1722 proved lucrative for the shrine cities because of the financial remittances made by Awadh officials and other individuals for mujtahids in these cities.¹¹ Part of the Indian money was set aside for Indian pilgrims, many of whom opted to remain in the shrine cities in search of a livelihood or in pursuit of religious studies. The massive influx of Indians to the shrine cities took place only from the 1860s, after the British annexation of the Kingdom of Awadh and the Indian Mutiny. At that time, several rich members of the royal family of the Nawwabs of Awadh arrived in the shrine cities with their followers. They distributed large sums of money to the poor and made endowments for public works. This attracted more Indians to the shrine cities, who could enjoy the life of comparative ease assured under the patronage of the wealthy Nawwabs. It was then a relatively easy matter for Indians to earn their living in the shrine cities, and those unable to work could depend on charity for their daily bread. From the late nineteenth century, however, the munificence of the wealthy settlers was greatly diminished and the proportion of paupers among the Indians in Iraq increased. Whereas the first generation of Indian noblemen of Awadh or Delhi who settled in the shrine cities had been rich, the second were only moderately well-off. Owing to the termination of pensions and allowances, the third generation were already poor people. Moreover, when in 1903 the British abolished the special "Indian fund,"

⁹ 'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh*, 6:61, 79–81; John Perry, *Karim Khan Zand: A History of Iran, 1747–1779* (Chicago, 1979), 192.

¹⁰ Cole, "Shi'i Clerics," 20, 22, 26.

¹¹ Juan Cole, "'Indian Money' and the Shi'i Shrine Cities of Iraq, 1786–1850," *MES* 22 (1986): 461–80.

which relied on Oudh Bequest money (see chapter 8), and from which Indians in the shrine cities had benefited since around 1860, the welfare of Indians further declined and Karbala was reported to be "a sink of Indian pauperism." In subsequent years, it became an increasingly difficult matter to distinguish who were and who were not Indians among the ethnic elements in the shrine cities.¹²

Much more than the Indian settlers, it was the Persian colony in Iraq that emerged in the nineteenth century as the most active and influential component among the population of the shrine cities. These eighty thousand Persians estimated to be in Iraq in 1919 (perhaps even more if one considers the many cases of mixed marriages) enjoyed the status of Iranian subjects, over whom Iranian consular officers held extra-territorial jurisdiction. The status of Persians in the country was a major cause of strained Ottoman-Qajar relations even after their privileges were officially confirmed in 1875. An agreement between the two states recognized the status of Iranian consuls and consular dragomans in the Ottoman Empire as including the same privileges enjoyed by their European counterparts. The exclusive authority of the Iranian consuls over Iranian subjects in matters of civil and criminal law, and succession was affirmed by the 1875 agreement. While Iranian subjects were declared amenable to the jurisdiction of Ottoman courts in cases of violation of the law, as well as in mixed civil and commercial cases, certain powers of assistance and protection in the proceedings were reserved to the Iranian consular representatives. The agreement also established the exemption of Iranian subjects from taxes to which Ottoman subjects were liable. Although it was laid down that all provisions relating to Iranian subjects in the Ottoman Empire should equally apply to Ottoman subjects in Iran, Iranians were the main beneficiaries of the agreement.¹³

The Ottoman willingness to accord the Persian community in Iraq such a unique status reflected Istanbul's incomplete control of the country and its attempt to avoid a possible war with Iran over the issue of the status of Persians in Iraq. Indeed, while it may be argued that in the nineteenth century Iran was not capable of posing a direct military threat to Istanbul, the Qajar shahs did exert enough power on the regional level to extract capitulations for their subjects in Iraq. The granting of privileges to Persians also reflected Istanbul's attempt to placate Shi'is in Iraq in the face of both the expansionist policy of Muhammad 'Ali of Egypt as demonstrated by his son's occupation of Syria (1831–1841) and the growing European penetration into Iraq in the nineteenth century. Their privileged status,

¹² Lorimer to McMahon, Baghdad, 11 August 1911, FO 195/2368/690–34; Report of the Protector of British Indian pilgrims, 1929, CO 730/159/2.

¹³ J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, 'Oman and Central Arabia*, 2 vols. in 5 pts. (Calcutta, 1908–15), 1, 1B:1425.

relative importance, and large numbers among the population of the shrine cities gave the Persians an advantage over the Arab Shi'i population of Iraq, enabling them to retain their vested economic interests and strong socio-religious links with their families and coreligionists in Iran. The Persian ulama, students, and merchants had a great impact on the religious life and economy of the shrine cities, most notably Karbala. They were also to be found in significant numbers in Baghdad, Basra, and Tuwayrij. Their socioeconomic and religious position was further bolstered by Ottoman-Qajar agreements which facilitated the influx of pilgrims, and regulated the corpse traffic from Iran to the shrine cities.

The privileged status of the Persians as derived from their protection by the Iranian government, and their control of resources in Iraq, made it difficult for the Ottomans to exercise effective control over Najaf and Karbala, which emerged as the two strongholds of Shi'i Islam in Iraq.

THE SHRINE CITIES

Shi'i believers attach high religious esteem to the holy cities of Najaf, Karbala, Kazimayn, and Samarra, the development of which between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries was shaped by the desire of the Ottoman and the Iranian states to dominate Shi'i affairs in Iraq.

The most prominent of these shrine cities was Najaf, which by the early twentieth century exercised an enormous religious and political influence far beyond the limits of Iraq. Located about 120 miles south of Baghdad, it escaped effective government control throughout much of the Ottoman period. Its semi-autonomous status, and self-image as the great nerve center of the world, found embodiment in its portrayal by both Shi'is and Western writers as the "heart of the world," a "world within a city," and the "receiver of all the news of the world."¹⁴ The city had at least nineteen functioning religious schools at the turn of the twentieth century. It was often the seat of the leading Shi'i mujtahid of the day, who would receive large contributions from Shi'i followers around the Muslim world. Attracting many Shi'i pilgrims, Najaf contains the holy shrine of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. The city's large cemetery (Wadi al-Salam) has been considered the holiest and most highly sought-after place for burial among Shi'i believers.

Like many other religious centers in the world, Najaf's fortunes changed greatly over the years. The lack of a regular water supply, and its vulnerability to repeated raids by the Arab tribes, were two of Najaf's most acute problems throughout its pre-nineteenth-century history. Following

¹⁴ Agha Najafi Quchani, *Siyahat-i sharq ya zindeginama va-safarnama-yi agha najafi quchani* (Mashhad, 1972), 581; 'Abd al-Rasul al-Sharifi, "Shay' 'an al-najaf aw 'alam fi madina," *al-'Irfan* 35 (1948): 1150-52; Great Britain, Administration Reports for 1918, Najaf, CO 696/1; Thomas Lyell, *The Ins and Outs of Mesopotamia* (London, 1923), 21-22.

the Safavid occupation in 1508, Shah Isma'īl I ordered the cleaning of the city's old water canal, which had silted up. His successor Shah Tahmasp, who visited Najaf around 1527, ordered the construction of another canal to bring water from Hilla to Najaf.¹⁵ These projects, however, did not solve Najaf's water problem. In the late sixteenth century very few pilgrims visited Najaf because of water shortages in the city, the pious canal-works having silted up and become almost dry.¹⁶ The desperate condition of Najaf at that time is evident from a petition sent probably by one of the city's dwellers to the Ottoman governor Sinan Pasha, who, in turn, submitted it to Sultan Murad III (d. 1594). The unidentified petitioner complained that the city was subject to repeated attacks by the tribes, and that it suffered from a great shortage of water. Its lack of security and regular water supply forced people to abandon it. Thus, whereas in the past there had been three thousand inhabited houses in the city, in the late sixteenth century there remained only thirty. Those who did stay included the Friday prayer sermon-deliverer, the prayer leader, the attendants and servants of the shrine, as well as a few other individuals. As may be gathered from the governor's dispatch to the Sultan, the petitioner seems to have appealed for the construction of a canal to bring water from the Euphrates to Najaf, and for the repair of the city's wall.¹⁷

The Portuguese traveler Pedro Teixeira, who visited Najaf in 1604, noted that the city was almost in ruins since the death in 1576 of Shah Tahmasp, who was said to have favored the city. The aqueduct built by Sultan Selim II (d. 1574) was clogged and needed repeated cleaning. The barely five hundred dwellers in Najaf at that time relied for their water supply mainly on some wells inside the city.¹⁸ Although a new canal from Hilla to Najaf was built by Shah 'Abbas I around 1623, it too dried up after a while.¹⁹ During the term of the Ottoman governor Ibrahim Pasha (1681–1683) a canal was constructed to bring water to nearby Kufa, but it did not reach Najaf. Indeed, the latter city could not rely for its regular water supply on any major canal until sometime after 1803, when the construction of the Hindiyya canal was completed.²⁰ This development was facilitated by the relative improvement in Ottoman-Iranian relations following their last war in 1821–1823, which ended with the first treaty of Erzurum. The Hindiyya gave a great push to the socioeconomic welfare of Najaf; it provided the water needed to sustain massive numbers of pilgrims and helped the city's

¹⁵ 'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh*, 3:337; Yusuf Karkush al-Hilli, *Ta'rikh al-hilla*, 2 vols. (Najaf, 1965), 1:119.

¹⁶ Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 34; Hilli, *Ta'rikh*, 1:119.

¹⁷ Ya'qub Sarkis, *Mabahith 'iraqiyya*, 3 vols. (Baghdad, 1948–1981), 2:58–60.

¹⁸ Teixeira, *Travels*, 48.

¹⁹ Hilli, *Ta'rikh*, 1:119.

²⁰ Sarkis, *Mabahith 'iraqiyya*, 2:60–63.

mujtahids to establish Najaf as the major Shi'i academic center from the 1840s at the expense of Karbala, which decreased in importance. As will be seen later in this chapter, the Hindiyya also had a great impact on the socioeconomic and religious contacts between Najaf and the surrounding tribes, thereby accelerating their conversion to Shi'ism.

Although Najaf's almost entirely Shi'i population was estimated to be only about thirty thousand early in the twentieth century, the periodic influx of pilgrims often more than doubled this figure. The bulk of the city's permanent population was composed of Arabs; Persians formed only a third of the population at that time.²¹ Najaf's position on the edge of the desert explains the very strong Arab tribal influences on the city. These features of Najaf found embodiment in the fact that important Arab families of ulama in the city traced their descent to neighboring tribes. Thus, the Kashif al-Ghita family stemmed from the Al 'Ali section of the Bani Malik tribe of the Muntafiq confederation.²² Moreover, until 1918 Najaf was under the influence of two Arab factions: the Zuqurt and the Shumurt. Najafis traced their formation to the first decade of the nineteenth century, when under the leadership of the mujtahid Shaykh Ja'far Kashif al-Ghita (d. 1812), warriors were recruited from among the city's dwellers to protect Najaf against the Wahhabi attacks. In subsequent years, the two factions managed to dominate Najafi life and they also cooperated with important families in the city. Thus, whereas the Zuqurt was allied with the Kashif al-Ghita family, the Shumurt was associated with the Milalis, who held the position of custodian of 'Ali's shrine from early in the sixteenth century until around 1840.²³ The two factions' bid for power within the city culminated during World War I, when in April 1915 the Zuqurt and the Shumurt expelled the Ottomans from Najaf and divided the control of its four quarters among themselves. Whereas Sayyid Mahdi, Hajji 'Atiyya, and Kazim Subbi of the Zuqurt ruled the Huwayyish, the 'Amara, and the Buraq quarters, respectively, Hajji Sa'd of the Shumurt administered the Mishraq quarter.²⁴ The four shaykhs enjoyed this position until May 1918, when their power was broken by the British.

²¹ Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2B:1310-11.

²² 'Abbas al-'Azzawi, *'Asha'ir al-'iraq*, 4 vols. (Baghdad, 1937-1956), 4:142; Mahdi al-Qazwini, *Ansab al-qaba'il al-'iraqiyya* (Najaf, 1956/7), 99n.

²³ Ja'far al-Mahbuba, *Madi al-najaf wa-hadiruha*, 3 vols. (Najaf, 1955-1958), 1:330-34; Muhammad Hasan al-Najafi, *Jawahir al-kalam fi sharh shara'i' al-islam*, 6th ed., 42 vols. (Najaf, 1958), 1:11; Ja'far al-Khalili, *Mawsu'at al-'atabat al-muqaddasa, qism al-najaf*, 10 vols. (Baghdad and Beirut, 1965-1970), 1:230-31; 'Ali al-Khaqani, *Shu'ara' al-ghari aw al-najafiyyat*, 2d ed., 12 vols. (Qum, 1988), 2:115-26; Meir Litvak, "The Shi'i Ulama of Najaf and Karbala, 1791-1904: A Socio-Political Analysis" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1991), 112-16.

²⁴ Administration Reports, 1918, Najaf, CO 696/1.

The strong tribal character of Najaf at that time is evident from the content of the constitution of the Buraq quarter (appendix 1), compiled after the four shaykhs had taken control of the administration of the city in 1915. The traditional loyalty of tribesmen to their tribe and shaykh was transformed in Najaf into a strong loyalty of the Buraq dwellers to their quarter and to its head Kazim Subbi. Moreover, the alliance of blood which united the quarter dwellers, the stress on honor, and the repeated reference to blood-money as the element to be used in conflict resolution, demonstrated the great extent to which Najafi civic spirit was dominated by tribal codes as late as the twentieth century.

In contrast to Najaf's strong Arab character, Karbala's ethnic composition and culture were marked by the city's very large Persian community. At the turn of the twentieth century, Karbala's almost entirely Shi'ī population was estimated to be fifty thousand, of whom Persians constituted at least 75 percent, the Arabs forming less than a quarter.²⁵ Karbala is situated about fifty-five miles south of Baghdad. Western visitors remarked that it did not in any way present the appearance of an Arab city; its architecture and bazaars reflected Persian influences.²⁶ Karbala contains the shrines of Husayn, son of 'Ali and the third Shi'ī imam, and of 'Abbas, Husayn's half-brother. Husayn is known among Shi'ī believers as the prince of martyrs (*sayyid al-shuhada'*) because he was killed in his challenge to the accession of Mu'awiya's son Yazid to the caliphate. Together with 'Abbas and a few other followers, Husayn died in the battle which took place on the plain of Karbala in 680. The battle and the heroic stand of Husayn and his small group became the most important event in Shi'ī history and mythology. The martyrdom of Husayn was most fervently celebrated by Shi'īs, and Karbala emerged as the focus of devotion, particularly for Persian Shi'ī believers. Traditions attach blessing to its water and soil, and promise rewards to the believers to be gained from their pilgrimage to the city and from burial in its cemetery (Wadi al-Iman), which stands only second in sanctity to that of Najaf.

Karbala seems to have enjoyed a relatively better water supply than Najaf; its date groves are said to have been irrigated from the Euphrates already in the fourteenth century. Following the Ottoman occupation of 1533, Sultan Suleyman I ordered the construction of the Husayniyya canal to bring water to Karbala. Described as a great engineering achievement, the Husayniyya separated from the Euphrates at Musayyib and flowed to Karbala, where it was divided into two branches.²⁷ Years of neglect, however, resulted in a shortage of water in the city, and like Najaf, Karbala was

²⁵ Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2A:976.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 977; British Consulate, Baghdad, 22 February 1943, FO 624/33/537.

²⁷ 'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh*, 4:36–37; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2A:751–53.

also reported to be almost completely abandoned by pilgrims in the late sixteenth century.²⁸ It was probably only after a dam was built at the head of the Husayniyya canal by Hasan Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Iraq (1704–1723), that Karbala enjoyed a steady water supply. These developments help explain why Karbala (and not Najaf) emerged first as the most important Shi'i center of study around 1737, replacing Isfahan, which had declined following the Afghan occupation of the city and the subsequent migration of Persian ulama to Iraq. Karbala's welfare increased further as Hasan Pasha built and repaired khans along the route from Baghdad to Karbala, thus improving the conditions for pilgrimage to the city.²⁹

During much of the Mamluk period, Karbala's administration was in the hands of Mamluk-appointed Sunnis from Baghdad, who also controlled the shrines and the collection of taxes in the city. Yet because of their weak military power, the Mamluks tolerated such Shi'i practices as the cursing and disavowal of the first three caliphs, which was prevalent in Karbala early in the nineteenth century, fearing that an attempt to abolish them would result in an Iranian reprisal. As Mamluk rule grew weaker from the 1820s, local gangs gradually succeeded in assuming actual control of the city, co-opting its landowners and merchant families. The Arab gang leaders allied themselves with Karbala's ulama. The name of the Ottoman Sultan was not mentioned in Friday prayers, and the city began to function, according to British reports, as a "self-governing semi-alien republic." This alarmed the Ottomans, who resumed direct rule over Iraq in 1831 and sought to increase centralization in the country. Karbala's resistance to Ottoman attempts to bring it under direct control eventually led to its occupation in 1843 by the governor Najib Pasha.³⁰

The Ottoman occupation of the city had three major consequences on the relative positions of Karbala and Najaf. First, while the suppression of Karbala ended this city's semi-autonomous position, Najaf escaped a similar fate since it submitted peacefully to Najib Pasha, who had proceeded from Karbala to Najaf to reassert Ottoman authority there; Najaf thus retained its socioeconomic and political position, which remained almost intact until the twentieth century. Second, the occupation of Karbala helped Najaf to emerge as the leading Shi'i center of learning from the 1840s as many students left Karbala and moved to Najaf, which also became the preferred seat of the majority of the grand Shi'i mujtahids. Third, following the news that reached Iran of the bloody occupation of

²⁸ Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 34.

²⁹ 'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh*, 5:210.

³⁰ Litvak, "Shi'i Ulama," 107, 124–26; Juan Cole and Moojan Momen, "Mafia, Mob and Shiism in Iraq: The Rebellion of Ottoman Karbala, 1824–1843," *PP* 112 (1986): 115–16, 122, 124, 126, 135–37; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 1, 1B:1349; 'Abd al-'Aziz Nawwar, *Ta'rikh al-'Iraq al-hadith* (Cairo, 1968), 92.

Karbala, the Qajars exerted effective pressures on the Ottoman government to grant immunities to Persians in Iraq. Thus, although the Ottoman occupation of Karbala led to the breaking of the power of the Arab gangs, paradoxically Persian influence in the city increased and by the turn of the twentieth century Persians dominated most of the socioeconomic and religious activity in Karbala. Whereas the Arab shaykhs of the Zuqurt and the Shumurt continued to influence Najafi life, Karbala's administration came under growing Persian influence. The strong links of Karbala with Iran as late as the twentieth century were evident in the high status of the Persianized Kammuna family, which practically controlled the city's affairs. The family was led by the two brothers Muhammad 'Ali and Fakhr al-Din, whose grandmother was said to be a daughter of Fath 'Ali Shah. They held the positions of the custodian of Husayn's shrine and the city's mayoralty, respectively, before their power was broken by the British in 1917.³¹

If Najaf and Karbala were the strongholds of Shi'ī Islam in Iraq, this cannot be said of Kazimayn and Samarra since the commanding factors in the development of these latter two cities were Kazimayn's proximity to Sunni Baghdad and Samarra's almost entirely Sunni population. Kazimayn's importance stems from its shrine, which contains the tombs of Musa al-Kazim, the seventh imam, and of his grandson Muhammad al-Jawad, the ninth imam. The extensive repairs to the shrine, which had been begun by Shah Isma'īl I and completed by Sultan Suleyman I, are yet another example of the benefits that accrued to the shrine cities from Ottoman-Iranian rivalry in their desire to dominate Shi'ī affairs in Iraq.³² Situated only three miles northwest of Baghdad, the town's population was estimated in the early twentieth century to be eight thousand, of whom seven thousand were Shi'īs. Arabs formed the bulk of the city's Muslim population; the number of Persians did not exceed one thousand. Kazimayn's strong orientation toward Baghdad was reinforced in 1870 when the city became connected with the capital by a horse tramway. The Ottomans thus enjoyed a greater control of the city than of Najaf or Karbala.³³ As will be shown in chapter 2, Kazimayn's proximity to Baghdad facilitated a good deal of sociopolitical and religious contacts between Sunnis and Shi'īs in Iraq, culminating in the events that preceded the formation of the monarchy.

Samarra contains the tombs of the tenth and eleventh imams, 'Ali al-Hadi and his son Hasan al-'Askari. It is also believed to be the place of birth of Muhammad al-Mahdi, the twelfth imam, who allegedly disappeared and is expected to return as the Mahdi. Located sixty-six miles north of

³¹ Review of the Civil Administration of Iraq, 1914–1918, FO 371/4148/34799.

³² 'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh*, 4:34–35; Sarkis, *Mabahith 'iraqiyya*, 3:155–59.

³³ Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2A:967–68; Review of the Civil Administration of Iraq, 1914–1918, FO 371/4148/34799.

Baghdad, Samarra's population was around 8,500 early in the twentieth century. Its inhabitants had been almost entirely Sunnis before the great mujtahid Muhammad Hasan Shirazi moved to the city from Najaf in 1875. Shirazi's move revived Samarra, which had experienced decline followed by insignificance after it ceased to be the 'Abbasid capital in the late ninth century.³⁴ The move of a leading Shi'i mujtahid to the city alarmed the Ottomans, who were faced with the sudden spread of Shi'ism to the area north of Baghdad. Indeed, the flow of funds, and Shi'i students and pilgrims to the city, which was followed by the observance of Shi'i rituals in public, exposed Samarra's population to growing Shi'i influences and challenged Sunni dominance in the city and its surroundings. The Ottoman fear of a growing Shi'i presence in this part of Iraq must have also been fed by Shirazi's involvement in the affairs which led to the Tobacco Revolt in Iran in 1891–92.³⁵

From the late nineteenth century, Ottoman officials and Sunni ulama both in Iraq and Istanbul made repeated appeals to Istanbul to check the spread of Shi'ism in Iraq. Thus, for example, Husayn Husnu Efendi, a former Shaykh al-Islam, stressed the crucial role of the Sunni madrasas in Baghdad and urged the government to send competent ulama to Iraq to reverse the impact of the Shi'i ulama on the population.³⁶ The Ottomans established two new madrasas in Samarra, the first of which (*al-Madrasa al-'Ilmiyya al-Sunniyya*) was opened in 1898 and was placed under a shaykh of a Sufi order, Muhammad Sa'id al-Naqshbandi. It was intended to improve the level of Sunni education in Samarra, and to initiate preaching activities in order to check the function of Shirazi's madrasa as a base for Shi'i propagation both in the city and its surroundings. The Ottomans also appointed a Sunni as the custodian of the Shi'i shrine, thereby improving their control of Shi'i affairs in Samarra.³⁷ Samarra greatly decreased in importance following Shirazi's death in 1895. Within a year after his death, most of his leading disciples left Samarra and settled mainly in Najaf, which reasserted its superior position as the most important Shi'i academic center. The move of Shirazi's disciple and important mujtahid Mirza

³⁴ Dhabihallah al-Mahallati, *Ma'athir al-kubara' fi ta'rikh samarra'*, 3 vols. (Najaf and Tehran, 1948–1949), 2:43–45, 52–55; Yunus Ibrahim al-Samarra'i, *Ta'rikh madinat samarra'*, 3 vols. (Baghdad, 1968–1973), 3:89; Khalili, *Mawzu'at al-'atabat al-muqaddasa, qism samarra'*, 8:175.

³⁵ 'Ali al-Wardi, *Lamabat ijtimaiyya min ta'rikh al-'iraq al-hadith*, 6 vols. (Baghdad, 1969–1978), 3:90–97; Agha Buzurg Tihrani, *Hadiyat al-razi ila al-imam al-mujaddid al-shirazi*, Persian trans. (Qum, 1984), esp. 58–59, 223–24, 251–74.

³⁶ Selim Deringil, "The Struggle against Shi'ism in Hamidian Iraq: A Study in Ottoman Counter-Propaganda," *WI* 30 (1990): 50.

³⁷ Samarra'i, *Ta'rikh madinat samarra'*, 2:180–83; "Madha yura' al-yawm fi samarra'," *Lughat al-'Arab* 1 (1911): 142; Review of the Civil Administration of Iraq, 1914–1918, FO 371/4148/34799; Summary of Events in Turkish Iraq, October 1910, FO 195/2341/989–60.

Muhammad Taqī Shirāzī from Samarra to Karbala in 1917 sealed Samarra's decline and the city lost whatever potential it had to become a Shi'ī stronghold within Iraq.

Yet, the overall Ottoman inability to check the power of Najaf and Karbala enabled these two cities to emerge as the bases of Shi'ī propagation in Iraq from the late eighteenth century. This had a great impact on the very large number of Arab tribes in central and southern Iraq that came under the influence of Najaf and Karbala.

THE CONVERSION OF THE TRIBES TO SHI'ISM

There is no evidence that would suggest that the Shi'īs were ever close to forming the majority of the population in Iraq before the nineteenth or even the twentieth century. Although conversion to Shi'ism took place in Iraq throughout Shi'ī history, it was confined mainly to cities, where only a small fraction of the country's population lived. Occasionally, some Arab tribes were also converted to Shi'ism like the Bani Sulama, the Tayy, and the Sudan in the marshes near Khuzistan during the Musha'sha' Arab Shi'ī dynasty of the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries.³⁸ It was only following the massive conversion of the bulk of Iraq's nominally Sunni Arab tribes to Shi'ism mainly during the nineteenth century that the share of the Shi'īs grew to its 1919 and 1932 estimates of 53 and 56 percent of the population, respectively. How can we account for this relatively late conversion and its magnitude? What was its impact on the religious identity of the tribesmen? Can we really make a clear-cut distinction between the social and moral values of Sunni and Shi'ī Arab tribesmen in Iraq on the eve of the formation of the monarchy? It is with these questions that the remaining discussion will be concerned.

Arab tribes formed the bulk of the population of southern and central Iraq during the Ottoman period, the nomads alone constituting as much as half the population in the south as late as 1867.³⁹ Until the nineteenth century Iraq's tribes were organized in loose confederations, each acting as a sort of a political and self-governing unit established in response to threats by other tribal constellations. Led by paramount shaykhs, these confederations fought over land and trade routes.⁴⁰ Periodic government expeditions against the tribes reinforced the group spirit of the confederations, thus further distinguishing each one from the other. The oldest tribal confederations in southern and central Iraq during the Ottoman period

³⁸ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed. s.v. "Musha'sha'."

³⁹ M. S. Hasan, "Growth and Structure of Iraq's Population, 1867-1947," *BOUIES* 20 (1958): 344.

⁴⁰ Robert Fernea, *Shaykh and Effendi: Changing Patterns Among the El Shabana of Southern Iraq* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970), 25.

were the Muntafiq, the Zubayd, the Dulaym, the 'Ubayd, the Khaz'al, the Bani Lam, the Al Bu Muhammad, the Rabi'a, and the Ka'b. The tribes that constituted these confederations were composed of camel breeders, sheep breeders, cultivators, and buffalo-breeding marsh dwellers. These divisions, however, were not always clear-cut and there was often a fusion between the different groups.⁴¹

Many of Iraq's tribes migrated to the country from Arabia, thus retaining great similarities in their virtues and moral values with Arabian tribes. Said to have arrived in Iraq early in Islamic history, most of the Muntafiq tribes are traced to the old 'Adnani tribes of Arabia although some claim lineage to Qahtani and Himyari tribes as well.⁴² The Zubayd migrated from Arabia to Iraq sometime after the Muslim occupation of the country in 634 A.D., and are traced to Qahtani tribes.⁴³ Two other confederations, the Dulaym and the Al Bu Muhammad, were formed from the Zubayd, the latter in the late seventeenth century.⁴⁴ The Rabi'a are also said to have arrived in Iraq around the period of the Muslim occupation, and to have ties with some of the old tribes of Arabia. The Ka'b claim lineage to the Rabi'a.⁴⁵ The 'Ubayd are traced to Himyari tribes and probably arrived in Iraq early in Islamic history.⁴⁶ The Khaz'al and the Bani Lam are considered two of the oldest known Tayy tribes in Iraq, and are said to have arrived there around the fourteenth century.⁴⁷ Iraq's tribal population increased in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sections of the Shammar, notably, the Shammar Tuqa and the Sa'ih, migrated from Ha'il to Iraq early in the eighteenth century.⁴⁸ Another significant addition to the country's tribal population was the migration of large sections of the Bani Tamim from Najd to Iraq around 1737.⁴⁹ As will be seen below, Iraq's tribal map took its final shape only in the nineteenth century following the migration from Arabia between 1791 and 1805 of other sections of the Shammar (the Jarba) and the 'Anaza confederations, as well as the Zafir tribe, because of Wahhabi pressures. Many of Iraq's Arab tribes claimed lineage to these confederations, and it is from them that the bulk of Iraq's Shi'i population was drawn from the late eighteenth century.

⁴¹ Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, 2d ed. (Princeton, N.J., 1982), 68.

⁴² 'Azzawi, *'Asha'ir*, 4:11, 28.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3:30.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 61, 105; Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 80; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2A:456.

⁴⁵ 'Azzawi, *'Asha'ir*, 4:162, 181.

⁴⁶ Ibrahim al-Haydari, *Kitab 'unwan al-majd fi bayan ahwal baghdad wa al-basra wa-najd* (Baghdad, n.d.), 105.

⁴⁷ 'Azzawi, *'Asha'ir*, 3:211–12, 245; Nawwar, *Ta'rikh*, 154.

⁴⁸ 'Azzawi, *'Asha'ir*, 1:233–34 and 3:203.

⁴⁹ 'Ali al-Wardi, *Dirasa fi tabi'at al-mujtama' al-'iraqi* (Baghdad, 1965), 147; 'Azzawi, *'Asha'ir*, 4:217.

In 1869 the prominent Baghdadi Sunni *'alim* Ibrahim al-Haydari listed those tribes which had "recently" been converted to Shi'ism. With the exception of the Khaz'al and the Ka'b (including its Khazraj section), which according to Haydari were converted in the early and mid-eighteenth century, respectively, all the other tribes in his list were converted just before or during the nineteenth century. The Zubayd, the Bani Lam, and the Al Bu Muhammad were the main converted confederations in Haydari's list. In addition, it included large sections of the Rabi'a (including the Dafafi'a, the Bani 'Amir and the Ju'ayfir), the Bani Tamim (including their largest section in Iraq, the Bani Sa'd), the Shammar Tuqa, the Dawwar, and the Sawakin. Also present in Haydari's list were the many tribes along the Hindiyya canal, and the five tribes of Diwaniyya (Aqra', Budayyir, 'Afak, Jubur, and Jaliha) that relied for their water supply on the Daghara canal.⁵⁰ Haydari's assertion that the Zubayd confederation was converted just before or early in the nineteenth century is supported by the account of the Iraqi Mamluk historian 'Uthman Ibn Sanad al-Basri (d. 1834). The twentieth-century Baghdadi Sunni *'alim* 'Abdallah Mahmud Shukri al-Alusi also acknowledged the conversion of the Zubayd, as well as sections of the Shammar and the Bani Tamim, just before or during the nineteenth century.⁵¹ To Haydari's list one should also add the great confederation of the Muntafiq, which, with the exception of its shaykhs of the Sa'dun family who remained Sunni, was converted to Shi'ism almost in its entirety in the nineteenth century.⁵² In many cases the conversion was not complete, and thus by the formation of the monarchy many tribes had been cut along sectarian lines.

It is perhaps not surprising that large sections of the Shammar, the Zafir, and the Bani Tamim, which arrived in Iraq in the eighteenth century, were converted during the subsequent century. What is striking, however, is that the bulk of Iraq's old confederations, the Muntafiq, the Zubayd, the Du-laym, the Al Bu Muhammad, the Khaz'al, the Bani Lam, the Rabi'a, and the Ka'b, were converted to Shi'ism only from the late eighteenth century and not beforehand. Several major developments accounted for this rapid and relatively late conversion of the tribes. At the core of this process were the Wahhabi attacks on Najaf and Karbala, the emergence of the latter two cities as Iraq's major desert market-towns, the change in the water flow of

⁵⁰ Haydari, *'Unwan al-majd*, 110–15, 118.

⁵¹ 'Uthman Ibn Sanad al-Basri al-Wa'ili, *Mukhtasar kitab matali' al-su'ud bi-tayyib akhbar al-wali da'ud*, ed. Amin al-Hilwani (Cairo, 1951/2), 169; 'Abdallah Mahmud Shukri [al-Alusi], "Di'ayat al-rafd wa al-khurafat wa al-tafriq bayn al-muslimin," *al-Manar* 29 (1928): 440.

⁵² Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2B:1273; Great Britain, Naval Intelligence Division, Geographical Handbook Series, *Iraq and the Persian Gulf*, September 1944, 379–80; Great Britain, Office of the Civil Commissioner, *The Arab of Mesopotamia*, Basra, 1917, 6.

the Euphrates, and most important, the Ottoman policy of tribal settlement beginning in 1831. The transition of the tribes from nomadic life to agricultural activity disrupted tribal order and created a major crisis among the tribesmen, forcing them to reconstruct their identity and relocate themselves on the socioreligious map of their surrounding environment. The conversion was facilitated by the proliferation of *sayyids* (descendants of the Prophet), who soothed the fragmentation of Iraq's tribal system. The scale of the conversion changed according to region as the factors mentioned above had a varying degree of influence on the marshes, the central and southern Euphrates, and the Tigris area.

The rise of the Wahhabis helps explain the drive of ulama in Najaf and Karbala to convert Iraq's tribes to Shi'ism. By 1775, Ibn Sa'ud was a power in Arabia, and his conquest of Hasa in 1795 enabled him to expand his influence beyond the confines of Najd. The Wahhabi pressures pushed the Zafir, parts of the 'Anaza and the Harb (including the Jubur), and the Shammar Jarba to Iraq. The Mamluks encouraged the strong Shammar Jarba to remain in Iraq, seeking to turn this tribe against Ibn Sa'ud and also to use it as a leverage against one of Iraq's strongest confederations, the 'Ubayd.⁵³ The Wahhabis invaded Iraq several times and raided the Muntafiq and the Khaz'al. They put Najaf under siege twice and sacked Karbala in 1801. The large force of tribal levies composed of the Muntafiq, the Zafir, the Shammar, and the Ka'b, which was sent to Hasa by the Mamluk governor Suleyman Pasha, failed to defeat the Wahhabis.⁵⁴ It was only in 1811 that the Wahhabi power was reduced by Muhammad 'Ali of Egypt.

The Wahhabi attacks of Najaf and Karbala reinforced the sectarian identity of the Shi'i ulama and increased their motivation to convert the tribes. Unlike Sunni-Shi'i academic polemics, which posed no real physical threat to Shi'i Islam, the sack of Karbala and the attacks of Najaf exposed the vulnerability of the Shi'i ulama in Iraq, lacking as they did a tribal army which could be mobilized against such a threat to the very existence of the two cities. Moreover, the Wahhabi forays coincided with the rise of Najaf and its attempt to vie with Karbala for the position of the leading Shi'i academic center. With the exception of one case when the Shi'i Khaz'al attacked Wahhabi forces in Iraq that were said to be advancing toward Najaf, this confederation was on the whole either too weak to resist the Wahhabis or indifferent to the city's fate. This alarmed ulama in Najaf and its surroundings, and hence they attempted to reinforce Shi'ism among the

⁵³ 'Azzawi, *'Asha'ir*, 1:137, 140, 144–45, 165, 231, 260, 290, 295–98, 305–6, and 3:203; idem, *Ta'rikh*, 6:163; Nawwar, *Ta'rikh*, 149; Tom Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society in Early Modern Iraq* (The Hague, 1982), 123, 125.

⁵⁴ J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795–1880* (Oxford, 1968), 99–100; Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 213–14; Mahbuba, *Madi al-najaf*, 1:324–26.

Khaz'al and to establish an army composed of members of this confederation while still under Wahhabi threat.⁵⁵

The Wahhabi attacks sharpened for the Shi'ī ulama the ever-menacing power of tribes in general and the danger which Iraq's nomadic tribes posed to their sources of income. This threat surfaced again in 1814 during the rebellion of Iraqi tribes against the government, motivated by the loose Mamluk control of the area south of Baghdad. The participants in the rebellion were the Zubayd, the Khaz'al, the tribes of Shamiyya and the Jezira, together with the Zafir, the Shammar Jarba, and the Rawala. The threatening moves of the tribes close to Najaf, Karbala, Hilla, and Kazimayn coincided with one of the major annual Shi'ī visitations of the shrine cities. The forty thousand Iranian pilgrims who were said to be in these cities at that time were unable to leave until the tribes had retreated in the face of an expedition sent by the governor.⁵⁶ The Wahhabi attacks, and the pressures of Iraq's tribes on the Shi'ī cities, were a major check on the latter's development. This particularly alarmed the Persian ulama who had migrated to Iraq between 1722 and 1763 and lacked a solid socioeconomic base in the country. Seen from their point of view, the conversion of the tribes to Shi'ism was essential to bolstering their position in southern Iraq and maintaining their independent status vis-à-vis the Sunni government in Baghdad. Moreover, religion was the major resource of the shrine cities, and the main force moving their economic activity, which relied heavily on charities, pilgrimage, and the corpse traffic from Iran. The nomadic tribes of Iraq were not inclined to visit the sacred shrines on pilgrimage, nor did they attach any other religious importance to them.⁵⁷ Aware of that, the Shi'ī ulama may have also regarded the conversion of the tribes to Shi'ism as an opportunity to increase the number of potential local believers, contributors, and pilgrims, who would be engaged in the rituals connected with the pilgrimage to the shrine cities and seek burial in the cities' holy cemeteries. Thus, the need to secure the sacred shrine cities and to augment their sources of income by creating a local economic base helps explain the drive of the Shi'ī ulama to convert the tribes from the late eighteenth century.

The functioning of Najaf and Karbala as desert market-towns and granary centers in Iraq made them an important channel of contact among the tribes. The annual cycle of the nomadic tribes of Iraq, the Syrian desert, and Arabia was spun around two seasons. During the rainy season the tribes pastured in the desert areas whereas between late April and early October they were to be found close to the rural-cultivated areas searching

⁵⁵ Kirkukli, *Dawhat al-wuzara'*, 212; Hamud al-Sa'idi, *Dirasat 'an 'asha'ir al-'iraq: al-Khaza'il* (Najaf, 1974), 68; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 1, 1B:1286.

⁵⁶ Kirkukli, *Dawhat al-wuzara'*, 263–64.

⁵⁷ 'Azzawi, *'Asha'ir*, 1:398.

for water and food. This coincided with the harvest season of wheat and barley in southern Iraq, which begins in April.⁵⁸ Before the mid-nineteenth century, Hilla was a large tribal market and center of exchange, and it may be that it also acted as a center for Shi'i propagation among the tribes.⁵⁹ While Najaf was almost in ruins until the eighteenth century, Karbala had the potential to act in this capacity at that time because of its relatively more fertile hinterland and the repair of the Husayniyya canal. As will become clear from the discussion of water and agriculture, however, the effectiveness of Shi'i missionary activity among the tribes improved markedly only after the great increase in the cultivated area around Karbala and Najaf from the nineteenth century as a result of the construction of the Hindiyya canal.

The Hindiyya gave a great push to the economic position of Najaf and Karbala, which emerged as Iraq's major desert market-towns. Najaf assumed the role of an emporium of trade for the desert from the nineteenth century when the Shatt al-Hilla river dried up. Iraq's principal rice grounds developed along the Hindiyya, and especially between Tuwayrij and Kufa, and in the districts of Shamiyya and Samawa, close to Najaf.⁶⁰ By the twentieth century Najaf already overshadowed Karbala in its importance as a desert market-town. In addition to its setting as a desert market-town for the sale of grain, rice, dates, and cloth, Najaf was a collecting center for wool and skins of sheep and camels. It attracted tribes from Arabia, as well as from the Syrian desert such as those wandering sections of the 'Anaza. The tribes used to encamp in an area close to the city called al-Minakha, where much of the dealing took place. Karbala catered mainly to the needs of the wandering Shammar and the 'Amarat, and for the shepherd-breeding Bani Hasan.⁶¹ The greater economic interaction of Najaf and Karbala with the tribes, particularly during the nineteenth century, enabled the emissaries who originated from these two cities to spread Shi'i Islam among the tribesmen much more effectively than in earlier periods.

The change in the flow of the water of the Euphrates also had its impact on the process of conversion. It has already been pointed out in the previous section that the rise of Karbala and Najaf from the mid-eighteenth century was closely related to their water supply. Najaf in particular had suffered an acute shortage of water, a result of its relative distance from the

⁵⁸ 'Abd al-Jabbar 'Uraym, *al-Qaba'il al-rahhal fi al-'Iraq* (Baghdad, 1965), 23–24; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2A:793.

⁵⁹ Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 10; 'Abdallah al-Nafisi, *Dawr al-shi'a fi tatawwur al-'Iraq al-siyasi al-hadith* (Beirut, 1973), 69.

⁶⁰ Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2A:793–94.

⁶¹ Mekki al-Jamil, *al-Badw wa al-qaba'il al-rahhal fi al-'Iraq* (Baghdad, 1956), 246–50; Talib 'Ali al-Sharqi, *al-Najaf al-ashraf: 'adatuha wa-taqaliduha* (Najaf, 1987), 47; 'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh*, 6:136; Naval Intelligence Division, *Iraq and the Persian Gulf*, 538, 546; Review of the Civil Administration of Iraq, 1914–1918, FO 371/4148/34799.

Euphrates and the very small number of wells within the city. Years of neglect almost silted up the Husayniyya canal, which brought water to Karbala, and it was only after a dam was built by Hasan Pasha early in the eighteenth century that the city's water supply improved significantly. The cultivated area in the province surrounding Karbala increased, which in turn attracted some tribes to the city's environs. In 1706 Hasan Pasha attacked sections of the Shammar that had migrated to Iraq a few years earlier. While the Shammar Tuqa consequently settled down in the area between the Diyala and Kut al-'Amara, the Mas'ud ended up in the area near Musayyib and Karbala.⁶² Yet, far more than the Husayniyya, it was the construction of the Hindiyya canal which resulted in the attraction of a large number of tribes to the area between Najaf and Karbala, transforming the relations between these two cities and the tribes.

Financed by an Rs.500,000 contribution of the Awadh Chief Minister Hasan Reza Khan in the late 1780s, the Hindiyya canal was built to bring water to perpetually dry Najaf. Its construction, which started in the late eighteenth century, was completed sometime after 1803. The flow of water in the canal greatly improved toward the mid-nineteenth century following major reconstructions, also financed by Shi'ī Indian money.⁶³ The Hindiyya not only assured the prosperity of Najaf in the nineteenth century but also caused major hydrologic and ecological changes in southern and central Iraq. The canal left the Euphrates at a point about five miles below Musayyib. By 1860–1865 it had begun to drain the Euphrates of its water, and sometime between 1865 and 1890 the Hindiyya absorbed the bulk of the river's water, thus changing its course. The Hindiyya grew to be a river which ran for about seventy-three miles before it ended in a lake near Najaf (Bahr al-Najaf). The barrage constructed by the Ottomans in 1890 not only failed to restore the former course of the Euphrates but also caused all its water to pour down the Hindiyya from 1903. The construction of the Hindiyya upset the traditional hydrologic balance between the western and eastern sides of the Euphrates. The upper parts of the western side were inundated, making cultivation impossible, and the area near Hilla gradually dried up as the stream of the Shatt al-Hilla river became thin and sluggish. Hilla lost its position as an agricultural and commercial center. In contrast, irrigation along the Hindiyya grew to be extensive and the area around it became well cultivated.⁶⁴

The irrigated areas around Najaf increased further with the construction

⁶² 'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh*, 5:171, 174.

⁶³ Cole, "Indian Money," 463; Sarkis, *Mabahith 'iraqiyya*, 2:63–64; Litvak, "Shi'ī Ulama," 119–20.

⁶⁴ William Loftus, *Travels and Researches in Chaldea and Susiana* (London, 1857), 43–46; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2A:496–97, 501–2, 719–28; Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society*, 130, 134; Mahbuba, *Madi al-najaf*, 1:195–96; Hilli, *Ta'rikh al-hilla*, 1:152.

of three smaller canals in the late nineteenth century, which also brought water to the city. Whereas the first was financed by a contribution from Muhammad Isma'il Khan, the Iranian governor of Kerman, the other two (known as the 'Abd al-Ghani and the Hamidiyya canals) were constructed in 1887/8 and 1893, respectively, by Ottoman officials.⁶⁵ The three new canals further improved the flow of water to Najaf. The many tribes in the Khaz'al sphere of influence, like the Bani Malik (and its sections the Bani Hasan, the Bani Zurayyij, the Al 'Ali, the Al Faraj, the 'Awabid, the Humayyidat, the Al Isma'il, and the Al Ibrahim), as well as the Jaliha, the Al Fatla, and the Qurayyit, were forced to abandon the Shatt al-Hilla region, and settled along the Hindiyya.⁶⁶ The attraction of many tribes to the increasingly more fertile area along the Hindiyya between Karbala and Najaf exposed the new settlers to the influence of the two cities. More than ever before, Najaf and Karbala were in a position to act as great nerve centers, and to radiate an active religious force to the tribesmen.

Still, as intensive as the activity of the emissaries might have been as a result of both the drive of the Shi'i ulama to convert the tribes as well as the growing contacts between Najaf and Karbala and the tribes, it cannot fully explain the magnitude of the conversion in the nineteenth century, let alone the willingness of the tribes to espouse Shi'ism. This is all the more apparent given the fact that Sunni, Shi'i, and British sources concur that there was almost no trace of Shi'ism among the nomadic camel breeders of Iraq in the early twentieth century, and that it had spread only among the sedentary tribes. Indeed, those tribes that have kept as a rule to the desert way of life remained almost invariably Sunni to this day.⁶⁷

In view of that observation, it seems that the magnitude of the conversion in the nineteenth century can be fully understood only as an unintended result of the new Ottoman policy of tribal settlement. In 1831 the Ottomans resumed direct control of Iraq, the Mamluk period thus coming to an end. Unlike Mamluk efforts to break the tribes by occasional blows without providing an alternative way of life, the new Ottoman governors encouraged the tribesmen to settle down and take up agriculture. The governors' effort reflected Istanbul's desire to settle the tribes so as to increase agricultural production and tax revenue to sustain the Empire's growing involvement in world capitalist economy. Although tribal settlement developed into a clear policy in Iraq only from the term of Midhat Pasha (1869–

⁶⁵ Hajji Pirzadeh, *Safarnama-yi hajji pirzadeh*, ed. Hafez Farman-Farmayan, 2 vols. (Tehran, 1963), 1:346–47; Mahbuba, *Madi al-najaf*, 1:200–203; Sarkis, *Mabahith 'iraqiyya*, 2:64–65; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2B:1311.

⁶⁶ Sa'idi, *'Asha'ir al-'iraq*, 82, 115–16; Salih Haider, "Land Problems of Iraq" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1942), 109–10.

⁶⁷ Anon., "al-Bida' wa al-khurafat wa al-taqalid wa al-'adat 'ind al-shi'a: risala min al-bahrayn, *al-Manar* 13 (1910): 307; Wardi, *Dirasa*, 144, 225; Office of the Civil Commissioner, *The Arab of Mesopotamia*, 5.

1872), his Ottoman predecessors had also sought to settle the tribes in their attempts to raise tribal revenue demands. Irrigation of cultivated areas was improved by the construction of new canals like the Jahala, which watered part of the 'Amara and the Zubayr districts. Old canals were cleaned in order to extend the cultivated areas, particularly during the term of Rashid Pasha (1853–1857). Midhat accelerated the process of settlement when he introduced the Ottoman Land Code in 1869, giving taxpayers security of tenure by granting them title deeds (*tapu sanads*) to plots on state domain. Applying this policy first to the Hindiyya district, and to the region between Hilla and Diwaniyya in general, he encouraged the selling of tracts of state land to individual holders and reduced land rent fees, thereby attaching tribesmen to land in central and southern Iraq.⁶⁸

Beginning mainly with Najib Pasha (1842–1849), successive governors took great pains to extend government authority to the rural south. The Ottomans considered settlement the means by which they could “civilize” the nomads, instill the shari‘a among them, and force them to settle their disputes in religious courts rather than according to tribal custom.⁶⁹ In seeking to settle the tribes and bring them under strict government control, the governors attempted to restructure tribal society. They sought to break the great tribal confederations and to undermine the status of their paramount shaykhs as “lords” who controlled large dominions. In this struggle over taxes, and the control of food and trade routes, the governors attempted to reduce the power of the shaykhs, partly by conferring their position to others. Many of Midhat’s predecessors made rigorous demands for tax increases and appointed paramount shaykhs to farm taxes, thereby estranging the relations between the latter and the tribes in their area of influence. The divisions between the various component tribes of the confederations increased, and main sections became virtually independent as the government made each tribe accountable for its own share of the crop.⁷⁰

Whereas early in the nineteenth century the great part of the cultivated area of central and southern Iraq was held under a system of communal tribal ownership, by the end of the century a large part of the land was

⁶⁸ ‘Azzawi, *Ta’rikh*, 7:245–49; Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 291, 306; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2A:895–96; Albertine Jwaideh, “Midhat Pasha and the Land System of Lower Iraq,” in *St. Antony’s Papers: Middle Eastern Affairs* 3, ed. Albert Hourani (London, 1963), 119–20; Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, “The Transformation of Land Tenure and Rural Social Structure in Central and Southern Iraq, c. 1870–1958,” *IJMES* 15 (1983): 494.

⁶⁹ Selim Deringil, “Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State: The Reign of Abdülhamid II (1876–1909),” *IJMES* 23 (1991): 347.

⁷⁰ ‘Azzawi, *Asha’ir*, 4:113–20; Haider, “Land Problems,” 578–80; Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 289–92; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 1, 1B:1361, 1366, 1426, 1430; Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society*, 132–38; Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 75–76; Fernea, *Shaykh and Effendi*, 34.

already registered by the leading families of the tribes in their own names. In granting title deeds to individuals under the Land Code from 1869, the Ottomans further upset the organization of tribal society and the relations between shaykhs and tribesmen. The Code was probably designed to fit conditions in Anatolia and the Balkans, where individual peasant proprietors had actually existed. Since it did not recognize communal ownership of land, the Code stood in conflict with tribal custom under which land was held collectively by all members of the tribe. Fears that their rights might somehow be taken away or that land registration might facilitate conscription deterred individual tribesmen from registering their rights. Many opted instead to pass their title deeds to their shaykhs, to former tax farmers, and even to city merchants in return for cultivation rights and a share of the crop. Unsuccessful in their attempt to create a class of small landowners and taxpayers in Iraq, the Ottomans realized later in the nineteenth century that the new system had resulted in a great loss of revenue and government control over large tracts of cultivated land. They therefore attempted to ban further granting of title deeds after 1881, and sought to repossess the lands that had been granted.⁷¹

The Ottoman effort to reduce the power of the shaykhs and to repossess land inflamed the tribes of the Hindiyya canal, and the Muntafiq and the Shamiyya regions, leading to a series of rebellions in 1849, 1852, 1863–1866, 1878–1883, and 1899–1905. The revolts involved the Bani Lam, the Khaz'al, the Zubayd, the Dulaym, the Zafir, the 'Afak, and the Al Bu Muhammad. Some of the early revolts reflected the objection of the paramount shaykhs to the Ottoman attempt to break their power. Others signaled the reaction of tribesmen to tax demands, which they could not meet, to government attempts to reclaim title deeds, or to military conscription. And still others reflected the estranged relations between shaykhs and tribesmen.⁷² Ottoman officials and ulama in Najaf and Karbala shared a common interest in trying to pacify the tribes. Whereas the former were mostly concerned with increasing tax revenues, the latter desired to secure the pilgrimage, the corpse traffic, and the flow of charities to the shrine cities. Thus, for example, during his first tenure as governor (1852), Namiq Pasha sought the intercession of Shi'i ulama with such tribes as the 'Afak, the Shammar Tuqa, the Khaz'al, the 'Ubayd, the Zafir, and the Dulaym in order to end their revolt, which was probably encouraged by Wadi Bay, the paramount shaykh of the Zubayd, who was the tax

⁷¹ Sluglett, "Land Tenure," 494–95; Jwaideh, "Midhat Pasha," 124.

⁷² Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 1, 1B:1358–59, 1361–62, 1366, 1425–27, 1430, 1434, 1505–10; Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society*, 135–38; Jwaideh, "Midhat Pasha," 116, 128; Samira Haj, "The Problems of Tribalism: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Iraqi History," *SH* 16 (1991): 55; Sa'idi, *Dirasat*, 94.

farmer of the Hindiyya district.⁷³ Some of these tribal sections were still not Shi'ī, and the function of the ulama as mediators between them and the government increased their influence among the tribes.

During the nineteenth century, the bulk of Iraq's tribes settled down and took up agriculture. While the Bani Tamim, sections of the Shammar and the Dafafi'a, and the Bani 'Amir showed a tendency to settle down already during the term of the last Mamluk governor, Da'ud Pasha (1816–1831), tribal settlement gained momentum only after the Ottomans resumed direct control over Iraq.⁷⁴ The population estimates for Iraq demonstrate the scope of this process of settlement and its impact on the social composition of southern and central Iraq. Whereas in 1867 the percentage of the nomadic and rural elements of the population of southern Iraq was 50 and 41 percent, by 1905 this changed to 19 and 72 percent, respectively. Similarly, in central Iraq this ratio changed from 23 and 39 percent to 7 and 78 percent, respectively.⁷⁵ The establishment of cities in central and southern Iraq in the latter part of the nineteenth century was yet another indication of the changing relations between the desert and the sown in the area. With the exception of Diwaniyya, Suq al-Shuyukh, Zubayr, and Hayy, which were established just before or early in the nineteenth century, no less than twenty cities, including 'Amara and Nasiriyya, were either established or expanded from small villages in the latter part of this century. The increase in the number of cities reflected the breaking of confederations and the increase in tribal settlement.⁷⁶

The transition to agriculture diversified tribal economy and stratified tribal society. The possession of agricultural property altered the balance of political power between the settled and the nomadic tribes. It greatly affected the internal relationships of the settled tribes, in changing the role of the shaykh and widening the gap between the rich and the poor sections. In his capacity as tax farmer or title-deeds holder, the shaykh assumed new responsibilities. He had to maintain order and security in his tribe's territory, to arbitrate in disputes among his tribesmen, to represent the tribe vis-à-vis the government, to organize forced labor and other communal works, and to supervise the distribution of water among the tribal cultivators.⁷⁷

⁷³ Nawwar, *Ta'rikh*, 173, 175, 178; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 1B:1366.

⁷⁴ Nawwar, *Ta'rikh*, 141, 156, 158–59; 'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh*, 6:246, and 7:220; Lady Anne Blunt, *Bedouin Tribes of the Euphrates* (New York, 1879), 384.

⁷⁵ Hasan, "Growth and Structure," 344.

⁷⁶ 'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh*, 7:136, 236–38; Wardi, *Dirasa*, 162–63; Sarkis, *Mabahith 'iraqiyya*, 1:264–77, 315–16; Albertine Jwaideh, "Aspects of Land Tenure and Social Change in Lower Iraq during Late Ottoman Times," in *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, ed. Tarif Khalidi (Beirut, 1984), 346.

⁷⁷ Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of the Middle East, 1800–1914* (Chicago, 1966), 172.

On their part, small tribal sections and individual tribesmen became attached to land and grew conscious of its function as a tribal home. Tribal linguistic terms for both the territorial area in which tribes moved with their flocks and herds (*dira*) and for holding (*lazma*) evolved among the settled tribes along the middle Euphrates to convey a sense of holding landed property.⁷⁸

In contrast with nomadic communities, the life of which reflected great mobility and fluidity, the opportunity for continual change of residential area was all but denied to the settled tribesmen. The attachment of individual tribesmen to small pieces of land triggered disputes between tribes and tribesmen over water and land. This, in turn, reinforced the fragmentation of tribal society and diminished group solidarity, particularly in the areas close to cities. Similar developments were observed in other parts of the Middle East where sedentarization of nomadic tribes took place during the nineteenth century. While in Egypt the beginning of the process had preceded that of Iraq by almost half a century, in both countries the process was greatly influenced by the introduction of perennial irrigation based on extensive water canal systems. Like their Iraqi counterparts, Egyptian shaykhs of formerly nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes had also emerged as big landowners, while the tribesmen "were lost among the fellahin."⁷⁹ Thus, both in Iraq and in Egypt the common socioeconomic interests of shaykhs and tribesmen grew weaker as they were pulled apart in the process of tribal settlement. Yet, unlike the relatively uncomplicated and completed procedures carried out in Egypt under Muhammad 'Ali and Sa'id, the confused conditions of land registration in Iraq resulted in a larger number of claims of tribes, and individual tribesmen, for land occupancy, cultivation rights, and water supply than in Egypt.⁸⁰ Indeed, the case of the 'Afak and the Daghara tribes, which clashed over land and water around 1881, and that of the tribes of Samawa, which quarreled in 1900 over the cultivation of rice, are only two examples of many such disputes among the settled tribes.⁸¹

Whereas the economy of nomadic tribes relies mainly on camels that are not so much water-dependent, agricultural occupation places a far heavier demand on fresh water supply. Water became the lifeblood of tribal cultivators and a scarce resource for which Iraqi tribes and tribesmen competed to maximize its use and to increase their crop. The physical proximity of fields to water canals was critical. Those near the top of the canals had an

⁷⁸ Jwaideh, "Land Tenure," 333–35; idem, "Midhat Pasha," 130.

⁷⁹ Gabriel Baer, "The Settlement of the Beduins," in his *Studies in the Social History of Modern Egypt* (Chicago, 1969), 6–12, citation on 7.

⁸⁰ Jwaideh, "Land Tenure," 338–39; Sir Ernest Dowson, *An Inquiry into Land Tenure and Related Questions* (Letchworth, 1931), 26.

⁸¹ 'Azzawi, *Ta'rikh*, 8:65, 138, 197–98.

immense advantage of access to water over those farther down. In the absence of countervailing custom, social sanction, or physical force, the users near the top of the canal satisfied their own needs first before allowing water to flow on down to their less-fortunate neighbors below. Those near the tail end of the canal thus often received less water, and in a less timely fashion, than those near the top. Thomas Lyell, who served as assistant director of land registration and magistrate in the Baghdad district just after the British occupation of Iraq in 1917, remarked: "Among the tribes, brother will fight against brother over the question of a small canal . . . [and over] the action of one brother in damming up the water so as to divert it on to his land, and not removing the dam at the promised time, thereby depriving the other brother of his rightful share and endangering his crop."⁸²

The disorder which followed the fragmentation of tribal structure, and the decline in the political and military power of the shaykhs, help explain the emergence of the *sirkals* (from the Persian word *sarkar*: the head of work) and the *sayyids* among the settled tribes. The origin of both the *sirkals* and the *sayyids* among the tribes of Iraq is obscure and it may very well be that their increase in number and influence, if not initial appearance, was closely tied to the settlement of the tribes and the reconstruction of tribal order. Whereas the *sirkals* essentially assumed a socioeconomic role, the *sayyids* also fulfilled religious and administrative functions within the tribe, thus greatly stimulating the conversion of the tribesmen to Shi'ism.

The *sirkals* proliferated in numbers during the nineteenth century. They were to be found only among the tribal cultivators and had no counterpart among the nomads. They assumed such roles as foremen, headmen, group leaders, or small sectional chiefs. Sometimes they also acted as minor shaykhs or heads of small tribal sections, but more frequently they appeared as spokesmen or representatives of the tribesmen-cultivators. The *sirkals*, whose office became semi-hereditary, superintended the work of a group of cultivators and assigned the work load of each group member. The shaykhs, and those city dwellers who were holders of title deeds, needed the *sirkals* to extract their share of revenue from the tribesmen to whom they had granted their pieces of land for cultivation. The *sirkals* were thus brokers whose main role was to keep the land under cultivation and to collect revenues for the landowner.⁸³ As will be seen in chapter 3, the status of the *sirkals* vis-à-vis the shaykhs, and their influence within the tribes, increased further following the establishment of the monarchy.

There are no indications that *sayyids*, or any other religious figures, lived

⁸² Lyell, *The Ins and Outs of Mesopotamia*, 42.

⁸³ Jwaideh, "Land Tenure," 343-44, 347, 349; idem, "Midhat Pasha," 130, 132-33; Fariq al-Muzhir Al Fir'awn, *al-Qada' al-'asha'iri* (Baghdad, 1941), 159.

among the nomadic tribes of Iraq. This was also the case with respect to the nomadic tribes of Arabia, who had not had any religious figures among them before they accepted the Wahhabi creed.⁸⁴ As in modern southern Arabia and in the Funj Sultanate of the Sudan (1504–1821), the *sayyids* in Iraq were associated with settled and semi-settled tribes rather than with camel breeders.⁸⁵ Their absence among nomads was probably due to the fact that life in the desert invoked puritanism rather than rich religious rituals and cults of saints.⁸⁶ The tribal *sayyids* abounded particularly in the settled Shi'i areas of central and southern Iraq. They claimed descent from 'Ali, the first Shi'i imam, through his wife Fatima al-Zahra, who was the Prophet's daughter.⁸⁷ Among the Shabana marsh tribe, for example, the *sayyids* constituted as much as 20 percent of the population even in the mid-twentieth century.⁸⁸ In the marshes, where the tribesmen were rice cultivators and buffalo breeders, there were few villages that did not boast at least one family who claimed descent from the Prophet, and there were also certain small villages which consisted entirely of *sayyids*.⁸⁹ The economic welfare of *sayyids* varied. While some became wealthy landowners, the majority were engaged in humble occupations, relying on their claim to the Shi'i religious tax of one-fifth of the income (the *khums*) incumbent upon all faithful Shi'is. Among the settled tribes, their claim for a fifth of the crop was known as "my ancestor's right" (*haqq jaddi*).⁹⁰

The authenticity of the greater number of *sayyids* in Iraq had not gone unquestioned. Since membership in this stratum conferred social prestige and potential material gain, claimants sometimes changed their place of residence to avoid a thorough examination of their status by the tribesmen.⁹¹ Some *sayyids* were emissaries who originated from the shrine cities to propagate Shi'i Islam and opted to settle down among the tribes. Others

⁸⁴ John Burckhardt, *Notes on the Bedouins and Wahabys*, 2 vols. (London, 1831), 1:99.

⁸⁵ On modern southern Arabia see Patricia Crone, "Tribes Without Saints," Paper Submitted in the Melon Seminar, 19 April 1991, Department of Near Eastern Studies, Princeton University, esp. 5, 22–23. On the Funj Sultanate see Abdel Ghaffar Ahmed, "Tribal and Sedentary Elites: A Bridge between Two Communities," in *The Desert and the Sown: Nomads in the Wider Society*, ed. Cynthia Nelson (Berkeley, 1973), 83.

⁸⁶ Alois Musil, *The Manners and Customs of the Ruwala Bedouins* (New York, 1928), 417–18; Michael Meeker, *Literature and Violence in North Arabia* (Cambridge, 1979), 23–24; Ernest Gellner, "Flux and Reflux in the Faith of Men," in his *Muslim Society* (Cambridge, 1981), 81–82; Emrys Peters, "The Paucity of Ritual among Middle Eastern Pastoralists," in *Islam in Tribal Societies: From the Atlas to the Indus*, ed. Akbar Ahmed and David Hart (London, 1984), esp. 210.

⁸⁷ 'Azzawi, 'Asha'ir, 4:229.

⁸⁸ Fernea, *Shaykh and Effendi*, 95.

⁸⁹ Wilfred Thesiger, *The Marsh Arabs* (London, 1964), 67.

⁹⁰ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 155–56; Wardi, *Dirasa*, 246.

⁹¹ 'Azzawi, 'Asha'ir, 4:229; 'Ala' al-Din al-Bayati, *al-Rashidiyya: dirasa antropolojiyya ijtimaiyya* (Najaf, 1971), 122; Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 74, 153; S. M. Salim, *Marsh*

were wandering holy men, diviners, or soothsayers who arrived in Iraq mainly from Arabia, Syria, and Iran. Thus, the Abu Tabikh family originated in al-Hasa, the Zuwayn migrated to Iraq from Mecca, the Yasari and the 'Abbas from Medina, the Al Magutar from Syria, and the Qazwinis from Iran.⁹² Some *sayyids* had most likely been Sunnis before their arrival in Iraq and they accepted Shi'ism after their settlement among the tribes. In two cases, the increase in influence of *sayyids* was also closely associated with the Ottoman attempt to break the confederations and the power of the shaykhs, and with the desire of *sayyids* to acquire landed property. The *sayyids* of 'Amara were said to have arrived there from the Hijaz around 1798, when many of the tribes of the former region were still subordinated to the Muntafiq. During either the first or the second tenure of Namiq Pasha (1852 and 1861–1868) as governor of Iraq, some of them were appointed tax farmers.⁹³ In the case of the Khaz'al, the Ottomans encouraged extraneous *sayyids* to settle among some of its tribal sections in order to undermine the influence of the paramount shaykhs. Given lands, they attracted tribesmen from various clans to work on their estates, thereby splitting them away from their parent unit.⁹⁴ The Ottomans thus acted like the Funj Sultans, who had granted lands to religious figures that settled with their followers among the sedentary tribes in the Sudan, thereby creating an alternative to the tribal leaders.⁹⁵ Yet, the use of *sayyids* to split confederations in Iraq seemed to be more the exception than the rule, and for the most part their religious, sociopolitical, and administrative roles in the tribes were intended to soothe the breaking down of tribal society and to restore unity.

The *sayyids* proliferated among those tribes in Iraq whose former social structure had been broken in the process of settlement. The transition of the tribes from nomadism to agriculture created a pressing need for additional mechanisms to cope with the new socioeconomic complexities as well as for saintly services. Tying individual tribesmen to water and small pieces of land, agriculture fragmented the tribal community. The confederations ceased to function as political communities and their large component tribes lost their distinction as collective economic units. The settled tribesmen became more vulnerable than their nomadic counterparts because of their dependency for their livelihood on a crop which could be

Dwellers of the Euphrates Delta (London, 1962), 62; Thesiger, *Marsh Arabs*, 67; George Harris, *Iraq: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture* (New Haven, 1958), 71.

⁹² Pierre-Jean Luizard, *La Formation de l'Irak Contemporain: Le Rôle Politique des Uléma Chiïtes à la Fin de la Domination Ottomane et au Moment de la Construction de l'Etat Irakien* (Paris, 1991), 197–98.

⁹³ 'Azzawi, 'Asha'ir, 4:249.

⁹⁴ Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 75.

⁹⁵ Ahmed, "Tribal and Sedentary Elites," 85.

easily destroyed. The shaykhs, who had lost much of their former political authority, were asked by the Ottomans to administer economically complex and socially stratified tribal systems, a task for which they were not well equipped. The *sayyids* were thus highly sought after by all members of the settled tribes and became an integral part of the fragmented society. They defused tension within and between tribes, or between tribesmen and non-tribesmen, installing themselves as "traffic lights" in the fragmented system and acting as the "grease in its wheel."

Aware of the decline in their authority and esteem among the tribesmen, the shaykhs needed the *sayyids* to restore order and stability among the fragmented tribal units, for it was the *sayyids* who possessed such eminence as derived from a valued descent group which could compensate for the decline of the influence of the shaykhs. This point is neatly illustrated by the case of shaykh Sattar of the Al 'Ali section of the Bani Hasan tribe. In the late nineteenth century Sattar gave his two daughters in marriage to *sayyids*, Hadi Qazwini and Muhammad Ibrahim Bahr al-'Ulam, who were each members of distinguished Shi'i religious families. It is known that in the latter case Sattar exerted pressures on the Bahr al-'Ulam family to concede to the marriage and he gave his new son-in-law large tracts of land and orchards in the Hindiyya area between Karbala and Tuwayrij. Since he wished to take personal care of his new property, Sayyid Bahr al-'Ulam left Najaf and settled among the tribesmen, to whom he began to teach Islam.⁹⁶

Sayyids often acted as the political agents of the shaykhs, keeping them informed of the affairs within their tribal section. In order to mobilize their tribes either for fighting or for some corporate enterprise, the shaykhs first needed to secure the *sayyids'* support. Once that was achieved, the shaykhs could usually rely on the *sayyids* to convince the various tribal groups of the justice and value of the shaykhs' cause. Moreover, since the shaykhs rarely knew how to conduct their own correspondence, the *sayyids* would also write letters on their behalf, signing them with the impress of the shaykhs' ring.⁹⁷ The position of *sayyids* as the shaykhs' confidants, and their function as mediators between alienated groups and in inter-tribal conflicts, increased their influence among the tribesmen. The status of *sayyids* further increased since some functioned as saints, their reputation as holy men being particularly strong among the marsh dwellers of 'Amara. *Sayyids* claimed to possess supernatural powers to cure maladies, cause misfortune, bring blessing, and practice various other magic rites. They

⁹⁶ Muhammad Mahdi Bahr al-'Ulam al-Tabataba'i, *Rijal al-sayyid bahr al-'ulam al-ma'ruf bi al-fawa'id al-rijaliyya*, 3 vols. (Najaf, 1965-1966), 1:157-58.

⁹⁷ Fulanain, *The Marsh Arab Haji Rikkan* (Philadelphia, 1928), 103-4; Fernea, *Shaykh and Effendi*, 96-97.

gained money on account of this, as well as the respect and veneration of tribesmen, who used to swear oaths in their name. Their high status was evident in the fact that blood money for a *sayyid* was double that of an ordinary person. The *sayyids* gave sanction to weddings, circumcisions, funerals, and other celebrations. Their prayers in times of drought, sickness, or any other crisis were looked upon as the collective prayers of the tribesmen. Usually the only literate men in most groups, they also served as physicians, scribes, and constituted the link to the outside world.⁹⁸ Their influence over the tribesmen rendered the *sayyids* a catalyst of conversion and most valuable to the emissaries who came to propagate Shi'ī Islam among the tribes.

The intensification of Shi'ī propagation from the early nineteenth century is evident in local chronicles. At that time the Shi'ī emissaries and preachers were assisted by the relative peaceful conditions in the country and by the loose Mamluk control of the area south of Baghdad. They also benefited from the indifference of the last Mamluk governor, Da'ud Pasha, who apparently was willing to tolerate Shi'ī missionary activity.⁹⁹ The emissaries took further advantage of the Ottoman reversal in 1831 of the Mamluk policy which had prohibited the public exercise of Shi'ī rituals in Iraq. They gained still greater freedom of activity among the tribesmen following the new strategy of Sultan 'Abd al-Hamid II (1876–1909) which called for Islamic unity, and the emphasize of the doctrine of equality by the Young Turks after their 1908 Revolution.

Sunni ulama and Ottoman officials cited 'Abd al-Hamid's strategy as the major factor which enabled the Shi'īs to bolster their position in Iraq and send emissaries to the tribes. They pointed to the lack of Ottoman counter-propaganda, and to the very small number of Sunni ulama in Iraq, who were overshadowed by their Shi'ī counterparts. It was claimed that the Shi'ī emissaries took advantage of the ignorance of the tribesmen, who fell under their influence. So strong was their persuasive power that even some Ottoman soldiers and policemen were converted to Shi'ism, rendering them no longer reliable in the eyes of the government.¹⁰⁰ Proposed solutions to counteract the Shi'ī activity included an increase in Sunni education and preaching in Iraq. In 1900 Muhammad Rashid Rida noted the

⁹⁸ Wardi, *Dirasa*, 246–48; Salim, *Marsh Dwellers*, 62–63; 'Abd al-Karim al-Nadwani, *Ta'rikh al-'amara wa-'asha'iriha* (Baghdad, 1961), 22–24; Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2A:790; Harris, *Iraq*, 60, 70–71.

⁹⁹ Kirkukli, *Dawhat al-wuzara'*, 278–79; Ibn Sanad, *Matali' al-su'ud*, 169. See also Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 250.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Sanad, *Matali' al-su'ud*, 169; Haydari, *Unwan al-majd*, 111, 112; Anon., "Kallimat 'an al-'iraq wa-ahlihi li-'alim ghayur 'ala al-dawla wa-madhab ahl al-sunna," *al-Manar* 11 (1908): 46; "al-Bida' wa al-khurafat," 307; Deringil, "The Struggle Against Shi'ism," 49, 54.

intention of the Ottoman government to send ulama to the districts of Basra, the Muntafiq, and Karbala to educate the tribes.¹⁰¹ Those five Sunni ulama who were sent to Iraq in 1905 to organize Ottoman education and to counter Shi'i propaganda failed to reverse the trend. Besides their very small number, they lacked the support of local officials, and were not highly motivated because they did not receive their salaries regularly. Thus, in 1907 the Baghdadi *'alim* Ahmad Shakir al-Alusi reiterated the need for trustworthy Sunni ulama in Iraq, and proposed to institute "mobile madrasas" consisting of ulama who would travel among the tribes to instill Sunni Islam among them.¹⁰²

The Ottomans failed to curtail the activity of the Shi'i emissaries not only because of the insufficient measures that they had taken toward that end or because of their lack of a social base in Iraq. They failed in large part because of the swiftness and intensity of the conversion particularly during the second half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the development of the Bani Hukayyim (of the Zubayd), the Shibil (of the Khaz'al), the Al Fatla and their section the Daghara (of the Dulaym), the Bani Hasan (of the Bani Malik), and the 'Afak show the increasing settlement of their shepherd sections close to Najaf and Karbala, and their conversion to Shi'ism, in the latter part of the nineteenth century.¹⁰³ The magnitude of the conversion was not fully appreciated outside Iraq before the late nineteenth century, and in the absence of detailed population estimates that distinguished between Sunnis and Shi'is, some Ottoman officials still considered the Shi'is a minority of only 40 percent of the population. As may be gathered from Selim Deringil's findings in the Ottoman archives, repeated references to the spread of Shi'ism in Iraq were made mainly during the late 1890s and early 1900s.¹⁰⁴ These references must have been stimulated by Shirazi's move from Najaf to Samarra in 1875 and his subsequent involvement in the affairs which led to the Iranian Tobacco Revolt of 1891-92. While the scant number of references during the Mamluk period may be attributed to the infrequent reports of the governors to Istanbul, it cannot explain the very few, if any, references after 1831, when the Ottomans resumed direct rule over Iraq. Part of the explanation has to do with the fact that the Ottomans did not grasp the implications of the transition of the tribes from nomadism to sedentary life in Iraq, and were not fully aware of the magnitude of the conversion until late in the nineteenth century.

British officials were also dazed by the scope of the conversion, which continued as late as the twentieth century. It was noted in 1917 that the process was still going on vigorously, and that there were examples of

¹⁰¹ "Bab al-akhbar," *al-Manar* 2 (1900): 687.

¹⁰² Deringil, "The Struggle Against Shi'ism," 52, 55.

¹⁰³ Stephen Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950* (Oxford, 1953), 25.

¹⁰⁴ Deringil, "The Struggle against Shi'ism," 49, 50.

conversion even among the Sa'dun family, who claimed descent from the *Sharif* of Mecca and whose members served as paramount shaykhs of the Muntafiq.¹⁰⁵

THE NATURE OF THE CONVERSION

The rapid conversion of Iraq's tribes to Shi'ism was by no means perfect and by the twentieth century Arab tribesmen were still divided along sectarian lines as the conversion cut across confederations and tribes.

Thus, the Shurayyifat of the Muntafiq confederation became Shi'i whereas the Shuhayyim, a constituent of the Bani Humayyid section of the Muntafiq, remained partly Sunni as late as the twentieth century.¹⁰⁶ The Fadagha tribe in the district of Kazimayn was split between Shi'is and Sunnis, and so were the Bani Sa'id of the Muntafiq and the Zubu' of the Shammar, who lived in the districts of Suq al-Shuyukh and Kazimayn, respectively. Whereas the majority of the Bani Tamim became Shi'i, a few of its sections remained Sunni. Likewise, although the Zubayd confederation became almost entirely Shi'i, parts of its Bani 'Ajil and the 'Azza sections remained Sunni early in the twentieth century. The Jubur al-Wawi of the Euphrates valley became Shi'i but the Jubur of the Tigris remained Sunni, both being sections of the Zubayd as well. Still in the Zubayd, the Janabiyyin, who lived near Musayyib, remained mostly Sunni and only some of its branches became Shi'i. The Al Bu Muhammad confederation became almost entirely Shi'i except a few small branches who remained Sunni. The Muhaysin section of the Ka'b that settled upon Shatt al-'Arab chiefly below Basra was also mostly Shi'i, with the exception of parts of Bayt Ghanim, which remained Sunni. The Rabi'a confederation also became almost entirely Shi'i, save for the important Kawwam section that was to be found both near Kut al-'Amara and in the district of Kazimayn.¹⁰⁷ The Shammar and the Dulaym confederations were split along religious lines as well. The Shammar Jarba that migrated to Iraq only in the late eighteenth century and whose tribal domain was in the Jezira in between the Euphrates and Tigris, remained Sunni. The Shammar Tuqa settled down near Karbala early in the eighteenth century and became Shi'i. Some of its branches frequented the Shamiyya and the Najaf districts and their tribesmen were converted to Shi'ism. Similarly, whereas most of the Dulaym confederation, whose domain was north of Baghdad remained Sunni, its Al Fatla branch settled in the Hindiyya district and became Shi'i.¹⁰⁸

In converting the tribesmen to Shi'ism the emissaries apparently did not

¹⁰⁵ Office of the Civil Commissioner, *The Arab of Mesopotamia*, 69–70.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 69; Longrigg, *Iraq*, 22.

¹⁰⁷ Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2A:777, 779, 780, 785, 788, and 2B:1253, 1254, 1570, 1949.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 2B:1748; Batatu, *The Old Social Classes*, 41.

use any specific procedure since conversion to or within Islam did not involve any formal process.¹⁰⁹ It is most likely that the introduction of Shi'i rituals and Islamic law among the settled tribes facilitated the conversion as the tribesmen began sharing the peasants' view of the holy. One may assume that the conversion took place in stages and that at any period of time it entailed anywhere between several individuals and entire tribal sections. It may be that in some cases tribesmen followed their shaykhs. But this is by no means a binding scenario as may be gathered from the case of the Muntafiq confederation. Although the entire tribal sections of this confederation became Shi'i during the nineteenth century, most members of the Sa'dun leading family were still Sunnis on the eve of the British occupation of Iraq. It is possible that in several cases the *sayyids* were the first to accept Shi'ism, and that they were subsequently followed by some or all of the tribal sections among whom they settled.

While some Sunni ulama regarded the conversion of the tribesmen as their defection from the Sunni faith, others viewed the tribesmen as barely Muslims prior to their conversion to Shi'ism. Yet they all perceived the change in the religious status of the tribesmen in Iraq as a conversion. Thus, in referring to the Shi'is and describing the conversion, some Sunni ulama used linguistic variations as derived from the Arabic term *rawafid*.¹¹⁰ This term conveys clear connotations of "rejection" of and "defection" from Sunni dogma. Moreover, the following remarks made by Muhammad Rashid Rida in a comment to an article published in his *al-Manar* in 1908 even go so far as to suggest that in his eyes the tribesmen had hardly been Muslims before they were converted to Shi'ism, and indeed, to Islam: "If those [Shi'i] emissaries preach [religion] among the [tribesmen], and teach them the Islamic duties, as well as what is permissible and what is prohibited, then, from the point of view of their religion, the current position of the tribesmen is better than their former status."¹¹¹

It may be that in accepting Shi'ism the tribesmen sought to evade conscription. It may also be as in the case of the Muntafiq that the conversion was an act of protest on the part of ordinary tribesmen against the widening gaps between the rich and the poor sections of the confederation, and particularly the transformation of the Sunni Sa'duns from tribal shaykhs into a landed aristocracy with strong urban vested interests. It is possible that the conversion symbolized an anti-government act of protest on the part of the tribesmen. The Ottoman attempts from 1831 to settle the nomadic population, expand agriculture, distribute title deeds to individuals, and increase the collection of taxes in Iraq led to feelings of injustice

¹⁰⁹ Richard Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 33.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Alusi, "Di'ayat al-rafd," 440.

¹¹¹ "Kalimat 'an al-'iraq," 49.

and opposition among the tribesmen as well as to acts of violence and resistance. Involved as they were in an intense conflict with the government, the tribesmen became receptive to Shi'ī Islam since they found the anti-government aspects of Shi'ism and its struggle against oppression and tyranny appealing.¹¹² But as valid as these reasons may be, they still do not entirely clarify the relation between the radical change which the tribesmen experienced following their transition from nomadic life to agricultural activity and their motivation to espouse Shi'ism.

It is the fragmentation of tribal system, which generated an identity crisis among the settled tribesmen, as well as their need to relocate themselves on the social map of their surrounding environment, that can fully explain the motivation of the tribesmen. The settlement transformed the former way of life of the tribesmen, creating a sense of displacement and alienation among them. As such, the conversion to Shi'ism was a reaction of the tribesmen to the crisis which they experienced following the breaking down of their former socioeconomic and political organization. The conversion was a compensation for the tribesmen's loss of their former way of life and an indication for their pursuit of stability. Moreover, the increase in sedentarization resulted in new socioeconomic contacts between the settled tribesmen and the cities around them, notably, Najaf and Karbala. These contacts sharpened for the tribesmen the issue of their identity, and increased their motivation for social inclusion and mobility. Seen from this point of view, the conversion reflected the attempt of tribesmen, as well as shaykhs, to adjust distances between them and their new neighbors in the Shi'ī urban centers. Their conversion to Shi'ism gave the tribesmen a greater religious legitimization, enabling them to consider themselves "better Muslims." In adopting an overt religious behavior they could gain more respect. And in observing Shi'ī rituals, like the visitation of the Shi'ī holy cities, they could improve their socioeconomic contacts with the urban Shi'ī population in southern Iraq. Conversion was thus the vehicle through which the tribesmen attempted to gain a new start and to rearrange their religious complex and social identity.

Nonetheless, the conversion to Shi'ism did not pervade the former social and moral values of the tribesmen. This was evident in the nature of Shi'ī rituals and the position of Shi'ī Islamic law among the tribesmen, as well as in the relations between Sunni and Shi'ī tribes. The Shi'ī emissaries promoted the visitation to the tombs of the imams, the cult of Shi'ī saints, and the rituals connected with the commemoration of Husayn, the third imam. As will be seen in chapters 5 and 6, the emissaries adjusted Shi'ī rituals to conform with Arab ideal attributes of manhood (*muruwwa*) and Iraqi tribal styles of celebration, notably, the *hosa*, which included clamorous

¹¹² Luizard, *La Formation de L'Irak*, 112, 119, 190–91.

receptions, horse riding, and firing weapons in the air. Since the tribesmen always preferred to hear the songs of heroes, the emissaries used Arabic poetry to dramatize the heroic stand of Husayn and his companions in the battle of Karbala. They also highlighted 'Ali's courage, his eloquence of speech, his honesty, and his simple way of life, thereby appealing to tribal values of masculinity, courage, pride, honor, and chivalry. The Shi'i emissaries thus acted in much the same fashion as the Prophet Muhammad, who had adjusted Islamic teaching to the Arab value system in order to facilitate the conversion of the Arab tribes to Islam.

The rituals were supplemented by the introduction of Shi'i law into the tribes by the religious agents (the *mu'mins*). The latter were sent to the settled tribes by the chief mujtahids who resided in Najaf and Karbala. Unlike the *sayyids*, the *mu'mins* were not members of the tribe. Assumed to be graduates of the madrasa, the *mu'mins* were authorized to settle such matters as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. They were also said to have introduced the practice of temporary marriage (*mut'a*) into the tribes, thus enabling affluent shaykhs and *sayyids* to contract a large number of marriages. The *mu'mins* conducted religious services and led the mourning ceremonies in commemoration of Husayn. Acting as religious advisors to the shaykhs, they were paid for their services from the communal contributions of tribesmen.¹¹³

But while Shi'i rituals and Islamic law helped the converted Arab tribesmen to cope better with their more complex daily life, Shi'ism did not preempt the role of genealogy among them, which became even more essential to establishing an individual's identity following the erosion of tribal cohesiveness.¹¹⁴ Indeed, religious worship (*'ibadat*) among the tribesmen and their daily activities (*mu'amalat*) continued to reflect their former social values. Although the new rituals enriched their cultural life, they did not erode tribal moral values, which continued to function underneath the newly acquired religious identity of the tribesmen. The rituals, which stressed Arab attributes of ideal manhood, provided the tribesmen with new heroes with whom they could identify and in whose names they could swear oaths. The crisis that resulted from the breakdown of tribal organization and lack of political authority encouraged the cult of Shi'i saints, whose images articulated the wish of the tribesmen for authority. Likewise, Shi'i religious law did not permeate tribal legal institutions, which eclipsed Islamic codes in importance. Tribal law and custom varied by tribes, and in spite of the introduction of basic Shi'i Islamic law, there did not develop a unified legal system among the tribes of Iraq. Indeed, the

¹¹³ "Bab al-akhbar," 687; Ahmad Fahmi, *Taqrir hawla al-'iraq* (Baghdad, 1926), 49; Bayati, *al-Rashidiyya*, 127-28; Salim, *Marsh Dwellers*, 64.

¹¹⁴ Muhammad Rida al-Muzaffar, "Hifaz al-qaba'il al-'arabiyya 'ala taqalidihā," in *Fir'awn, al-Qada' al-'asha'iri*, xxxviii.

impact of Shi'ī law was confined mainly to marriage and divorce. Many tribes continued to retain their own distinct legal customs, and their socio-economic dealings and customs regarding women continued to reflect tribal codes. Even their methods of conflict resolution remained strongly tribal in nature, clans and tribes continuing to pay blood money collectively well into the twentieth century.¹¹⁵

The continuous interaction between Sunni nomads and Shi'ī sedentary groups further reinforced the latter's tribal moral values and heritage as well as their Arab identity. Thus, even the old men of the marsh Arabs continued to tell legendary tales of the courage, honor, and generosity of their tribal ancestors, and Iraqi villagers persisted in calling themselves settled nomads, and claimed descent from old fathers and former nomadic tribes well into the twentieth century.¹¹⁶ The durability of kinship among the settled tribes also found embodiment in the relations between the converted tribes that settled in between the two rivers and the Arab marsh dwellers. The area of settlement of many of the marsh dwellers cut across Iraqi and Iranian territories, and it may be that some of them were converted to Shi'ism as a result of their contacts with Iranians outside Iraqi-Ottoman territory. The tribesmen despised the marsh dwellers because of what they considered the latter's mixed blood, their practice of temporary marriage, and their name *ma'dan* or *al-ma'adi*, which outside the marshes connoted "yokel."¹¹⁷

The image of the marsh dwellers as inferiors is illustrated by the case of the Al Bu Muhammad confederation, from which the bulk of 'Amara's tribes were drawn. Early in the twentieth century the Al Bu Muhammad all lived in reed huts. Their area proper was between 'Amara down to 'Uzayyir in Iraq and partly inside Persian Arabistan. Although their principle occupation was buffalo breeding, they were engaged in rice cultivation and fishing as well. In spite of their descent from the Zubayd, they were despised by the neighboring Arab tribes, and it was rumored that they were of Indian or Persian origin. The neighboring tribes refused to give their daughters in marriage to the Al Bu Muhammad and pointed to their intermarriage with Persian tribesmen as proof of their inferiority. It was also said that the shaykhs of the Al Bu Muhammad, and the *sayyids* who lived among them, enjoyed far more latitude than the Koran permitted regarding the number of their wives.¹¹⁸ The view of the marsh dwellers as

¹¹⁵ Ja'far al-Khalili, "al-Qada' al-'asha'iri," in Fir'awn, *al-Qada' al-'asha'iri*, xxvi; Muzaffar, "Hifaz al-qaba'il," in Fir'awn, *al-Qada'*, xxxix; Salim, *Marsh Dwellers*, 51; Hanna Baratu, "Iraq's Underground Shi'a Movements: Characteristics, Causes and Prospects," *MEJ* 35 (1981): 585-86.

¹¹⁶ Wardi, *Dirasa*, 152-53; Salim, *Marsh Dwellers*, 4, 7, 43; Fernea, *Shaykh and Effendi*, 12-13; Thesiger, *The Marsh Arabs*, 93; Harris, *Iraq*, 72.

¹¹⁷ Doris Adams, *Iraq's People and Resources* (Berkeley, 1958), 23-24.

¹¹⁸ Lorimer, *Gazetteer*, 2B:1254-55. See also 'Azzawi, 'Asha'ir, 3:66.

inferiors because of their "Persian connection" and the practice of temporary marriage by their shaykhs and *sayyids* demonstrates both the strong Arab identity of Iraq's converted tribesmen as well as their general reluctance to adopt this practice, which was more common in Iran. Indeed, with the exception of affluent shaykhs and *sayyids*, who could afford to contract marriages with several women, temporary marriage did not take root among the common tribesmen in Iraq.¹¹⁹

The massive conversion of the bulk of Iraq's tribes to Shi'ism mainly during the nineteenth century facilitated the expansion of a Shi'i polity in southern Iraq. Although in the nineteenth century the nature of the polity and its institutions were still unclear, by 1908 the Shi'i mujtahids had already formulated a political theory which defined the form of government in the state which they envisaged.

¹¹⁹ Muhsin al-Amin, *al-Husun al-mani'a fi radd ma awradahu sahib al-manar fi haqq al-shi'a* (Damascus, 1909), 37; Muhammad Jawad Mughniyya, "al-Mut'a 'ind al-shi'a al-imamiyya," *al-'Irfan* 37 (1950): 1096; "Bab al-akhbar," 687; Fahmi, *Taqrir hawla al-'iraq*, 49. See also Werner Ende, "Ehe auf Zeit (*mut'a*) in der Innerislamischen Diskussion der Gegenwart," *WI* 20 (1980): 17.