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Michael M. Gunter

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3

THE KURDISH EMIRATES

Obstacles or precursors to Kurdish nationalism?

Michael Eppel

The main sociopolitical frameworks in Kurdistan in the premodern era were the tribes and the tribal, quasi-feudal principalities or emirates headed by emirs (or mirs). The emirates were ruled by strong Kurdish tribal dynasties, which dominated their tribes and subjected weaker tribes and non-tribal populations to their control, sometimes creating extensive supra-tribal political units. The major Kurdish tribal dynasties were the Hasanwahids (Hasanwiya) (959–1095), Banu Annaz (Annazids) (990–1116), Shaddadid (951–1075), and Banu Marwan (Marwanids) (984–1083).

Although the Kurdish emirates experienced varying degrees of autonomy, they continued to be vassals of successive Muslim overlords – the Abbasid, Seljuk, Turkmen, Ottoman, and Iranian (Safavid and Qajar) states and dynasties. From the tenth century, the Kurdish tribes and emirates were exposed to the growing pressure of migration from the east of Turkish tribes. In the eleventh century, the Seljuk sultanate arose a major force in the Muslim world. The Kurdish emirates and dynasties either submitted to the Seljuk rulers or were incorporated into their political arenas. The prominent Kurdish dynasty that won renown as Muslim fighters under Seljuk rule was the Ayyubi dynasty of Salah al-Din al Ayyubi (1137–1193), known as Saladin.¹

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Kurdish emirates suffered from the destruction inflicted on the region by waves of Mongol conquests. From the mid-fourteenth century until the end of the fifteenth century, Kurdistan was dominated by Turkmen tribal confederations ruled by the “White Sheep” (*Aqqoyunlu*) and “Black Sheep” (*Karaqqoyunlu*) tribal dynasties.²

Their weak control of Kurdistan enabled the Kurdish emirates to recover. The relations between the Turkmen military tribal elites and Kurdish tribal society were essentially unstable. The Turkmen rulers accepted the autonomous, and at times even independent, status of the Kurdish tribes and emirates, which, in turn, accepted the Turkmen. Prominent among the Kurdish principalities was the Hasankeyf emirate, ruled by descendants of the Ayyubi dynasty in the service of Turkmen rulers.

During the fifteenth century, conflict broke out between the two Turkmen confederations. It was joined by the Kurdish emirates and tribes, many of which were allies, and indeed vassals, of the Black Sheep. Even in the early stages of its rise to power, in the years 1420–1436, the White Sheep confederation was forced to fight the Kurdish tribes and

emirates allied with the Black Sheep, but they had the help of some of the Kurdish tribes and emirates that they now ruled (see Endnote 2).

Following their victory, the White Sheep took over most of Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, and established their capital in Tabriz. Because the majority of Kurdish emirates and tribes were allies of the Black Sheep, the White Sheep leaders sought to eliminate the families of their emirs and tribal leaders, and appoint governors to take charge. Some Kurds found places at the court of the White Sheep rulers, but relations between the Turkmen military tribal elite and the Kurdish emirates and tribes were unstable, suspicious, and fraught with violent clashes. Against the background of the loose and unstable White Sheep regime, the virtually independent Kurdish emirates, especially the emirate of Bitlis, grew in strength. Even so, there was no uniformity in their actions. Each tribe and emir maintained an independent relationship with the Black Sheep confederation and its ruling dynasty, and subsequently with the White Sheep.

The Kurdish tribes and emirates thus divided their allegiance between the rival Turkmen dynasties. In the second half of the fifteenth century, the White Sheep conquered the old Hasankeyf emirate ruled by descendants of Ayyubis. Nevertheless, the Kurdish emirates continued to consolidate under the loose rule of the Turkmen. With the collapse of the White Sheep in the face of the strong, emerging Safawid–Iranian state and Ottoman Empire, the Kurdish emirates, although fragmented, became the major local forces in Kurdistan in the early sixteenth century.

At the end of that century, Emir Sharaf al-Din Bitlisi (or Bidlisi) published a famous book, *Sharafnama* (1597), about the history of the Kurdish states and emirates. In it, he lists the major emirates of his day, mainly in southern and eastern Kurdistan: Hakkari, Soran (Sohran), Baban, Ardalan, Bitlis (Bidlis), Chizire (Cizire, al-Jazira), Bahdinan (Bhadinan), Mush (Muks), and Chemiskezek (Chamishgazak) in the Dersim–Tuncheli area.³ He also mentions the emirate of Hasankeyf, whose emirs had accepted the suzerainty of the Turkmen White Sheep tribal confederation in 1455. With the conquest of Kurdistan by the Ottoman Sultan Selim I in 1514, the remaining emirates were subjected to direct Ottoman rule.

The role of the Kurdish emirates in the Ottoman–Iranian struggle

From the early sixteenth century, Kurdistan was divided between the two rival regional powers: the Ottoman Empire and the Iranian Safavid Shi'i state. The continual struggle between these two regional powers had a profound impact on the political and social conditions in Kurdistan, and created the environment in which the emirates survived, expanded, and eventually declined up until the first half of the nineteenth century.

The Ottomans, in the wake of their victory over the Safavid Iranians in the Battle of Chaldiran in 1514, took control of the greater part of Kurdistan. In the confrontation between the two powers, most of the Kurdish emirates had sided with the Ottoman Empire and played a significant role in the Ottoman conquest of Kurdistan and the Tigris and Euphrates valleys.

The successful cooperation between the Kurds and the Ottomans was the achievement of the Kurdish statesman and courtier, Mevlana Idris Bidlisi, who had been the secretary of the last White Sheep ruler before that dynasty was eliminated by the Safavids. He subsequently served at the court of the Ottoman Sultan Bayazid II (1481–1512) and of his heir, Sultan Selim I. On the latter's instructions, Bidlisi persuaded the 18-strong Kurdish emirs of the areas of Chemiskezek, Bitlis, Palu, Hasankeyf, Baradost, Baban, Soran, Amadiya, and Chizire (Cizire, al-Jazira in Arabic) to support the Ottomans.

The Kurdish emirs and tribes recognized the strength of the Ottomans as well as their common interest as Sunnis against the Iranian Shi'i state and against the Qizilbashi Sufi order, which was an ally of the Iranian Safavids. (The Shi'i Sufi order of the Qizilbashis had considerable influence among the Turkmen tribes, who were major rivals of the Kurds during the sixteenth century.)

The Kurdish emirs preferred the decentralized rule of their Ottomans because it allowed them to preserve some measure of autonomy. The policy of the Iranian Safavids, however, was to undermine strong emirs and independent emirates, and to favor marginal families dependent on and therefore loyal to the Iranian rulers. Ardalan was the only Kurdish emirate to maintain its autonomy as a vassal principality under Iranian rule. It played an important role in the struggle against the Ottoman Empire and was the main rival of the Ottomans' vassal emirates, which were the Bahdinin emirate in the seventeenth century and the strong Baban emirate in the eighteenth century. The emirs of Ardalan enjoyed considerable influence at the Iranian Shah's court. Some of the heads of Ardalan's ruling dynasty married into the Safavid dynasty and sometimes held significant positions at the Shah's court.

The Kurdish emirates: relative strength and cultural flowering

The emirates survived as long as their ruling emirs succeeded in maneuvering between different forces – other emirates, tribal Arab confederations, Ottoman *valis* (governors), and the Mamluk rulers of Baghdad. Their survival depended also on the developments in Ottoman–Iranian relations and on the fluctuations between the centralizing and decentralizing orientations of the Ottoman administration. In a list of Ottoman provinces dating from 1527, the leaders of 17 emirates are defined as the great emirs of Kurdistan.⁴

Over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Ottoman Empire utilized the Kurdish emirates in the struggle with Iran but eliminated those that accumulated too much power or whose emirs became too independent. Although the Ottomans succeeded in gradually limiting the autonomy of the emirates by exploiting internal struggles in the emirs' dynasties and between various local forces, the emirates continued to exist and even to flourish until the 1830s.

As early as the mid-16th century, Sultan Sulayman the Magnificent had conquered the strong emirate of Chemiskezek (or Chamishgazak, between Mount Ararat and east Dersim, west of the northern Tigris River), which had existed since the thirteenth century. A dispute within the ruling family following the death of the strong Emir Pir Hüseyin enabled the Ottoman sultan to divide the lands among the emir's sons and thus to weaken the emirate, which became subordinate to the Ottoman *sanjaks* (administrative districts).

Bitlis

In the first half of the seventeenth century, the emirate of Bitlis emerged as the most dominant and prosperous of the Kurdish emirates. According to the historical narrative, the emirs of Bitlis were from the Rojiki (Rozhiki) tribe, a branch of the Marwanid dynasty, which took control of the city of Bitlis during the tenth century.⁵ Until the late fifteenth century, they remained under the patronage of the more powerful Turkmen tribal confederations. Bitlis emerged as an almost independent emirate after the death of the powerful Turkmen leader, Uzun Hasan, in 1573. In the early sixteenth century, the emirate supported the Ottoman forces of Sultan Selim I, and its emirs were awarded the title of "Noble

Khan". In 1530–1531, however, the emirate switched allegiance to the Safavid side, a move that led to its defeat by the Ottomans.

The period of greatest prosperity in Bitlis began in 1578, when Sultan Murad III restored the emirate's autonomy and installed Sharaf al-Din Bitlisi (Bidlisi), a member of the Rojiki tribe and the author of the *Sharafnama*, as emir. Under its talented and educated emirs, Bitlis flourished. In the first half of the seventeenth century, it became the strongest and most prominent of the emirates. The Ottoman traveler and official Evliya Chelebi and European travelers who visited Bitlis during this period were impressed by the emirate's military strength and economic vitality, and by the extent of its independence, and described it as a burgeoning cultural and religious center.

According to Chelebi, Bitlis in the mid-seventeenth century had 1,200 shops and workshops. It was a cultural hub with mosques, *medresat*, and influential Sufi orders – the Naqshbandiyya and the Bakhtashiyya – which maintained centers of religious and intellectual activity. The emirs of Bitlis owned 13 *zeamet* and 124 *timars*, feudal estates that were granted by the Ottoman sultans to the emirs and other local rulers in exchange for military services.

Chelebi's description reflects the special, quasi-Renaissance character of Emir 'Abd al-Khan Rozhiki (d. 1666?), the ruler of Bitlis, a man of considerable education and broad intellectual interests; a patron of the arts and sciences; and talented in architecture, poetry, medicine, and drawing. According to Chelebi, "Abd al-Khan's library contained thousands of books in Persian and Arabic and hundreds of European books, mostly in French, on geography, physics, astronomy and medicine". *Ulema*, who wrote poetry in Kurdish, were active in his court. Chelebi noted that the emir was able to call up 70,000 fighters (a figure that seems somewhat exaggerated).⁶

Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, a French traveler who visited the region in the seventeenth century, also gained the mistaken impression that it was independent and that its emir was not subject either to the sultan or the Shah. (In fact, despite his broad autonomy and relative power, the emir was subject to the sovereignty of the Ottoman sultan.)⁷

In the mid-seventeenth century, the emirate collided with the Ottoman Empire, which was worried by its growing power. Notwithstanding its relative strength, the emirate was unable to stand against Ottoman might. Its capital city, Bitlis, was conquered by the Ottomans. Its autonomy was limited, its emir was arrested and exiled, and it lost its strength and importance.

The decline of the emirate of Bitlis allowed the ascent of the emirates of Bahdinan, Baban, Soran and Botan. For various periods during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, the authority of the Bahdinan (Bhadinan) emirate extended over portions of the Hakkari area to the east and southeast of Lake Van, and the environs of the cities of Aqra, 'Amadiya, Zakho, and Barzan. Internal strife in the emir's dynasty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries enabled the Ottomans to weaken it.⁸

Baban

The Ottoman–Iranian struggle was the background to the growth of the emirate of Baban in the second half of the seventeenth century. Its rise was probably facilitated by the regional vacuum created by the decline of the Bitlis emirate. The emirs of Baban exploited their location on the border of the Ottoman Empire with Iran in order to reinforce their status and independence in the local power game. In 1678, Suleiman Baba (Baban) was awarded the title of pasha and enjoyed a solemn reception in Istanbul, in recognition of his services to

the Ottoman Empire. Until 1784, the capital of Baban was the village and fortress of Qal'a Chilawan, but between 1784 and 1788, the Babans built their capital in Sulaymaniyya.

The emirs of Baban played an important and complex role in the political arena of the Baghdad *vilayet* and in the cities of Basra and Mosul. Its importance in the regional struggles was due to the proximity of Sulaymaniyya to Baghdad, its relative military strength, and its position as an important barrier against the Iranians. Nevertheless, the constant internal strife and domestic struggles within Baban enabled the Ottomans and the Iranians, and their proxy, the emirate of Ardalán, to interfere in Baban's affairs. In the wake of domestic struggles and Ottoman interference, the emirs of Baban and members of the House of Baban sometimes took refuge in Iran. Although the Babans were vassals of the Ottomans, because of their weakness they were obliged to pay taxes also to the Iranian governors of Shahrizor.⁹

The Babans preferred that the *valis* of Baghdad would be sent by the Ottoman authorities in Istanbul and not nominated from among strong local forces. A *vali* sent from Istanbul was dependent on local leaders, had limited ability to pressure the emirate, and would help the Babans to gain influence in Baghdad. For example, in 1788, Emir Ibrahim Baban Pasha forged an alliance with the Ottoman governor of Basra and the tribal Bedouin federation of Muntafik against the Ottoman–Mamluk *vali* of Baghdad.

Unlike their rivals, the House of Ardalán, which had considerable influence at the Shah's court, the emirs of Baban were not close to the Ottoman court in Istanbul, to which they ostensibly owed their loyalty. Their struggles for survival during the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth were against the Ottoman *valis* and other local forces: the Mamelukes in Baghdad, the House of Ardalán, and the Iranian governors of the nearby district of Shahrizur.¹⁰

The decline of the emirates in the nineteenth century

The changes in international relations after the Ottoman–Iranian wars ended with the Treaty of Erzurum in 1823, the growing involvement of Britain and Russia in the region, and a series of Ottoman and Iranian reforms that changed the conditions that had fostered the continuing existence of the Kurdish emirates. First of all, the emirates lost their importance as proxy forces in the Ottoman–Iranian confrontation. The Russian push toward Istanbul and through the Caucasus in the direction of the Persian Gulf were important factors that had led Britain to adopt, since the 1830s, a policy intended to preserve the Ottoman Empire as a buffer against Russia. In line with this, Britain supported the Ottoman Empire against local centrifugal forces, among them the Kurdish emirates.

The Ottoman Tanzimat reforms, promulgated successively between 1839 and 1876, were characterized by a centralization and modernization of the administration, which led to confrontations with the Kurdish emirates. The Ottoman Empire sought to suppress any autonomous forces whose independence ran counter to the strengthening of central authority and to the control of the centralized, modernizing administration. However, the primacy of tribal and emirate interests hindered the Kurdish emirates from uniting against the Ottomans. In the quasi-feudal conditions of Kurdistan, the emirs were embroiled in their local struggles. Those who harbored ambitions of regional dominance were unable to accumulate sufficient political and military might to give them a chance in a confrontation with the Ottoman Empire.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, three of the emirates had maintained their strength and autonomy as Ottoman vassals: the emirate of Baban in the Sulaymaniya region; Soran, centered around Rawanduz; and Botan (Bohtan), based around the city and fortress

of Jazirat bin ‘Umar. The other emirates, Hakkari and Bahdinan, were weak and either had their autonomy limited by the Ottoman authorities or were dominated by the stronger emirates.

The strongman of the House of Baban at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century was Emir ‘Abd al-Rahman Baban (ruled 1789–1813). He was deeply involved in the power struggles in Baghdad, and sometimes he achieved a degree of influence there and could engineer the rise or fall of the Ottoman *valis*. However, the struggles in the Baban family enabled the Ottomans and Iranians to meddle in the emirate and in Baban’s affairs. In the context of these convoluted struggles, Baban was forced to flee from Sulaymaniyya to Iran no less than five times.¹¹

The Treaty of Erzurum in 1823 between the Ottoman Empire and Iran sidelined the Baban emirate. It lost its importance as an asset in the Ottoman–Iranian rivalry and its ability to maneuver *vis-à-vis* the Ottoman authorities. The internal conflicts in the Baban dynasty and emirate were exploited by the Ottomans to interfere in its affairs and to weaken it.

The final steps to subdue the emirate and reduce its territory were initiated by the Ottoman *vali* in Baghdad, Najib Pasha, in 1847. Emir Ahmad Pasha (1838–1847) was ousted, and the Ottomans appointed his brother to replace him. The Baban dynasty continued to head the emirate, but the emirs were appointed by the Ottoman authorities. The emirate finally disappeared in 1851 with the appointment of Isma‘il Pasha, a Turkish officer, as *kaymakam* (district governor) of the area.

Soran

The emergence of the Soran emirate, led from 1814 by Emir Muhammad Kor, as the most powerful local force in Kurdistan, was against the background of the decline of the Baban emirate, Ottoman weakness following the war with Russia in 1828–1829, and the conquest of Syria in 1831 by Egypt’s ruler Muhammad Ali. Muhammad Kor expanded and fortified Soran’s capital, the city of Rawanduz, and built a citadel there.¹²

Most of Kor’s military force relied on the tribes, but it included a Regular Army unit, cavalry, infantry, and even some artillery. Kor also established workshops for the manufacture of swords, rifles, and even cannons. The minting of coins bearing his name and the references to him in Friday sermons in the emirate’s mosques were further signs of his ambition. He set up a *diwan*, or advisory council, and cultivated the support of the “*ulama*”.

In the 1820s and early 1830s, the emirate of Soran under Muhammad Kor became the leading power in southern and central Kurdistan. During those decades, he forcibly extended his sovereignty to the Hakkari emirate and the Baradost, Surchi, and Mamish tribes, taking over Rawanduz, Zakhō, Dohuk, and Amadiya, the capital of the Bahdinan emirate. Kor deposed the rulers of the old emirate of Bahdinan, which dated back to the fourteenth century. Officially, Bahdinan continued to exist after Muhammed Kor was defeated by the Ottomans in 1834; however, it never fully recovered, and its rulers were nominated by the Ottomans. In 1843, as part of their centralization policy, the Ottomans incorporated Bahdinan into the *vilayet* of Mosul and finally dissolved the emirate.

Only the emirate of Botan remained free of Mohammed Kor’s hegemony. In 1833, following his suppression of the Yazidis and the conquest of Bahdinan, Muhammad Kor attacked Botan and conquered its capital, Jazirat ibn ‘Umar. Bedir Khan’s forces, however, continued to hold a series of fortresses, which Muhammad Kor attempted to capture. The resistance by Bedir Khan and his supporters, along with the revolts that broke out in Amadia and other places, forced Muhammad Kor to break off his offensive and retreat.

In the summer of 1834, Muhammad Kor succeeded in repelling the Ottoman offensive against Soran. The Ottomans were worried by possible cooperation between Kor and the army of the rebellious governor of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, who had conquered Syria. The Ottoman offensive in the summer of 1836 forced Muhammad Kor to retreat and entrench himself in Rawanduz. When it became apparent that the Ottomans were prevailing, his allies, the Kurdish tribes acted in their own interests and refrained from assisting him.

Kor was dealt an additional blow by the *ulama* in the city of Rawanduz. Possibly under Ottoman influence, they objected to the mention of him in Friday sermons instead of the Ottoman sultan and declared their opposition to the conflict with the sultan. The mufti of Rawanduz even issued a *fatwa* prohibiting war against the sultan.¹³ In the light of Iranian unwillingness to assist him or give him shelter, in addition to his isolation against Ottoman strength and its British backing, Muhammad Kor agreed to surrender. He went to Istanbul, apparently on the basis of a promise by the Ottoman commander, Rashid Pasha, that if he surrendered and accepted Ottoman sovereignty, he could continue to govern in Soran.

During the six months that he spent in Istanbul, Mohammed Kor was again promised continued control of the emirate, although with limited autonomy and under Ottoman sovereignty. However, on his way back to Soran via the Black Sea, he disappeared, and it is safe to assume that he was murdered by the Ottomans.

The emirate of Soran and its ambitious ruler fell victim to the changed international conditions, following the involvement of Britain and Russia in the region, the end of belligerence between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, and the accelerated reforms and trends toward centralization within the Ottoman Empire.¹⁴

After the fall of Soran, only Botan remained as the last Kurdish emirate. Its ruler, Muhammad Bedir Khan, took the Ottoman side in the Ottoman–Egyptian conflict and was awarded an Ottoman military rank. Bedir Khan sought to exploit his status and ties with the Ottomans in order to increase his autonomous position within the empire. He enjoyed the broad-based support both of Kurds – tribes and non-tribal peasants alike – and Armenians, from Van in the northwest to Sulaymaniya in the southeast. In view of the weakness of the Hakkari emirate, Bedir Khan extended his patronage to it.

With the end of the Ottoman–Egyptian war and the retreat of Muhammad Ali's forces from Syria in 1840, the tensions experienced by Bedir Khan and the Kurdish tribes with the Ottoman authorities diminished, but Bedir Khan's relations with the Ottomans became entangled in the Muslim–Christian tensions. These had intensified with the growth of missionary activity and the impact of the Ottoman reforms.

Mir (Emir) Nurallah Beg, the ruler of the emirate of Hakkari (southeast of Lake Van), was officially the suzerain of the Nestorian community, but his relationship with the Nestorians deteriorated in the 1830s. During that decade, American and British Protestant missionaries became active in the Hakkari area, seeking to convert Christian Nestorians to Protestantism. The American missionaries exploited the concessions to build churches that had been granted to them under the Tanzimat reforms. This aroused the suspicions of the Kurdish Muslim population in Hakkari, who feared Christian infiltration and the strengthening of the local Christian population.¹⁵

Ottoman officials, annoyed by the Western missionary activities, encouraged Nurallah Beg to impose his authority over the Nestorians. Hakkari was a weak emirate, and Nurallah Beg approached Bedir Khan for assistance in 1839. However, Bedir Khan used the opportunity to strengthen his patronage over Hakkari. The influence of the *alim* (religious scholar) Shaykh Taha of Nehri also appears to have affected Bedir Khan's conduct. The American

missionaries and British travelers who reported on these events emphasized the Islamic religious fanaticism that characterized both Emir Bedir Khan and Shaykh Taha.

The Muslim–Christian tensions and clashes that had rumbled throughout the Ottoman Empire since the 1830s, took the form in Kurdistan of an internal conflict between Kurdish, Nestorian, and Assyrian groups, and between Kurds and Armenians. The tensions between the Kurds (Muslims) and the Nestorian–Assyrian and Armenian Christians at times reflected the socioeconomic rifts between Kurds and Turkmen, who were primarily, but not only, a pastoral–tribal population, as opposed to the mainly sedentary Christians, who were peasants as well as merchants and craftsmen.¹⁶

The slaughter of 7,000 to 10,000 Nestorian–Assyrian Christians in 1843 by Bedir Khan's forces was reported by Western missionaries and travelers in Kurdistan, and sparked strong British protests and pressure to overthrow Bedir Khan. From the Ottoman perspective, Bedir Khan had been useful in weakening Western Christian activity, but at the same time they sought to block him from becoming too strong a local power.

Bedir Khan's coalition with Emir Nur Allah Beg of Hakkari and Khan Muhammad of Mush could not withstand the might of the Ottoman army, which had been modernized and trained by Prussian officers. Moreover, Yezdansher Khan, a relative of Bedir Khan and one of the most prominent commanders in his army, had switched to the Ottoman side. In the face of Ottoman strength, Bedir Khan surrendered in 1847 and was exiled from Kurdistan. He was later pardoned and awarded the title of pasha, and he served the Ottoman state for several more decades. Two hundred members of the Bedir Khan family underwent a process of Ottomanization, like many other members of the Kurdish tribal feudal elite who had emigrated or were exiled to Istanbul, and became integrated into the Ottoman establishment. However, his grandchildren Sureyya (1883–1938), Celadet (1895–1951), and Kamuran (1893–1978) became Kurdish nationalists and were among the most important spokesmen for Kurdish nationalism in the first half of the twentieth century.

The conflict between the emirate of Botan under Bedir Khan and the Ottoman Empire was an expression of Kurdish opposition to the Ottoman trends toward centralization and reform. The elimination of the emirate suited both Ottoman and British interests. The Ottomans aimed to impose a centralized authority over the peripheral, semi-independent forces within the empire and to strengthen Ottoman rule in eastern Anatolia and Kurdistan. Bedir Khan's involvement in Muslim–Christian tensions was useful to Britain, whose interest lay in strengthening the centralist reforms in the Ottoman Empire, and to the Ottomans themselves as a pretext to get rid of Bedir Khan and subdue the last remaining Kurdish emirate.

Implications of the destruction of the Kurdish emirates

The Kurdish emirates and the dynasties of the ruling emirs, which had identified themselves as Kurdish throughout their generations, were an expression of Kurdish ethnic distinctiveness. Nonetheless, the tribal, quasi-feudal nature of the emirates, the constant struggles waged among and within them, and the dominance enjoyed by the Ottoman and Iranian states in the region prevented the emirates from unifying and coalescing into an independent state or political force strong enough to contend with the power of the Ottoman Empire or of Iran, which between them had divided up Kurdistan since the sixteenth century. None of the Kurdish emirates became strong enough to impose effective sovereignty over other emirates and tribes, and none became a focus for the development of a central political power in Kurdistan beyond the tribal/quasi-feudal stage. These sociopolitical and economic

conditions were not conducive to the growth of an affluent urban bourgeoisie that used Kurdish as its high language and whose modernization was in Kurdish.

The implications of the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms in the first half of the nineteenth century, the change in regional international conditions that accompanied the end of the Ottoman–Iranian wars, and the growing influence of Britain and Russia reduced the capacity of the emirs to maneuver *vis-à-vis* the dominant powers. The emirates lost their strategic importance, and, unable to unite, they collapsed separately, one after another, overcome by the superior power of the Ottoman Empire and the Iranian state, whose centralist, modernizing policies precluded the continued existence of semi-independent power centers within their borders. Thus, the demise of the Kurdish emirates in the nineteenth century created a vacuum that paved the way for the strengthening of the tribes and Sufi shaykhs in Kurdistan as the century progressed.

The emirates had constituted a potential nucleus for statehood, and their decline, along with the weakness of the Kurdish language, the geopolitical conditions prevailing in Kurdistan, and the slow development of the modern bourgeoisie, greatly hindered the development of a Kurdish national movement, which did not begin until the late nineteenth century.

The Kurdish emirates thus played a rather contradictory role in the development of conditions for the emergence of the Kurdish national movement. The very existence of emirates that imposed their authority on weaker tribes and later developed into supra-tribal formations constituted a nucleus of Kurdish statehood and created an early Kurdistan political arena. The very existence of emirates that imposed their authority on weaker tribes and later developed into supra-tribal formations constituted a nucleus of Kurdish statehood and created an early Kurdistan political arena. On the other hand, their rivalries, tribalism, and intertribal dissensions were fundamental obstacles to the dawning of a supra-tribal and supra-emirate Kurdish national sentiment, and to the emergence of a central political power willing and able to unify the tribes and emirates.

The merchants and *ulama* that flourished in the small urban centers created buds of development of a bourgeois class. But the tribalism and tribal quasi-feudal structure of the emirates, together with the geopolitical and economic conditions of Kurdistan, and the obstacles to the spread of the high Kurdish language, impeded the growth of the Kurdish bourgeoisie with Kurdish national consciousness. Most of the small number of modernized Kurds in the nineteenth century were incorporated into the Ottoman and the Iranian bureaucracies and the empire's military and political establishment. The slow modernization in Kurdistan took place in the Turkish, Arabic, or Persian languages.

However, despite their demise, the emirates were undoubtedly significant, alongside tribal and religious identities, in perpetuating a sense of Kurdish distinctiveness. This was an important social factor facilitating the political growth of the Kurdish national movement and the dissemination of a Kurdish nationalist consciousness in modern Kurdish society.

Notes

- 1 About the Kurdish emirates and tribes in the Middle Ages, see: Sharaf Khan al-Din Al-Bidlisi, *Sharafnama, Fi ta'rikh al-duwal wa-al-imarāt al-Kurdiyāh*, 2 vols. Translation into Arabic by Muhammad 'Ali 'Uni, edited by Yahia al-Khashab (Damascus: Dar al-zaman liltiba't wa-a-nashr wa-al-tawz'i, 2006); Sharaf al-Din al-Bidlisi, *The Sharafnama, or, The History of the Kurdish Nation*, Book 1. Translation into English and commentaries by M. R. Izady (Costa Mesa, CA, Mazda, 2005); Ibn al-Athir, *Al-Kamil fi-al-Taarikh* (Beirut: Dar Beirut liltaba't wa-al-nashr, 1966), vol. 6, pp. 506–507; vol. 9, pp. 598–599; Ibn al-Athir, *The Chronicle of Ibn al-Athir for the Crusading Period from al-Kamil fi'l-ta'rikh*, Part 1, *The Years 491–541/1097–1146; The Coming of the Franks and*

- Muslim Response*. Translated by D. S. Richards (Aldershot and Burlington, 2006), pp. 240, 307, 367; H. F. Amedroz, “The Marwanid Dynasty at Mayyafariqin in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries AD”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (January 1903), pp. 123–154; Vladimir Minorsky, “Annazids”, *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, New edition (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954–2003), vol. 1, pp. 512–513; and Ibn Khaldun, *Taarikh al-'alamat* (Beirut: Dar al-Katib al-Lubnani, 1958), vol. 4, pp. 674–686, 1093. For basic research on the Shadadids, see: V. Minorsky, *Studies in Caucasian History* (London: Taylor's Foreign Press, 1953). Minorsky strongly maintained that the Shadadiya was a Kurdish dynasty.
- 2 John E. Woods, *The Aqqoyunlu: Clan, Confederation, Empire* (Minneapolis, MN and Chicago, IL: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976).
 - 3 Al-Bidlisi, *Sharafnama, Fi ta'rikh al-duwal*; and Bitlisi, *The Sharafnama*, pp. 20, 47.
 - 4 I. Metin Kunt, *Sultan's Servants: The Transformation of Ottoman Provincial Government, 1550–1650* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 108.
 - 5 On the ancient origin of the al-Ruzkia (Rojiki/Rozhiki/Roshaki) tribe and the active role of the emirs of Bidlis in the Ottoman–Iranian struggle, see Bitlisi, *The Sharafnama*, pp. 339–442; Hakan Ozoglu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State: Evolving Identities, Competing Loyalties, and Shifting Boundaries* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004).
 - 6 *Evliya Celebi in Bitlis*. Translated and edited by Robert Dankoff (Leiden and New York: E. J. Brill, 1990), pp. 283–295. This description of 'Abd al-Khan's library is based exclusively on Chelebi's report. It was apparently the only source that described it. Von Hammer, an Austrian historian, diplomat, and scholar of Middle Eastern studies, wrote at the beginning of the nineteenth century a detailed history of the Ottoman Empire. He relied on Chelebi for his account of the conquest of the emirate. In his brief description of the palace treasures, based on Chelebi, he saw fit to point out only the books in Persian. M. De Hammer, *Histoire de L'Empire Ottoman*, vol. 3, Book III (Paris: Imprimerie de Bethune et Plon, 1844), pp. 37–38.
 - 7 Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, *Les Six voyages en turquie, en perse, et aux indes (Six Voyages to Turkey, Persia, and India)*, vol. 2 (Paris: François Maspero, 1981).
 - 8 Sadiq al-Damaluji, *Imarat Bahdinan al-Kurdiyya au imarat al-'Amadiya* (Irbil: wizarat al-tarbiyya, 1999) (Arabic) (*The Kurdish emirate of Bahdinan or emirate al-'Amadiya*); and Amir Hassanpour, “Bahdinan”, *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 33, p. 485. Available online, accessed 23 August 2011: www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bahdinan-kurdish-region-river-dialect-group-and-emirate.
 - 9 E. I. Vasileva, *Yugo-Vostochniy Kurdistan b 17-nachale 19 veki – ocharki istorii emiratorv Ardalan i Baban (Southeastern Kurdistan from the Seventeenth Century to the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century: Chapters in the History of the Emirates of Ardalan and Baban)* (Moscow: Academia Nauk USSR, Nauka, 1991) (In Russian).
The account of the agent resident of the East India Company in *Basra in the Beginnings of the Nineteenth Century*: C. R. Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. I (London: James Duncan, 1836; Reprinted: Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers, 1972). D. Jalil, *Kurdi Osmanskoy Imperii w Pervoy Polovine 19 Beka (The Kurds of the Ottoman Empire in the First Half of the 19th Century – Russian)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972).
 - 10 See also *Chronicles of the Principality of Ardalan*, written in the nineteenth century by Emir Husraw ibn Muhammad Bani Ardalan, *Chronika – Istoria Kniazestwa Bani Ardalan*. Translation from Persian to Russian, editing and introduction by E. I. Vasileva (Moscow, 1984).
 - 11 Claudius J. Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, pp. 96–97; S. H. Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), pp. 232–243; and Tom Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society in Early Modern Iraq: Mamluk Pashas, Tribal Shaykhs and Local Rule between 1802–1831* (The Hague and Boston, MA: M. Nijhoff, 1982), p. 97.
 - 12 H. C. Rawlinson, “Notes of a Journey from Tibriz, through Persian Kurdistan, to the Ruins of Takhti-Soleiman, and from Thence by Zenjan and Tarom to Gilan in October and November, 1838; with a Memoir on the Site of Atropatenian Ecbatana”, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 10 (1840), p. 25.
 - 13 For a detailed description and discussion of the fall of Muhammad Kor, see Jalil, *Kurdi Osmanskoi Imperii*, pp. 100–102; Richard Wood, *The Early Correspondence of Richard Wood, 1831–1841*. Edited by A. B. Cunningham (London: Royal Historical Society, 1966), p. 97. See also an account by a British traveler: W. F. Ainsworth, *Travels and Researches in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia* (London: John Parker, 1842), vol. 1, pp. 323.

- 14 An important source about the relations between the Kurds and Russia in the period of the demise of the Kurdish emirates is P. I. Averianov, *Kurdi b voynakh Rossii c Persiei i Turkei w techeniye 19 stoletia* (*The Kurds in the Russian Wars with Persia and Turkey in the Nineteenth Century*) (Tiflis (Tbilisi): Press of the General Command of the Caucasus Military Region, 1900) (In Russian).
- 15 The missionary activity, the Nestorian sect, and the events set forth here are discussed in a series of primary sources and studies that reflect the viewpoints of missionaries and local Christians. See Kamal Salibi and Yusuf K. Houry, eds., *The Missionary Herald, Reports from Northern Iraq 1833–1847*. A more balanced account may be found in the books by the British traveler and archaeologist Sir Austen Henry Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon: With Travels in Armenia and Kurdistan, and the Desert*; and Sir Austen Henry Layard, *Popular Account of Discoveries at Nineveh* (London: John Murray, 1851), pp. 122–170. See also John Joseph, *The Nestorians and Their Neighbors* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961); and Gordon Taylor, *Fever and Thirst: Dr. Grant and the Christian Tribes of Kurdistan* (Chicago, IL: Academy Chicago Publishers, 2005).
- 16 For a detailed discussion of the relations between Bedir Khan and the Nestorians, see Wadie Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement: Its Origins and Development* (New York, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), pp. 62–74.