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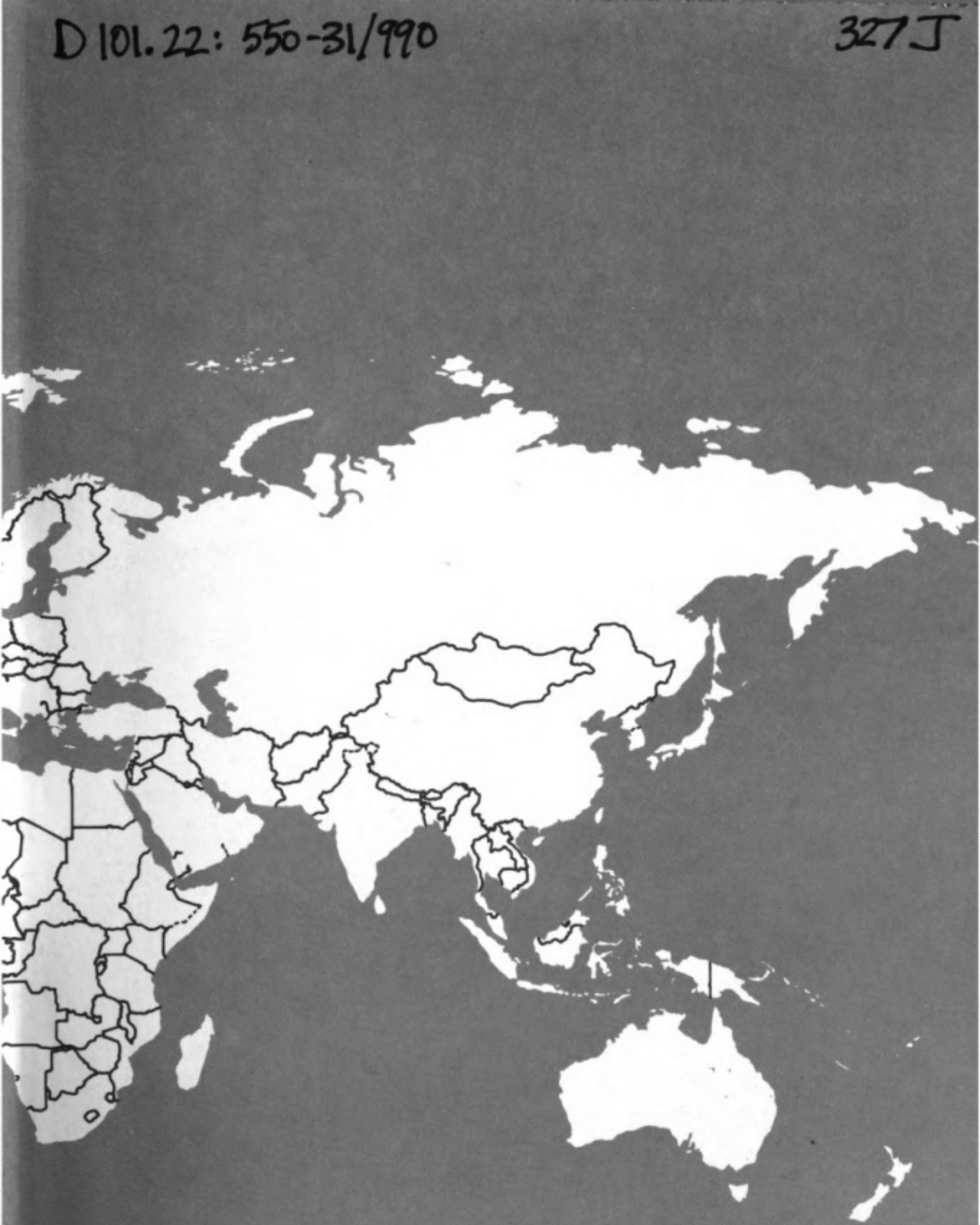

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Research Completed
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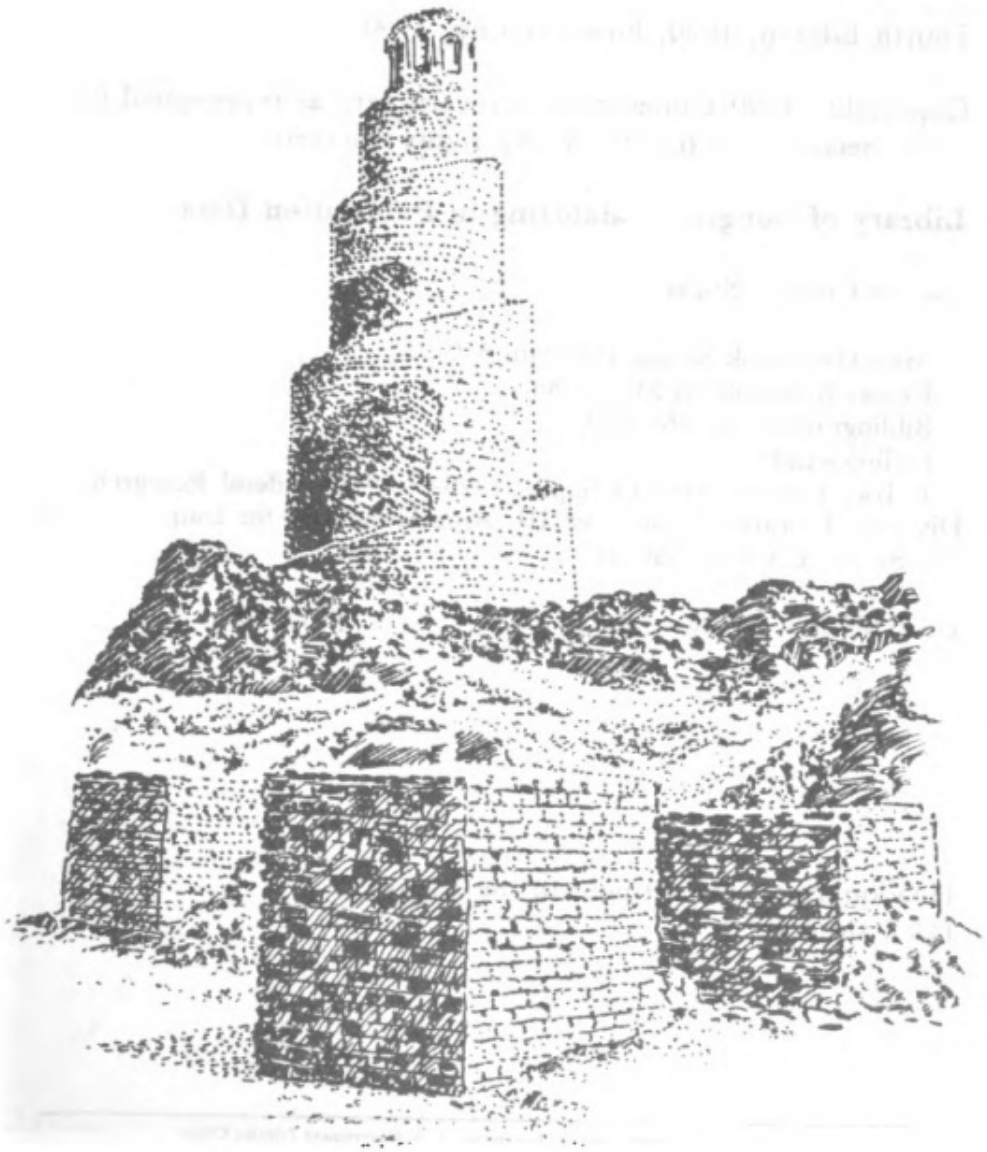

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On the cover: Samarra Mosque, built approximately A.D. 836 by the Abbasid caliph Al Muhtasim, who made Samarra his capital

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# Foreword

This volume is one in a continuing series of books now being prepared by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress under the Country Studies—Area Handbook Program. The last page of this book lists the other published studies.

Most books in the series deal with a particular foreign country, describing and analyzing its political, economic, social, and national security systems and institutions, and examining the interrelationships of those systems and the ways they are shaped by cultural factors. Each study is written by a multidisciplinary team of social scientists. The authors seek to provide a basic understanding of the observed society, striving for a dynamic rather than a static portrayal. Particular attention is devoted to the people who make up the society, their origins, dominant beliefs and values, their common interests and the issues on which they are divided, the nature and extent of their involvement with national institutions, and their attitudes toward each other and toward their social system and political order.

The books represent the analysis of the authors and should not be construed as an expression of an official United States government position, policy, or decision. The authors have sought to adhere to accepted standards of scholarly objectivity. Corrections, additions, and suggestions for changes from readers will be welcomed for use in future editions.

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# Preface

Like its predecessor, this study is an attempt to treat in a concise and objective manner the dominant social, political, economic, and military aspects of contemporary Iraqi society. Sources of information included scholarly journals and monographs, official reports of governments and international organizations, newspapers, and numerous periodicals. Unfortunately there was a dearth of information from official Iraqi sources, as well as a lack of sociological data resulting from field work by scholars in Iraq in the 1980s. Chapter bibliographies appear at the end of the book; brief comments on some of the more valuable sources suggested as possible further reading appear at the end of each chapter. Measurements are given in the metric system; a conversion table is provided to assist those readers who are unfamiliar with metric measurements (see table 1, Appendix). A glossary is also included.

The transliteration of Arabic words and phrases follows a modified version of the system adopted by the United States Board on Geographic Names and the Permanent Committee on Geographic Names for British Official Use, known as the BGN/PCGN system. The modification is a significant one, however, in that diacritical markings and hyphens have been omitted. Moreover, some geographical locations, such as the cities of Babylon, Kirkuk, Mosul, and Nineveh, are so well known by these conventional names that their formal names—Babil, Karkuk, Al Mawsil, and Ninawa, respectively, are not used.



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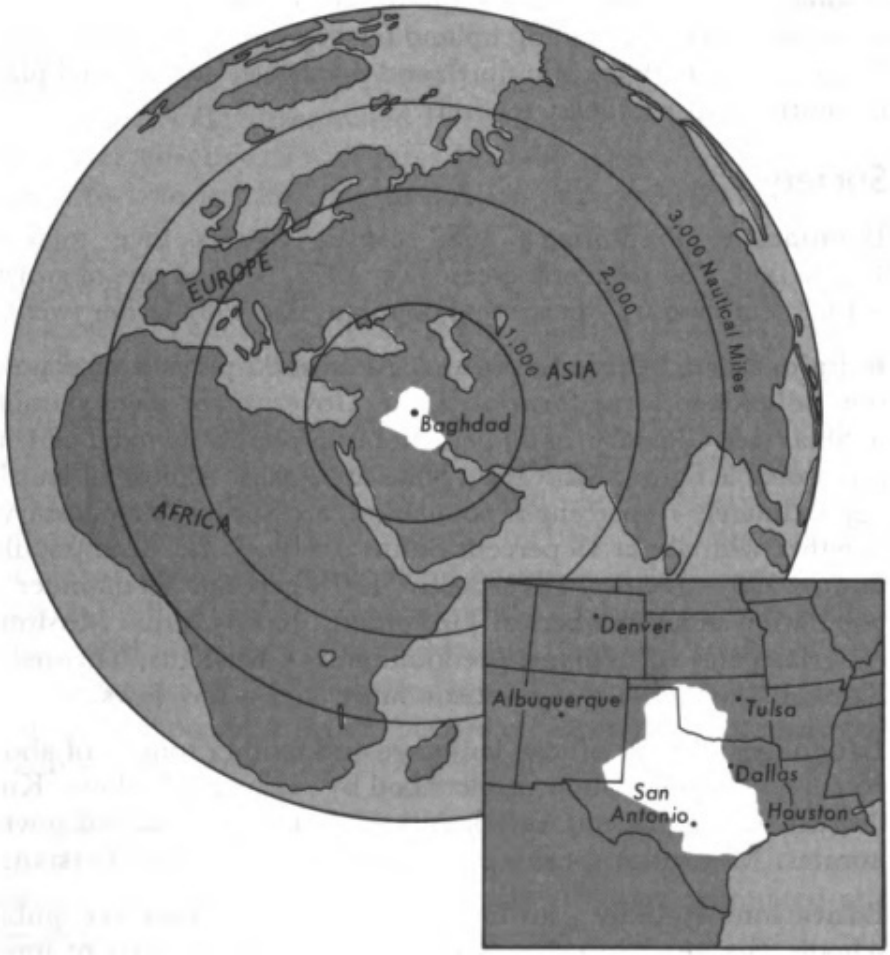


## Country

**Formal Name:** Republic of Iraq.

**Short Form:** Iraq.

**Term for Citizens:** Iraqis.

**Capital:** Baghdad.

## Geography

**Size:** Area of Iraq variously cited as between 433,970 (excluding Iraqi half of 3,520 square-kilometer Iraq-Saudi Arabia



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Neutral Zone shared with Saudi Arabia), and 437,393 square kilometers.

**Topography:** Country divided into four major regions: desert in west and southwest; rolling upland between upper Euphrates and Tigris rivers; highlands in north and northeast; and alluvial plain in central and southeast sections.

## Society

**Population:** Preliminary 1987 census figures give total of 16,278,000, a 35 percent increase over 1977. Annual rate of growth 3.1 percent; about 57 percent of population in 1987 under twenty.

**Religious and Ethnic Divisions:** At least 95 percent of population adheres to some form of Islam. Government gives number of Shias (see Glossary) as 55 percent but probably 60 to 65 percent is reasonable figure. Most Iraqi Shias are Arabs. Almost all Kurds, approximately 19 percent of population, are Sunnis (see Glossary), together with about 13 percent Sunni Arabs. Total Arab population in 1987 given by government as 76 percent. Remainder of population small numbers of Turkomans, mostly Sunni Muslims; Assyrians and Armenians, predominantly Christians; Yazidis, of Kurdish stock with a syncretistic faith; and a few Jews.

**Languages:** Arabic official language and mother tongue of about 76 percent of population; understood by majority of others. Kurdish official language in As Sulaymaniyah, Dahuk, and Irbil governorates. Minorities speaking Turkic, Armenian, and Persian.

**Education:** Rapidly growing enrollment in tuition-free public schools. Six years of primary (elementary), three years of intermediate secondary, and three years of intermediate preparatory education. Six major universities, forty-four teacher training schools and institutes, and three colleges and technical institutes, all government owned and operated. Dramatic increases since 1977 in numbers of students in technical fields (300 percent rise) and numbers of female primary students (45 percent rise). Literacy variously estimated at about 40 percent by foreign observers and 70 percent by government. Academic year 1985–86: number of students in primary schools 2,812,516; secondary schools (general) 1,031,560; vocational schools 120,090; teacher training schools and institutions 34,187; universities, colleges, and technical institutes 53,037.

**Health:** High incidence of trachoma, influenza, measles, whooping cough, and tuberculosis. Considerable progress has been made in control of malaria. Continuing shortage of modern trained



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medical and paramedical personnel, especially in rural areas and probably in northern Kurdish areas.

## Economy

**Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** estimated at US$35 billion in 1986; in 1987 GDP estimated to have a 1.7 percent real growth rate, after negative growth rates 1981–86. Following outbreak of war with Iran in 1980, oil production decreased sharply.

**Currency:** 1,000 fils = 20 dirhams = 1 Iraqi dinar (ID). (For value of Iraqi dinar—see Glossary). Data on financial status of Iraq are meager because Central Bank of Iraq, which is main source of official statistics, has not released figures since 1977.

**Oil Industry:** Contribution to GDP in 1986 variously estimated, but probably about 33.5 percent. Production of crude oil averaged nearly 2.1 million barrels per day (bpd—see Glossary) in 1987; estimated at nearly 2.5 million bpd in 1988; oil exports in 1987 estimated at 1.8 million bpd; oil revenues in 1987 estimated at US$11.3 billion. Oil reserves in late 1987 calculated at 100 billion barrels definite and 40 billion additional barrels probable. Natural gas production in 1987 estimated at 7 million cubic meters; an estimated 5 million cubic meters burned off and remainder marketed. Natural gas reserves of nearly 850 billion cubic meters.

**Manufacturing and Services:** Contribution of services (including construction, estimated at 12 percent; transportation and communications, estimated at 4.5 percent; utilities, estimated at 2 percent) to GDP in 1986 variously estimated at 52 percent; mining and manufacturing contributed about 7 percent. Government figures put value of industrial output in 1984 at almost ID2 billion, up from about ID300 million in 1968. Principal industries nonmetallic minerals, textiles, food processing, light manufacturing, with combination of government-owned and government- and private-owned plants. Construction is estimated to employ about 20 percent of civilian and military labor force (because much construction is defense related, figures are lacking). Government figures showed 1984 industrial labor force at 170,000, with 80 percent of workers in state factories, 13 percent in private sector, and 7 percent in mixed sector.

**Agriculture:** Accounted for about 7.5 percent of GDP in 1986; employed about 33 percent of the labor force in 1987. Cereal production increased almost 80 percent between 1975 and 1985;



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wheat and barley main crops. Date production dropped sharply because of war damage to date palms.

**Exports:** Almost US$12 billion (including crude oil) in 1987. Crude oil, refined petroleum products, natural gas, chemical fertilizers, and dates were major commodities.

**Imports:** About US$10 billion in 1987. Government import statistics in 1984 showed 34.4 percent capital goods, 30 percent raw materials, 22.4 percent foodstuffs, and 12.5 percent consumer goods.

**Major Trade Areas:** Exports (in order of magnitude) in 1986 mainly to Brazil, Spain, and Japan. Imports (in order of magnitude) in 1986 mainly from Japan, Turkey, Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), Italy, and Britain.

## Transportation

**Roads:** Paved road network almost doubled between 1979 and 1985, to 22,397 kilometers. Also 7,800 kilometers of unpaved secondary and feeder roads. In 1987 1,000-kilometer-long segment of international express highway from Mediterranean to Persian Gulf under construction.

**Railroads:** By 1985 2,029 kilometers of railroads, of which 1,496 were standard gauge, rest meter gauge.

**Ports:** Basra was main port, together with newer port at Umm Qasr. Oil terminals at Mina al Bakr, Khawr al Amayah, and Al Faw, latter recaptured from Iran in 1988, and industrial port at Khawr az Zubayr. War with Iraq damaged port facilities and prevented use of most ports.

**Pipelines:** Local lines to Persian Gulf and new spur line from Basra area to Saudi Arabia's Petroline (running from Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia to Red Sea port of Yanbu), with 500,000 bpd capacity, completed in 1985 because Syria cut off use of pipelines through Syria following outbreak of Iran-Iraq War. Further parallel pipeline to Saudi Arabia with 400,000 bpd capacity under construction in 1988. Pipeline from Baiji to Baghdad and from Baghdad to Khanaqin; pipeline also between Baiji and Turkish Mediterranean port of Dortyol opened in 1977 with 800,000 to 900,000 bpd capacity, expanded by 500,000 bpd capacity in 1987. Small pipelines distributed refined products to major consuming areas.



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**Airports:** International airports at Baghdad and Basra, with new airport under construction at Baghdad. Also ninety-five airfields, sixty-one with permanent-surface runways.

## Government and Politics

**Government:** In accordance with Provisional Constitution of July 16, 1970, executive and legislative powers exercised by Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), chairman of which is also president of country. First parliamentary elections held in June 1980, resulting in First National Assembly. Second National Assembly elected in October 1984; National Assembly has generally met twice annually as provided in Constitution and exercises legislative functions together with RCC, which has ultimate decision-making authority.

**Politics:** Political system was under firm control of Baath (Arab Socialist Resurrection) Party. Party's high command, called Regional Command, was headed in 1988 by President Saddam Husayn, who held title of secretary general of the Regional Command and was also chairman of the RCC; vice chairman of the RCC and presumably successor to Husayn was Izzat Ibrahim; vice president was Taha Muhy ad Din Maruf. Government and political leadership interchangeable because members of Regional Command also members of RCC. Political activities, where they existed, carried out within framework of Progressive National Front (PNF), of which Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was a participant. Some Kurdish and independent progressive groups also included in PNF. Politics of opposition outside PNF banned for all practical purposes.

**Administrative Divisions:** In 1988 eighteen governorates or provinces, each divided into districts and subdistricts. Limited self-rule was granted to Kurds in three northern governorates officially known as Autonomous Region (see Glossary) and popularly known as Kurdistan (land of the Kurds).

**Judicial System:** Administratively under jurisdiction of Ministry of Justice but theoretically independent under the Constitution. All judges appointed by president. Court of Cassation, highest court of land; personal status disputes handled by religious community courts (Islamic law—or sharia—or other). Country divided into five appellate districts.

**International Affairs:** Major issue was war with Iran since 1980 and attempts at a peace settlement, which resulted in cease-fire in August 1988. In 1980s Iraq moved from close friendship with Soviet



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Union to rapprochement with United States (diplomatic relations reestablished in 1984), cordial relations with Western Europe, especially France, and good relations with Persian Gulf states and Jordan. Iraqi relations with Syria, which supported Iran in the war, were cool.

## National Security

**Armed Forces (1987):** Army—approximately 1 million (including about 480,000 active reserves); navy—about 5,000; air force—40,000 (including 10,000 in Air Defense Command). Compulsory two-year conscription for males was extended during war.

**Combat Units and Major Equipment (1987)** (Equipment estimates tentative because of wartime losses): Army—seven corps headquarters, five armored divisions (each with one armored brigade and one mechanized brigade), three mechanized divisions (each with one armored brigade and two or more mechanized brigades), thirty infantry divisions (including army, volunteer, and reserve brigades), one Presidential Guard Force (composed of three armored brigades, one infantry brigade, and one commando brigade), six Special Forces brigades; about 4,600 tanks, including advanced versions of T-72, about 4,000 armored vehicles, more than 3,000 towed and self-propelled artillery pieces; Air Defense Command—about 4,000 self-propelled antiaircraft guns, more than 300 SAMs; Army Air Corps—about 270 armed helicopters. Navy—one frigate, eight OSA-class patrol boats with Styx SSMs, other small patrol, minesweeping, and supply ships; (being held in Italy under embargo in 1988) four Lupo-class frigates, with Otomat-2 SSMs and Albatros/Aspide SAMs, six Assad-class corvettes with Otomat-2 SSMs. Air Force—about 500 combat aircraft in 2 bomber squadrons, 11 fighter-ground attack squadrons, 5 interceptor squadrons, 1 counterinsurgency squadron, and 2 transport squadrons.

**Military Budget:** Fiscal year (FY) 1986 estimated at US$11.58 billion.

**Police, Paramilitary, and State Security Organizations (1987):** People's Army—estimated 650,000 (constituted majority of paramilitary reserves); Security Forces—4,800 estimate; Frontier Guard, Futuwah (paramilitary youth organization), Department of General Intelligence, regular civil police force—sizes unknown.



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*Figure 1. Administrative Divisions of Iraq, 1988*



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# Introduction

IN THE LATE 1980s, Iraq became a central actor in Middle Eastern affairs and a force to reckon with in the wider international community. Iraq's growing role resulted from the way in which it was adapting the principles of Baath (Arab Socialist Resurrection) Party socialism to meet the country's needs and from its somewhat unexpected success in compelling Iran in August 1988 to request a cease-fire in the eight-year-old Iran-Iraq War.

Iraq's reassertion in the 1980s of its role in the region and in the world community evoked its ancient history. At one time Mesopotamia ("the land between the rivers"), which encompassed much of present-day Iraq, formed the center not only of the Middle East but also of the civilized world. The people of the Tigris and Euphrates basin, the ancient Sumerians, using the fertile land and the abundant water supply of the area, developed sophisticated irrigation systems and created what was probably the first cereal agriculture as well as the earliest writing, cuneiform. Their successors, the Akkadians, devised the most complete legal system of the period, the Code of Hammurabi. Located at a crossroads in the heart of the ancient Middle East, Mesopotamia was a plum sought by numerous foreign conquerors. Among them were the warlike Assyrians, from the tenth century through the seventh century B.C., and the Chaldeans, who in the sixth century B.C. created the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

In 539 B.C., Semitic rule of the area ended with the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Great. The successors of Cyrus paid little attention to Mesopotamia, with the result that the infrastructure was allowed to fall into disrepair. Not until the Arab conquest and the coming of Islam did Mesopotamia begin to regain its glory, particularly when Baghdad was the seat of the Abbasid caliphate between 750 and 1258.

Iraq experienced various other foreign rulers, including the Mongols, the Ottoman Turks, and the British under a mandate established after World War I. The British placed Faisal, a Hashimite claiming descent from the Prophet Muhammad, on the throne in 1921. Popular discontent with the monarchy, which was regarded as a Western imposition, led in 1958 to a military revolution that overthrew the king.

Ultimately, the military regime installed a government ruled by the Baath's Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) and created



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the Provisional Constitution of July 16, 1970, that institutionalized the RCC's role. Within the Baath, power lay primarily in the hands of Baathists from the town of Tikrit, the birthplace of Saddam Husayn, who played an increasingly prominent role in the government in the 1970s. (Tikrit was also the hometown of his predecessor, Ahmad Hasan al Bakr, who formally resigned the leadership in 1979).

The Baathist government in 1970 granted the Kurdish minority a degree of autonomy, but not the complete self-rule the Kurds desired, in the predominantly Kurdish regions of Dahuk, Irbil, and As Sulaymaniyah (see fig. 1). In the early 1970s, Iraqi casualties from the renewed warfare with the Kurds were such as to induce Saddam Husayn to sign an agreement with the shah of Iran in Algiers in March 1975 recognizing the thalweg, or the midpoint of the Shatt al Arab, as the boundary between the two countries. The agreement ended the shah's aid to the Kurds, thus eventually quelling the rebellion.

Saddam Husayn then turned his attention to domestic matters, particularly to the economy and to an industrial modernization program. He had notable success in distributing land, in improving the standard of living, and in increasing health and educational opportunities. Rural society was transformed as a result of large rural-to-urban migration and the decline of rural handicraft industries. Urban society witnessed the rise, particularly in the late 1970s and the 1980s, of a class of Baathist technocrats. In addition, the Shia (see Glossary) Muslims, who, although they constituted a majority, had been largely unrepresented in significant areas of Iraqi society, in which the minority Sunni (see Glossary) Muslims were the governing element, were integrated to a considerable degree into the government, into business, and into the professions.

Buoyed by domestic success, Saddam Husayn shifted his concentration to foreign affairs. Beginning in the late 1970s, Iraq sought to assume a more prominent regional role and to replace Egypt, which had been discredited from its position of Arab leadership because of signing the Camp David Accords in 1978. Iraq, therefore, gradually modified its somewhat hostile stance toward Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states, seeking to win their support. Relations with the Soviet Union, Iraq's major source of weapons, cooled, however, following the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan that began in December 1979. In contrast, Iraqi ties with France improved considerably, and France became Iraq's second most important arms supplier.

The overthrow of the monarchy in Iran and the coming to power in 1979 of Ayatollah Sayyid Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini—whom



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Saddam Husayn had expelled from Iraq in 1978, reportedly at the shah's request—revived the historic hostility between the two countries. Saddam Husayn feared the impact on Iraqi Shias of Khomeini's Islamic fundamentalism and resented Iran's attempted hegemony in the Persian Gulf region. Believing Iran's military forces to be unprepared as a result of the revolutionary purges, in September 1980, following a number of border skirmishes, Iraq invaded Iranian territory. Thus began a bitter, costly, eight-year-long war in which the strength and the revolutionary zeal of Iran were clearly demonstrated.

From late 1980 to 1988, the war took precedence over other matters. The Baath high command succeeded in controlling Iraq's military institution to a degree that surprised foreign observers. One of the major instruments for accomplishing this control was the People's Army, which served as the Baath Party's militia.

The Baath could do little, however, to counter Iran's superiority in manpower and matériel. At times when Iraq considered its situation particularly desperate—for example, when Iranian forces appeared to be gaining control of substantial areas of Iraqi territory, such as Al Faw Peninsula in the south and the northern mountainous Kurdish area—Iraq unleashed a barrage of missiles against Iranian cities. Further, reliable reports indicated that Iraq used chemical warfare against the enemy, possibly in the hope of bringing Iran to the negotiating table.

To prevent domestic unrest as a result of the war, Saddam Husayn adopted a "guns and butter" economic policy, bringing in foreign laborers to replace those called to military service and striving to keep casualties low. After drawing down its own reserves, Iraq needed the financial support of its Gulf neighbors. Of the latter, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates all provided Iraq with loans to help it prosecute the war. Relations with Egypt also improved significantly after the war's outbreak. Meanwhile Iraqi hostility toward Syria, its fellow Baathist government but traditional rival, increased as a result of Syria's strong support of Iran.

As part of his wartime economic policies, Saddam Husayn in 1987 returned agricultural collectives to the private sector, and in 1988 he took measures to privatize more than forty state-run factories because of the inefficiency and unprofitability of agriculture and industry when under state control. These privatizing steps reflected a desire for greater economic efficiency rather than a change in economic ideology. Government controls on the economy were decreased by cutting subsidies, by allowing partial foreign



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ownership, and by reducing bureaucratic regulation of enterprises, thus reducing labor costs.

Despite the introduction of more liberal economic policies in Iraq in the late 1980s, few indications suggested that the political system was becoming less rigid to any significant degree. Ultimate decisions in both the economic and the political realms apparently remained in the hands of Saddam Husayn rather than in those of the constitutionally designated RCC. According to a statement by Saddam Husayn to the Permanent Bureau of the Arab Jurists' Federation in Baghdad in November 1988, the Baath two years previously had approved steps toward democratization, but these had been delayed by the Iran-Iraq War. The measures included having a minimum of two candidates for each elective post, allowing non-Baathists to run for political office, and permitting the establishment of other political parties. In January 1989, following an RCC meeting chaired by Saddam Husayn, the formation of a special committee to draft a new constitution was reported; according to unconfirmed reports in November, the new constitution will abolish the RCC. Elections for the National Assembly were also announced, and this body was authorized to investigate government ministries and departments. The elections took place in early April and featured almost 1,000 candidates (among them 62 women, although none was elected) for the 250 seats; only 160 Baath Party members were elected. A number of Baathist candidates also were defeated in the September Kurdish regional assembly elections. The results of both elections indicated a gradual downgrading of the prominence of the Baath. The RCC, moreover, directed the minister of information to permit the public to voice complaints about government programs in the government-controlled press; and government officials were ordered to reply to such complaints. The role of Saddam Husayn's family in government affairs was somewhat muted as well. Following the helicopter crash in a sandstorm on May 5 that killed Saddam Husayn's brother-in-law and cousin, Minister of Defense Adnan Khayr Allah Talfah, a technocrat who did not come from Tikrit, replaced Talfah.

The internal security apparatus controlled by the Baath Party continued to keep a particularly close check on potential dissidents: these included Kurds, communists, and members of Shia revival movements. These movements, such as Ad Dawah al Islamiyah (the Islamic Call), commonly referred to as Ad Dawah, sought to propagate fundamentalist Islamic principles and were out of sympathy with Baath socialism. Furthermore, in 1988 in the final stages of the war, both before and after the cease-fire, Iraq was thought to have engaged in chemical warfare against the Kurds. Conceivably



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the regime saw an opportunity to instill such fear in the Kurds, a significant percentage of whom had cooperated with Iran during the war, that their dissidence would be discouraged. In the spring of 1989 the government announced it would depopulate a border strip thirty kilometers wide along the frontier with Turkey and Iran on the northeast, moving all inhabitants, mainly Kurds, from the area; it began this process in May.

In December 1988, reports surfaced of dissidence within the army, in which Saddam Husayn lacked a power base. The projected annual Army Day celebrations on January 6, 1989, were cancelled and allegedly a number of senior army officers and some civilian Baathists were executed. In February the regime announced that all units of the People's Army would be withdrawn from the front by late March; in July a further announcement disbanded the three-division strong 1st Special Army Corps, formed in June 1986, but apparently some time would elapse before soldiers actually returned to civilian status. Such measures were probably occasioned by the continued success of the cease-fire, initiated in August 1988. The cease-fire held, although a number of border incidents occurred, of which the most serious was the Iranian flooding of a sixty-four-kilometer frontier area northeast of Basra. Informed observers considered the flooding designed to put pressure on Iraq to return a strip of approximately 1,000 square kilometers of Iranian territory on the steppe beyond Baqubah. On October 27, Iran stopped flooding the area, probably as a prelude to a new United Nations (UN) and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) mediation effort.

The peace talks under UN sponsorship, despite a score of face-to-face meetings, had made little progress as of mid-December. A few exchanges of prisoners of war (POWs), largely of those that were ill or wounded, had taken place, but both Iraq and Iran still held large numbers of each other's prisoners. Saddam Husayn, who had agreed on October 5, 1988, to the ICRC plan for prisoner repatriation, in March 1989 proposed in a letter to UN Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuellar that the UN guarantee the return of the freed POWs to civilian life. Saddam Husayn made his proposal in the hope that this guarantee would reassure Iran, which held approximately 70,000 Iraqi POWs—whereas Iraq held about half that number of Iranians—that the balance of power would not be disturbed. Iran has refused to exchange prisoners or to implement any of the ten points of UN Security Council Resolution 598 dealing with the dispute until Iraq returns all Iranian territory.

A major source of disagreement in the peace negotiations was Iraq's insistence on sovereignty over the Shatt al Arab, as opposed



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to the divided ownership created under the 1975 Algiers Agreement. Failing such a settlement, Iraq threatened to divert the waters of the Shatt al Arab above Basra so that it would rejoin the Gulf at Umm Qasr, a port that Iraq had announced it would deepen and widen. Iraq was eager to have Iran allow the UN to begin clearing sunken ships from the Shatt al Arab so as to permit Iraqi access to the sea.

Iraq, meanwhile, had launched a diplomatic campaign to improve its relations with other countries of the region, particularly with Jordan and Egypt. In the last half of 1988, beginning even before he accepted the cease-fire, Saddam Husayn met five times with King Hussein and three times with Egyptian president Husni Mubarak. These high-level meetings included symbolic elements, such as Saddam Husayn's accompanying Hussein on a visit in Baghdad to the graves of Faisal and Ghazi, the Hashimite kings of Iraq, an indication of a considerably more moderate Iraqi Baathist attitude toward monarchy than had been evident in the past. The meetings were designed to bolster political and economic support for Iraq (in December 1988 Iraq concluded a US$800 million trade agreement with Jordan for 1989), as well as to coordinate Arab policy toward the Palestine Liberation Organization and toward Israel, a revision of Iraq's previous rejection of any Arab-Israeli settlement. In addition, Saddam Husayn sought to reassure Saudi Arabia, from which Iraq had received substantial financial support during the Iran-Iraq War, that Iraq had no intention of dominating or of overthrowing the Persian Gulf monarchies.

In its relations with the Western world, Iraq also exhibited greater moderation than it had in the 1970s or early 1980s. For example, the United States Department of State indicated in late March 1989 that Iraq had agreed to pay US$27.3 million compensation to relatives of the thirty-seven American naval personnel killed in the 1987 Iraqi attack on the USS *Stark*. During the war with Iran, Iraq had borrowed extensively from France, Britain, Italy, and to a lesser extent from the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) and Japan. These countries would doubtless play significant roles in Iraq's reconstruction and rearmament; in view of their commercial interest, Iraq has succeeded in having its loan repayments rescheduled. For example, Iraq signed an agreement with France in September 1989 allowing it to repay its indebtedness, due in 1989, over a six- to nine-year period, and completing arrangements for Iraq's purchase of fifty Mirage 2000s.

Since the cease-fire in August 1988, Iraq has undertaken an extensive rearmament program involving foreign arms purchases and the intensified development of its domestic arms industry to generate



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export income as well as to meet domestic needs. The First Baghdad International Exhibition for Military Production took place from April 28 to May 2, 1989, featuring numerous types of Iraqi arms. Among weapons Iraq produced in 1989 were a T-74 tank, called the Lion of Baghdad, and an Iraqi version of the airborne early warning and control (AWACS) aircraft, developed from the Soviet Ilyushin Il-76. Iraq named the plane the Adnan-1 after late Minister of Defense Adnan Khayr Allah Talfah. A military development that aroused considerable concern in Israel was Iraq's launching from its Al Anbar space research center in early December of a forty-eight-ton, three-stage rocket capable of putting a satellite into space orbit. The minister of industry and military industrialization also announced that Iraq had developed two 2,000-kilometer range surface-to-surface missiles.

Apart from the need to replace lost armaments, the war imposed a heavy reconstruction burden on Iraq. To rebuild the infrastructure and to prevent disaffection among the population of the south who had suffered particularly, the government gave a high priority to the rebuilding of Basra. On June 25, Iraq published the completion of the basic reconstruction of Basra at a cost of approximately US$6 billion, stating that work was then beginning on rebuilding Al Faw, which prior to wartime evacuation had about 50,000 inhabitants. The government has also announced programs to create heavy industry, such as new iron and steel and aluminum works, to build another petrochemical complex, to upgrade fertilizer plants, and to reconstruct the offshore oil export terminals at Khawr al Amayah and Mina al Bakr. In June 1989 Iraq reported its readiness to accommodate very large crude oil carriers at a new terminal at Mina al Bakr.

Iraq has taken other economic measures to stimulate oil production and to control inflation. Since the cease-fire, Iraq has pumped nearly its full OPEC quota of 2.8 billion barrels of oil per day. In September 1989, Iraq completed its second crude oil pipeline across Saudi Arabia, with a capacity of 1,650,000 barrels per day, terminating at the Red Sea just south of the Saudi port of Yanbu. These major economic ventures have led to inflation. To counter price rises, the regime has set weekly prices on fruit and vegetables and in late June instituted a price freeze for one year on state-produced goods and services. Concurrently it authorized an additional monthly salary of 25 Iraqi dinars (approximately US$80) for all civil servants and members of the police and military forces.

The negative economic consequences of the war extended beyond the reconstruction of cities and war-damaged infrastructure to include postponed development projects. For example, the massive



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rural-to-urban migration, particularly in southern Iraq, caused by the war had intensified a process begun before the war and had created an urgent need for housing, educational, and health facilities in urban areas. The war also had serious effects on Iraqi society, exacerbating the strained relations of Iraqi Arabs with the leading minority, the Kurds. The war, however, exerted a positive influence by promoting a greater sense of national unity, by diminishing differences between Shias and Sunnis, and by improving the role of women. The aftermath of the war permitted modification of traditional Baathist socialist doctrines so as to encourage greater privatization of the economy, although the degree to which the government would maintain its reduced interference in the economic sphere remained to be seen.

The end of the war left a number of unknown factors facing the Iraqi economy and society. One was the size of the postwar world petroleum demand and whether Iraq could sell its potential increased output on the international market. An important unanswered social question was whether women who had found employment during the war would return to domestic pursuits and help increase the birthrate as the government hoped. Although women might remain in the work force, presumably, work permits of most foreign workers brought in during the war would be terminated.

An immediate result of the war was an attempt by the government at political liberalization in allowing multiple candidates for elected posts and by offering an amnesty for political, but not for military, offenders. A test of this liberalization will be whether the reforms promised by the end of 1989—the new constitution, legalization of political parties other than the Baath, and freedom of the press—occur. Measures taken as of mid-December reflected only minimal lessening of the personal control of President Saddam Husayn over the decision-making process in all spheres of the country's life.

The end of the war left many security issues unresolved. Although the regime had disbanded some armed forces units, would Iraq maintain a strong, well-trained army, posing a potential threat to its neighbors and to Israel? Also, what of the Iraqi POWs returning home after several years' indoctrination in POW camps in Iran—could the government of Saddam Husayn rely on their loyalty? Finally, Iraq faced the problem of its traditional Sunni-Shia dichotomy. The war had demonstrated the ability of Iraqi Shias to put nationalist commitment above sectarian differences, but the influence of fundamentalist Shia Islam in the area, represented by the Iranian regime, would continue to threaten that loyalty.

December 15, 1989 — Helen Chapin Metz

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# Chapter 1. Historical Setting

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*Calf's head that appears as an ornament on golden harp from Ur, ca. 2500 B.C.*

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IRAQ, A REPUBLIC since the 1958 coup d'état that ended the reign of King Faisal II, became a sovereign, independent state in 1932. Although the modern state, the Republic of Iraq, is quite young, the history of the land and its people dates back more than 5,000 years. Indeed, Iraq contains the world's richest known archaeological sites. Here, in ancient Mesopotamia (the land between the rivers), the first civilization—that of Sumer—appeared in the Middle East. Despite the millennium separating the two epochs, Iraqi history displays a continuity shaped by adaptation to the ebbings and flowings of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (in Arabic, the Dijlis and Furat, respectively). Allowed to flow unchecked, the rivers wrought destruction in terrible floods that inundated whole towns. When the rivers were controlled by irrigation dikes and other waterworks, the land became extremely fertile.

The dual nature of the Tigris and the Euphrates—their potential to be destructive or productive—has resulted in two distinct legacies found throughout Iraqi history. On the one hand, Mesopotamia's plentiful water resources and lush river valleys allowed for the production of surplus food that served as the basis for the civilizing trend begun at Sumer and preserved by rulers such as Hammurabi (1792–1750 B.C.), Cyrus (550–530 B.C.), Darius (520–485 B.C.), Alexander (336–323 B.C.), and the Abbasids (750–1258). The ancient cities of Sumer, Babylon, and Assyria all were located in what is now Iraq. Surplus food production and joint irrigation and flood control efforts facilitated the growth of a powerful and expanding state.

Mesopotamia could also be an extremely threatening environment, however, driving its peoples to seek security from the vicissitudes of nature. Throughout Iraqi history, various groups have formed autonomous, self-contained social units. Allegiance to ancient religious deities at Ur and Eridu, membership in the Shiat Ali (or party of Ali, the small group of followers that supported Ali ibn Abu Talib as rightful leader of the Islamic community in the seventh century), residence in the *asnaf* (guilds) or the *mahallat* (city quarters) of Baghdad under the Ottoman Turks, membership in one of a multitude of tribes—such efforts to build autonomous security-providing structures have exerted a powerful centrifugal force on Iraqi culture.



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Two other factors that have inhibited political centralization are the absence of stone and Iraq's geographic location as the eastern flank of the Arab world. For much of Iraqi history, the lack of stone has severely hindered the building of roads. As a result, many parts of the country have remained beyond government control. Also, because it borders non-Arab Turkey and Iran and because of the great agricultural potential of its river valley, Iraq has attracted waves of ethnically diverse migrations. Although this influx of people has enriched Iraqi culture, it also has disrupted the country's internal balance and has led to deep-seated schisms.

Throughout Iraqi history, the conflict between political fragmentation and centralization has been reflected in the struggles among tribes and cities for the food-producing flatlands of the river valleys. When a central power neglected to keep the waterworks in repair, land fell into disuse, and tribes attacked settled peoples for precious and scarce agricultural commodities. For nearly 600 years, between the collapse of the Abbasid Empire in the thirteenth century and the waning years of the Ottoman era in the late nineteenth century, government authority was tenuous and tribal Iraq was, in effect, autonomous. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Iraq's disconnected, and often antagonistic, ethnic, religious, and tribal social groups professed little or no allegiance to the central government. As a result, the all-consuming concern of contemporary Iraqi history has been the forging of a nation-state out of this diverse and conflict-ridden social structure and the concomitant transformation of parochial loyalties, both tribal and ethnic, into a national identity.

Beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, the *tanzimat* reforms (an administrative and legal reorganization of the Ottoman Empire), the emergence of private property, and the tying of Iraq to the world capitalist market severely altered Iraq's social structure. Tribal shaykhs (see Glossary) traditionally had provided both spiritual leadership and tribal security. Land reform and increasing links with the West transformed many shaykhs into profit-seeking landlords, whose tribesmen became impoverished sharecroppers. Moreover, as Western economic penetration increased, the products of Iraq's once-prosperous craftsmen were displaced by machine-made British textiles.

During the twentieth century, as the power of tribal Iraq waned, Baghdad benefited from the rise of a centralized governmental apparatus, a burgeoning bureaucracy, increased educational opportunities, and the growth of the oil industry. The transformation of the urban-tribal balance resulted in a massive rural-to-urban migration. The disruption of existing parochial loyalties and the



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rise of new class relations based on economics fueled frequent tribal rebellions and urban uprisings during much of the twentieth century.

Iraq's social fabric was in the throes of a destabilizing transition in the first half of the twentieth century. At the same time, because of its foreign roots, the Iraqi political system suffered from a severe legitimacy crisis. Beginning with its League of Nations mandate in 1920, the British government had laid out the institutional framework for Iraqi government and politics. Britain imposed a Hashimite (also seen as Hashemite) monarchy, defined the territorial limits of Iraq with little correspondence to natural frontiers or traditional tribal and ethnic settlements, and influenced the writing of a constitution and the structure of parliament. The British also supported narrowly based groups—such as the tribal shaykhs—over the growing, urban-based nationalist movement, and resorted to military force when British interests were threatened, as in the 1941 Rashid Ali coup.

Between 1918 and 1958, British policy in Iraq had far-reaching effects. The majority of Iraqis were divorced from the political process, and the process itself failed to develop procedures for resolving internal conflicts other than rule by decree and the frequent use of repressive measures. Also, because the formative experiences of Iraq's post-1958 political leadership centered around clandestine opposition activity, decision making and government activity in general have been veiled in secrecy. Furthermore, because the country lacks deeply rooted national political institutions, political power frequently has been monopolized by a small elite, the members of which are often bound by close family or tribal ties.

Between the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958 and the emergence of Saddam Husayn in the mid-1970s, Iraqi history was a chronicle of conspiracies, coups, countercoups, and fierce Kurdish uprisings. Beginning in 1975, however, with the signing of the Algiers Agreement—an agreement between Saddam Husayn and the shah of Iran that effectively ended Iranian military support for the Kurds in Iraq—Saddam Husayn was able to bring Iraq an unprecedented period of stability. He effectively used rising oil revenues to fund large-scale development projects, to increase public sector employment, and significantly to improve education and health care. This tied increasing numbers of Iraqis to the ruling Baath (Arab Socialist Resurrection) Party. As a result, for the first time in contemporary Iraqi history, an Iraqi leader successfully forged a national identity out of Iraq's diverse social structure. Saddam Husayn's achievements and Iraq's general prosperity, however, did not survive long. In September 1980, Iraqi troops



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crossed the border into Iran, embroiling the country in a costly war (see fig. 1).

## Ancient Mesopotamia

### Sumer, Akkad, Babylon, and Assyria

Contemporary Iraq occupies the territory that historians traditionally have considered the site of the earliest civilizations of the ancient Middle East. Geographically, modern Iraq corresponds to the Mesopotamia of the Old Testament and of other, older, Middle Eastern texts. In Western mythology and religious tradition, the land of Mesopotamia in the ancient period was a land of lush vegetation, abundant wildlife, and copious if unpredictable water resources. As such, at a very early date it attracted people from neighboring, but less hospitable areas. By 6000 B.C., Mesopotamia had been settled, chiefly by migrants from the Turkish and Iranian highlands (see fig. 2).

The civilized life that emerged at Sumer was shaped by two conflicting factors: the unpredictability of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which at any time could unleash devastating floods that wiped out entire peoples, and the extreme fecundity of the river valleys, caused by centuries-old deposits of soil. Thus, while the river valleys of southern Mesopotamia attracted migrations of neighboring peoples and made possible, for the first time in history, the growing of surplus food, the volatility of the rivers necessitated a form of collective management to protect the marshy, low-lying land from flooding. As surplus production increased and as collective management became more advanced, a process of urbanization evolved and Sumerian civilization took root.

Sumer is the ancient name for southern Mesopotamia. Historians are divided on when the Sumerians arrived in the area, but they agree that the population of Sumer was a mixture of linguistic and ethnic groups that included the earlier inhabitants of the region. Sumerian culture mixed foreign and local elements. The Sumerians were highly innovative people who responded creatively to the challenges of the changeable Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Many of the great Sumerian legacies, such as writing, irrigation, the wheel, astronomy, and literature, can be seen as adaptive responses to the great rivers.

The Sumerians were the first people known to have devised a scheme of written representation as a means of communication. From the earliest writings, which were pictograms (simplified pictures on clay tablets), the Sumerians gradually created cuneiform—a way of arranging impressions stamped on clay by the wedge-like



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section of a chopped-off reed. The use of combinations of the same basic wedge shape to stand for phonetic, and possibly for syllabic, elements provided more flexible communication than the pictogram. Through writing, the Sumerians were able to pass on complex agricultural techniques to successive generations; this led to marked improvements in agricultural production.

Another important Sumerian legacy was the recording of literature. The most famous Sumerian epic and the one that has survived in the most nearly complete form is the epic of Gilgamesh. The story of Gilgamesh, who actually was king of the city-state of Uruk in approximately 2700 B.C., is a moving story of the ruler's deep sorrow at the death of his friend and of his consequent search for immortality. Other central themes of the story are a devastating flood and the tenuous nature of man's existence. Laden with complex abstractions and emotional expressions, the epic of Gilgamesh reflects the intellectual sophistication of the Sumerians, and it has served as the prototype for all Middle Eastern inundation stories. The precariousness of existence in southern Mesopotamia also led to a highly developed sense of religion. Cult centers such as Eridu, dating back to 5000 B.C., served as important centers of pilgrimage and devotion even before the rise of Sumer. Many of the most important Mesopotamian cities emerged in areas surrounding the pre-Sumerian cult centers, thus reinforcing the close relationship between religion and government.

The Sumerians were pantheistic; their gods more or less personified local elements and natural forces. In exchange for sacrifice and adherence to an elaborate ritual, the gods of ancient Sumer were to provide the individual with security and prosperity. A powerful priesthood emerged to oversee ritual practices and to intervene with the gods. Sumerian religious beliefs also had important political aspects. Decisions relating to land rentals, agricultural questions, trade, commercial relations, and war were determined by the priesthood, because all property belonged to the gods. The priests ruled from their temples, called ziggurats, which were essentially artificial mountains of sunbaked brick, built with outside staircases that tapered toward a shrine at the top.

Because the well-being of the community depended upon close observation of natural phenomena, scientific or protoscientific activities occupied much of the priests' time. For example, the Sumerians believed that each of the gods was represented by a number. The number sixty, sacred to the god An, was their basic unit of calculation. The minutes of an hour and the notational degrees of a circle were Sumerian concepts. The highly developed agricultural system and the refined irrigation and water-control systems



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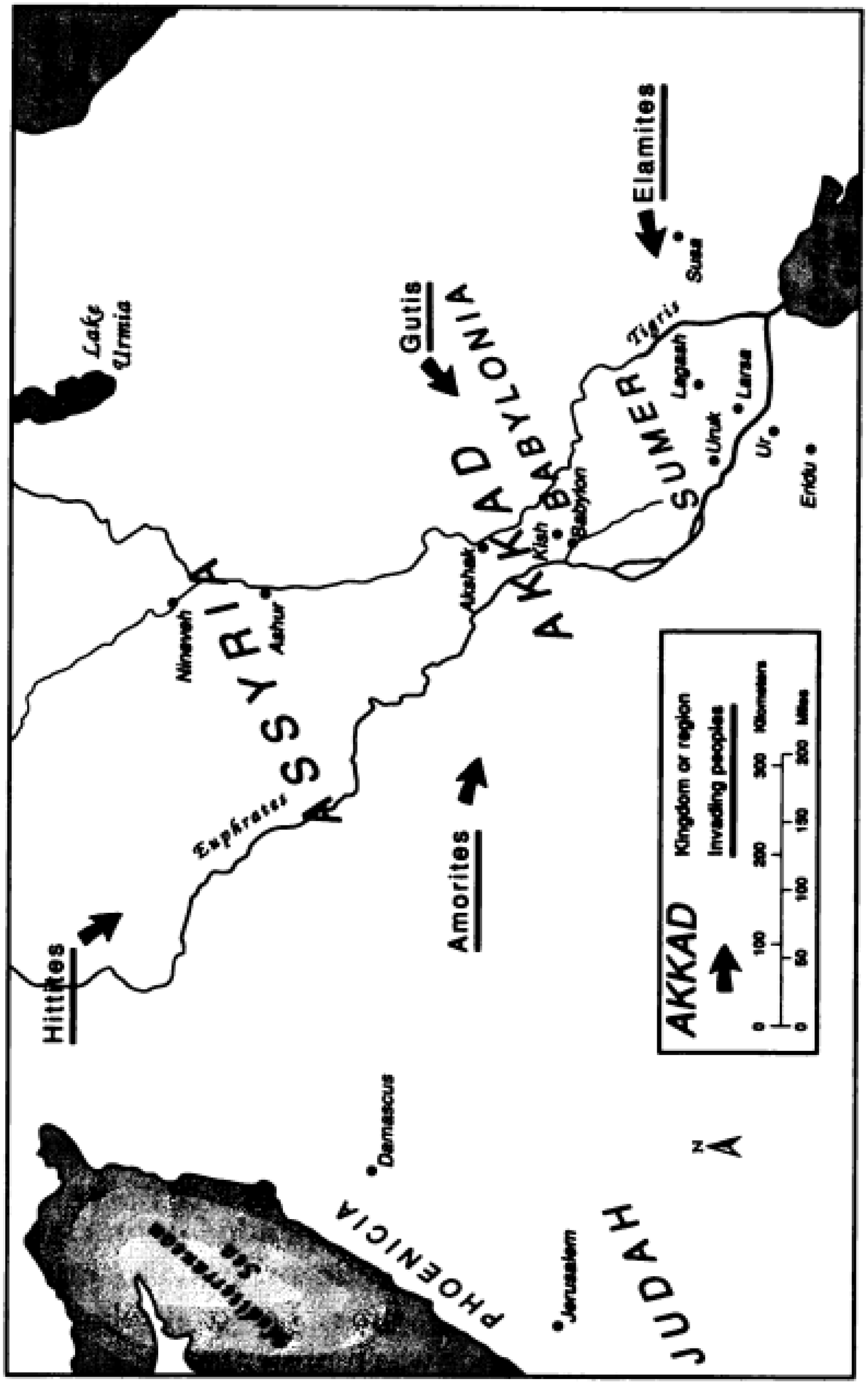


Source: Based on information from George Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, Cleveland, 1965.

*Figure 2. Ancient Mesopotamia*



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that enabled Sumer to achieve surplus production also led to the growth of large cities. The most important city-states were Uruk, Eridu, Kish, Lagash, Agade, Akshak, Larsa, and Ur (birthplace of the prophet Abraham). The emergence of urban life led to further technological advances. Lacking stone, the Sumerians made marked improvements in brick technology, making possible the construction of very large buildings such as the famous ziggurat of Ur. Sumer also pioneered advances in warfare technology. By the middle of the third millennium B.C., the Sumerians had developed the wheeled chariot. At approximately the same time, the Sumerians discovered that tin and copper when smelted together produced bronze—a new, more durable, and much harder metal. The wheeled chariot and bronze weapons became increasingly important as the Sumerians developed the institution of kingship and as individual city-states began to vie for supremacy.

Historians generally divide Sumerian history into three stages. In the first stage, which extended roughly from 3360 B.C. to 2400 B.C., the most important political development was the emergence of kings who, unlike the first priestly rulers, exercised distinct political rather than religious authority. Another important feature of this period was the emergence of warring Sumerian city-states, which fought for control of the river valleys in lower Mesopotamia. During the second phase, which lasted from 2400 B.C. to 2200 B.C., Sumer was conquered in approximately 2334 B.C. by Sargon I, king of the Semitic city of Akkad. Sargon was the world's first empire-builder, sending his troops as far as Egypt and Ethiopia. He attempted to establish a unified empire and to end the hostilities among the city-states. Sargon's rule introduced a new level of political organization that was characterized by an even more clear-cut separation between religious authority and secular authority. To ensure his supremacy, Sargon created the first conscripted army, a development related to the need to mobilize large numbers of laborers for irrigation and flood-control works. Akkadian strength was boosted by the invention of the composite bow, a new weapon made of strips of wood and horn.

Despite their military prowess, Akkadian hegemony over southern Mesopotamia lasted only 200 years. Sargon's great-grandson was then overthrown by the Guti, a mountain people from the east. The fall of the Akkadians and the subsequent reemergence of Sumer under the king of Ur, who defeated the Guti, ushered in the third phase of Sumerian history. In this final phase, which was characterized by a synthesis of Sumerian and Akkadian cultures, the king of Ur established hegemony over much of Mesopotamia. Sumerian supremacy, however, was on the wane.



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By 2000 B.C. the combined attacks of the Amorites, a Semitic people from the west, and the Elamites, a Caucasian people from the east, had destroyed the Third Dynasty of Ur. The invaders nevertheless carried on the Sumero-Akkadian cultural legacy.

The Amorites established cities on the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers and made Babylon, a town to the north, their capital. During the time of their sixth ruler, King Hammurabi (1792–1750 B.C.), Babylonian rule encompassed a huge area covering most of the Tigris-Euphrates river valley from Sumer and the Persian Gulf in the south to Assyria in the north. To rule over such a large area, Hammurabi devised an elaborate administrative structure. His greatest achievement, however, was the issuance of a law code designed "to cause justice to prevail in the country, to destroy the wicked and the evil, that the strong may not oppress the weak." The Code of Hammurabi, not the earliest to appear in the Middle East but certainly the most complete, dealt with land tenure, rent, the position of women, marriage, divorce, inheritance, contracts, control of public order, administration of justice, wages, and labor conditions.

In Hammurabi's legal code, the civilizing trend begun at Sumer had evolved to a new level of complexity. The sophisticated legal principles contained in the code reflect a highly advanced civilization in which social interaction extended far beyond the confines of kinship. The large number of laws pertaining to commerce reflect a diversified economic base and an extensive trading network. In politics, Hammurabi's code is evidence of a more pronounced separation between religious and secular authority than had existed in ancient Sumer. In addition to Hammurabi's legal code, the Babylonians made other important contributions, notably to the science of astronomy, and they increased the flexibility of cuneiform by developing the pictogram script so that it stood for a syllable rather than an individual word.

Beginning in approximately 1600 B.C., Indo-European-speaking tribes invaded India; other tribes settled in Iran and in Europe. One of these groups, the Hittites, allied itself with the Kassites, a people of unknown origins. Together, they conquered and destroyed Babylon. Hittite power subsequently waned, but, in the first half of the fourteenth century B.C., the Hittites reemerged, controlling an area that stretched from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. The military success of the Hittites has been attributed to their monopoly in iron production and to their use of the chariot. Nevertheless, in the twelfth century B.C., the Hittites were destroyed, and no great military power occupied Mesopotamia until the ninth century B.C.



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One of the cities that flourished in the middle of the Tigris Valley during this period was that of Ashur, named after the sun-god of the Assyrians. The Assyrians were Semitic speakers who occupied Babylon for a brief period in the thirteenth century B.C. Invasions of iron-producing peoples into the Middle East and into the Aegean region in approximately 1200 B.C. disrupted the indigenous empires of Mesopotamia, but eventually the Assyrians were able to capitalize on the new alignments of power in the region. Because of what has been called "the barbarous and unspeakable cruelty of the Assyrians," the names of such Assyrian kings as Ashurnasirpal (883–859 B.C.), Tiglath-Pileser III (745–727 B.C.), Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.), and Ashurbanipal (669–626 B.C.) continue to evoke images of powerful, militarily brilliant, but brutally savage conquerors.

The Assyrians began to expand to the west in the early part of the ninth century B.C.; by 859 they had reached the Mediterranean Sea, where they occupied Phoenician cities. Damascus and Babylon fell to the next generations of Assyrian rulers. During the eighth century B.C., the Assyrians' control over their empire appeared tenuous, but Tiglath-Pileser III seized the throne and rapidly subdued Assyria's neighbors, captured Syria, and crowned himself king of Babylon. He developed a highly proficient war machine by creating a permanent standing army under the administration of a well-organized bureaucracy. Sennacherib built a new capital, Nineveh, on the Tigris River, destroyed Babylon (where citizens had risen in revolt), and made Judah a vassal state.

In 612 B.C., revolts of subject peoples combined with the allied forces of two new kingdoms, those of the Medes and the Chaldeans (Neo-Babylonians), effectively to extinguish Assyrian power. Nineveh was razed. The hatred that the Assyrians inspired, particularly for their policy of wholesale resettlement of subject peoples, was sufficiently great to ensure that few traces of Assyrian rule remained two years later. The Assyrians had used the visual arts to depict their many conquests, and Assyrian friezes, executed in minute detail, continue to be the best artifacts of Assyrian civilization.

The Chaldeans became heir to Assyrian power in 612 B.C., and they conquered formerly Assyrian-held lands in Syria and Palestine. King Nebuchadnezzar (605–562 B.C.) conquered the kingdom of Judah, and he destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Conscious of their ancient past, the Chaldeans sought to reestablish Babylon as the most magnificent city of the Middle East. It was during the Chaldean period that the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, famed as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, were created.



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Because of an estrangement of the priesthood from the king, however, the monarchy was severely weakened, and it was unable to withstand the rising power of Achaemenid Iran. In 539 B.C., Babylon fell to Cyrus the Great (550–530 B.C.). In addition to incorporating Babylon into the Iranian empire, Cyrus the Great released the Jews who had been held in captivity there.

## Iranian and Greek Intrusions

Mesopotamia, for 2,000 years a stronghold of Semitic-speaking peoples, now fell to Indo-European rule that persisted for 1,176 years. Cyrus, one of history's truly great leaders, ruled with a firm hand, but he was also well attuned to the needs of his subjects. Upon assuming power, he immediately replaced the savagery of the Assyrians with a respect for the customs and the institutions of his new subjects. He appointed competent provincial governors (the predecessors of the Persian satraps), and he required from his subjects only tribute and obedience. Following Cyrus's death, a brief period of Babylonian unrest ensued that climaxed in 522 B.C. with a general rebellion of Iranian colonies.

Between 520 and 485 B.C., the efficient and innovative Iranian leader, Darius the Great, reimposed political stability in Babylon and ushered in a period of great economic prosperity. His greatest achievements were in road building—which significantly improved communication among the provinces—and in organizing an efficient bureaucracy. Darius's death in 485 B.C. was followed by a period of decay that led to a major Babylonian rebellion in 482 B.C. The Iranians violently quelled the uprising, and the repression that followed severely damaged Babylon's economic infrastructure.

The first Iranian kings to rule Iraq followed Mesopotamian land-management practices conscientiously. Between 485 B.C. and the conquest by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C., however, very little in Babylon was repaired and few of its once-great cities remained intact. Trade also was greatly reduced during this period. The established trade route from Sardis to Susa did not traverse Babylonia, and the Iranian rulers, themselves much closer to the Orient, were able to monopolize trade from India and other eastern points. As a result, Babylonia and Assyria, which together formed the ninth satrapy of the Persian Empire, became economically isolated and impoverished. Their poverty was exacerbated by the extremely high taxes levied on them: they owed the Iranian crown 1,000 talents of silver a year, in addition to having to meet the extortionate demands of the local administrators, and they were responsible for feeding the Iranian court for four months every year.



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*Ruins of a tower at Nimrud, near Kirkuk, referred to as Tower of Babel*
*Courtesy Matson Collection*

Iranian rule lasted for more than 200 years, from 551 B.C. to 331 B.C. During this time, large numbers of Iranians were added to Mesopotamia's ethnically diverse population. The flow of Iranians into Iraq, which began during the rein of the Achaemenids, initiated an important demographic trend that would continue intermittently throughout much of Iraqi history. Another important effect of Iranian rule was the disappearance of the Mesopotamian languages and the widespread use of Aramaic, the official language of the empire.

By the fourth century B.C., nearly all of Babylon opposed the Achaemenids. Thus, when the Iranian forces stationed in Babylon surrendered to Alexander the Great of Macedon in 331 B.C. all of Babylonia hailed him as a liberator. Alexander quickly won Babylonian favor when, unlike the Achaemenids, he displayed respect for such Babylonian traditions as the worship of their chief god, Marduk. Alexander also proposed ambitious schemes for Babylon. He planned to establish one of the two seats of his empire there and to make the Euphrates navigable all the way to the Persian Gulf, where he planned to build a great port. Alexander's grandiose plans, however, never came to fruition. Returning from an expedition to the Indus River, he died in Babylon—most probably from malaria contracted there in 323 B.C. at the age of



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thirty-two. In the politically chaotic period after Alexander's death, his generals fought for and divided up his empire. Many of the battles among the Greek generals were fought on Babylonian soil. In the latter half of the Greek period, Greek military campaigns were focused on conquering Phoenician ports and Babylonia was thus removed from the sphere of action. The city of Babylon lost its preeminence as the center of the civilized world when political and economic activity shifted to the Mediterranean, where it was destined to remain for many centuries.

Although Alexander's major plans for Mesopotamia were unfulfilled, and his generals did little that was positive for Mesopotamia, the effects of the Greek occupation were noteworthy. Alexander and his successors built scores of cities in the Middle East that were modeled on the Greek city-states. One of the most important was Seleucia on the Tigris. The Hellenization of the area included the introduction of Western deities, Western art forms, and Western thought. Business revived in Mesopotamia because one of the Greek trade routes ran through the new cities. Mesopotamia exported barley, wheat, dates, wool, and bitumen; the city of Seleucia exported spices, gold, precious stones, and ivory. Cultural interchange between Greek and Mesopotamian scholars was responsible for the saving of many Mesopotamian scientific, especially astronomical, texts.

In 126 B.C., the Parthians (or Arsacids), an intelligent, nomadic people who had migrated from the steppes of Turkestan to northeastern Iran, captured the Tigris-Euphrates river valley. Having previously conquered Iran, the Parthians were able to control all trade between the East and the Greco-Roman world. For the most part, they chose to retain existing social institutions and to live in cities that already existed. Mesopotamia was immeasurably enriched by this, the mildest of all foreign occupations of the region. The population of Mesopotamia was enormously enlarged, chiefly by Arabs, Iranians, and Aramaeans. With the exception of the Roman occupation under Trajan (A.D. 98–117) and Septimius Severus (A.D. 193–211), the Arsacids ruled until a new force of native Iranian rulers, the Sassanids, conquered the region in A.D. 227.

Little information is available on the Sassanid occupation, which lasted until A.D. 636. The north was devastated by battles fought between Romans and Sassanids. For the most part, the Sassanids appear to have neglected Mesopotamia. By the time the enfeebled Sassanid Empire fell to Muslim Arab warriors, Mesopotamia was in ruins, and Sumero-Akkadian civilization was entirely extinguished. Sassanid neglect of the canals and irrigation ditches vital for agriculture had allowed the rivers to flood, and parts of the land



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had become sterile. Nevertheless, Mesopotamian culture passed on many traditions to the West. The basic principles of mathematics and astronomy, the coronation of kings, and such symbols as the tree of life, the Maltese cross, and the crescent are part of Mesopotamia's legacy.

## The Arab Conquest and the Coming of Islam

The power that toppled the Sassanids came from an unexpected source. The Iranians knew that the Arabs, a tribally oriented people, had never been organized under the rule of a single power and were at a primitive level of military development. The Iranians also knew of the Arabs through their mutual trading activities and because, for a brief period, Yemen, in southern Arabia, was an Iranian satrapy.

Events in Arabia changed rapidly and dramatically in the sixth century A.D. when Muhammad, a member of the Hashimite clan of the powerful Quraysh tribe of Mecca, claimed prophethood and began gathering adherents for the monotheistic faith of Islam that had been revealed to him (see Religious Life, ch. 2). The conversion of Arabia proved to be the most difficult of the Islamic conquests because of entrenched tribalism. Within one year of Muhammad's death in 632, however, Arabia was secure enough for the Prophet's secular successor, Abu Bakr (632–634), the first caliph and the father-in-law of Muhammad, to begin the campaign against the Byzantine Empire and the Sassanid Empire.

Islamic forays into Iraq began during the reign of Abu Bakr. In 634 an army of 18,000 Arab tribesmen, under the leadership of the brilliant general Khalid ibn al Walid (aptly nicknamed "The Sword of Islam"), reached the perimeter of the Euphrates delta. Although the occupying Iranian force was vastly superior in techniques and numbers, its soldiers were exhausted from their unremitting campaigns against the Byzantines. The Sassanid troops fought ineffectually, lacking sufficient reinforcement to do more. The first battle of the Arab campaign became known as the Battle of the Chains because Iranian soldiers were reputedly chained together so that they could not flee. Khalid offered the inhabitants of Iraq an ultimatum: "Accept the faith and you are safe; otherwise pay tribute. If you refuse to do either, you have only yourself to blame. A people is already upon you, loving death as you love life."

Most of the Iraqi tribes were Christian at the time of the Islamic conquest. They decided to pay the *jizya,* the tax required of non-Muslims living in Muslim-ruled areas, and were not further disturbed. The Iranians rallied briefly under their hero, Rustam, and



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attacked the Arabs at Al Hirah, west of the Euphrates. There, they were soundly defeated by the invading Arabs. The next year, in 635, the Arabs defeated the Iranians at the Battle of Buwayb. Finally, in May 636 at Al Qadisiyah, a village south of Baghdad on the Euphrates, Rustam was killed. The Iranians, who outnumbered the Arabs six to one, were decisively beaten. From Al Qadisiyah the Arabs pushed on to the Sassanid capital at Ctesiphon (Madain).

The Islamic conquest was made easier because both the Byzantine Empire and the Sassanid Empire were culturally and socially bankrupt; thus, the native populations had little to lose by cooperating with the conquering power. Because the Muslim warriors were fighting a jihad (holy war), they were regulated by religious law that strictly prohibited rape and the killing of women, children, religious leaders, or anyone who had not actually engaged in warfare. Further, the Muslim warriors had come to conquer and settle a land under Islamic law. It was not in their economic interest to destroy or pillage unnecessarily and indiscriminately.

The caliph Umar (634–44) ordered the founding of two garrisoned cities to protect the newly conquered territory: Kufah, named as the capital of Iraq, and Basra, which was also to be a port. Umar also organized the administration of the conquered Iranian lands. Acting on the advice of an Iranian, Umar continued the Sassanid office of the divan (Arabic form *diwan*). Essentially an institution to control income and expenditure through record keeping and the centralization of administration, the divan would be used henceforth throughout the lands of the Islamic conquest. *Dihqans,* minor revenue collection officials under the Sassanids, retained their function of assessing and collecting taxes. Tax collectors in Iraq had never enjoyed universal popularity, but the Arabs found them particularly noxious. Arabic replaced Persian as the official language, and it slowly filtered into common usage. Iraqis intermarried with Arabs and converted to Islam.

By 650 Muslim armies had reached the Amu Darya (Oxus River) and had conquered all the Sassanid domains, although some were more strongly held than others. Shortly thereafter, Arab expansion and conquest virtually ceased. Thereafter, the groups in power directed their energies to maintaining the status quo while those outside the major power structure devoted themselves to political and religious rebellion. The ideologies of the rebellions usually were couched in religious terms. Frequently, a difference in the interpretation of a point of doctrine was sufficient to spark armed warfare. More often, however, religious disputes were the rationalization for underlying nationalistic or cultural dissatisfactions.



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## The Sunni-Shia Controversy

The most critical problem that faced the young Islamic community revolved around the rightful successor to the office of caliph. Uthman, the third caliph, had encountered opposition during and after his election to the caliphate. Ali ibn Abu Talib, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law (by virtue of his marrying the Prophet's only surviving child, Fatima), had been the other contender.

Ali's pietism was disquieting to certain vested-interest groups, who perceived the more conservative Uthman as more likely to continue the policies of the previous caliph, Umar. Discontent increased, as did Ali's formal opposition to Uthman based on religious grounds. Ali claimed that innovations had been introduced that were not consonant with Quranic directives. Economics was the key factor for most of the members of the opposition, but this, too, acquired religious overtones.

As a result of the rapid military expansion of the Islamic movement, financial troubles beset Uthman. Many beduins had offered themselves for military service in Iraq and in Egypt. Their abstemious and hard life contrasted with the leisured life of Arabs in the Hijaz (the western part of the Arabian Peninsula), who were enjoying the benefits of conquest. When these volunteer soldiers questioned the allocation of lands and the distribution of revenues and pensions, they found a ready spokesman in Ali.

Groups of malcontents eventually left Iraq and Egypt to seek redress at Medina in the Hijaz. Uthman promised reforms, but on their return journey the rebels intercepted a message to the governor of Egypt commanding that they be punished. In response, the rebels besieged Uthman in his home in Medina, eventually slaying him. Uthman's slayer was a Muslim and a son of the first caliph, Abu Bakr. The Muslim world was shaken. Ali, who had not taken part in the siege, was chosen caliph.

Two opponents of Ali enlisted Aisha, a widow of the Prophet Muhammad, to join them in accusing Ali and demanding retribution for Uthman's death. When the three went to Iraq to seek support for their cause, Ali's forces engaged theirs near Basra. Aisha's two companions were killed, and Ali was clearly victorious. Muawiyah, a kinsman of Uthman and the governor of Syria, then refused to recognize Ali, and he demanded the right to avenge his relative's death. In what was perhaps the most important battle fought between Muslims, Ali's forces met Muawiyah's at the Plain of Siffin near the largest bend of the Euphrates River. Muawiyah's forces, seeing that they were losing, proposed arbitration.



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Accordingly, two arbitrators were chosen to decide whether Uthman's death had been deserved. Such a decision would give his slayer status as an executioner rather than as a murderer and would remove the claims of Uthman's relatives. When the arbitrators decided against Ali, he protested that the verdict was not in accordance with sharia (Islamic law) and declared his intention to resume the battle.

Ali's decision, however, came too late for the more extreme of his followers. Citing the Quranic injunction to fight rebels until they obey, these followers insisted that Ali was morally wrong to submit to arbitration. In doing so, they claimed, he bowed to the judgment of men—as opposed to the judgment of God that would have been revealed by the outcome of the battle. These dissenters, known as Kharajites (from the verb *kharaja*—to go out), withdrew from battle, an action that had far-reaching political effects on the Islamic community in the centuries ahead. Before resuming his dispute with Muawiyah, Ali appealed to the Kharajites; when they rejected the appeal, he massacred many of them. Furious at his treatment of pious Muslims, most of Ali's forces deserted him. He was forced to return to Al Kufah—about 150 kilometers south of Baghdad—and to await developments within the Islamic community.

A number of Islamic leaders met at Adruh in present-day Jordan, and the same two arbitrators from Siffin devised a solution to the succession problem. At last it was announced that neither Ali nor Muawiyah should be caliph; Abd Allah, a son of Umar, was proposed. The meeting terminated in confusion, however, and no final decision was reached. Both Ali and Muawiyah bided their time in their separate governorships: Muawiyah, who had been declared caliph by some of his supporters, in newly conquered Egypt, and Ali, in Iraq. Muawiyah fomented discontent among those only partially committed to Ali. While praying in a mosque at Al Kufah, Ali was murdered by a Kharajite in 661. The ambitious Muawiyah induced Ali's eldest son, Hasan, to renounce his claim to the caliphate. Hasan died shortly thereafter, probably of consumption, but the Shias (see Glossary) later claimed that he had been poisoned and dubbed him "Lord of All Martyrs." Ali's unnatural death ensured the future of the Shia movement—Ali's followers returned to his cause—and quickened its momentum. With the single exception of the Prophet Muhammad, no man has had a greater impact on Islamic history. The Shia declaration of faith is: "There is no God but God; Muhammad is his Prophet and Ali is the Saint of God."



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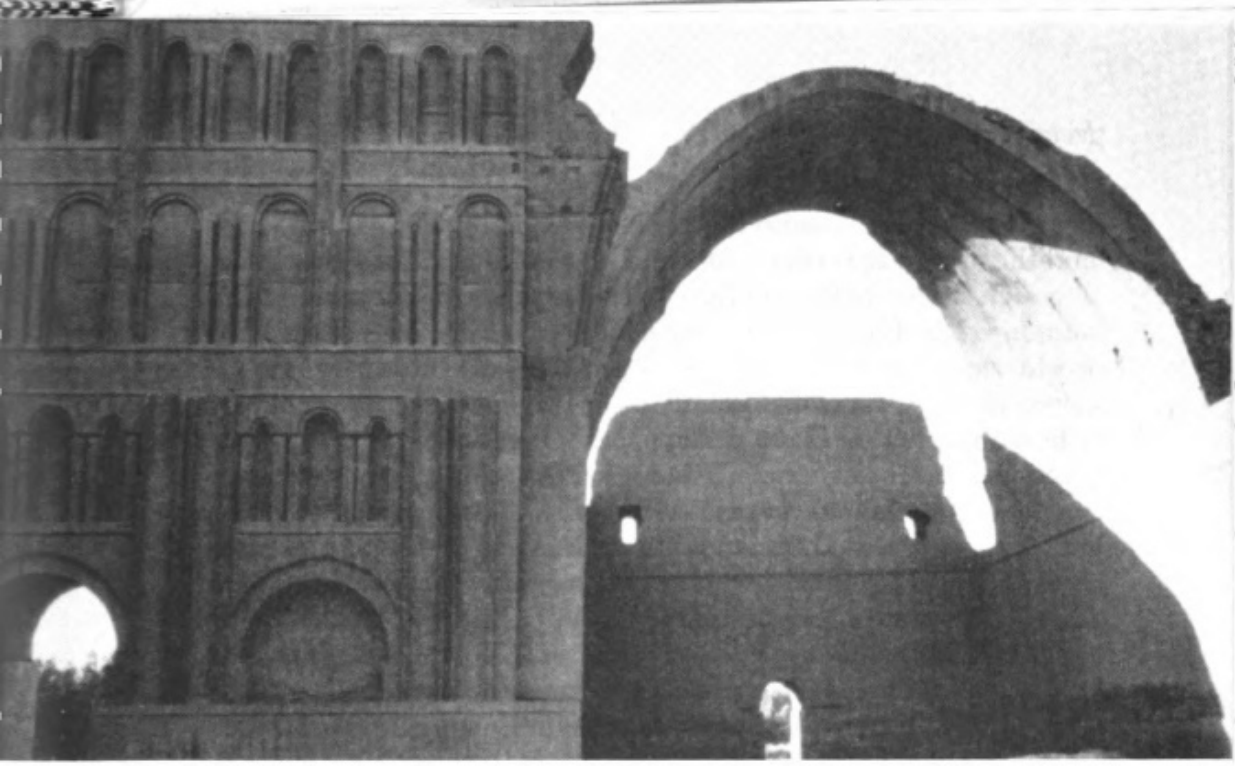

*Arch of Ctesiphon*
*Courtesy Ronald L. Kuipers*

Subsequently, Muawiyah was declared caliph. Thus began the Umayyad Dynasty, which had its capital at Damascus. Yazid I, Muawiyah's son and his successor in 680, was unable to contain the opposition that his strong father had vigorously quelled. Husayn, Ali's second son, refused to pay homage and fled to Mecca, where he was asked to lead the Shias—mostly Iraqis—in a revolt against Yazid I. Ubayd Allah, governor of Al Kufah, discovered the plot and sent detachments to dissuade him. At Karbala, in Iraq, Husayn's band of 200 men and women refused to surrender and finally were cut down by a force of perhaps 4,000 Umayyad troops. Yazid I received Husayn's head, and Husayn's death on the tenth of Muharram (October 10, 680) continues to be observed as a day of mourning for all Shias. Ali's burial place at An Najaf, about 130 kilometers south of Baghdad, and Husayn's at Karbala, about 80 kilometers southwest of Baghdad, are holy places of pilgrimage for Shias, many of whom feel that a pilgrimage to both sites is equal to a pilgrimage to Mecca (see Religious Life, ch. 2).

The importance of these events in the history of Islam cannot be overemphasized. They created the greatest of the Islamic schisms, between the party of Ali (the Shiat Ali, known in the West as Shias or Shiites) and the upholders of Muawiyah (the Ahl as Sunna, the People of the Sunna—those who follow Muhammad's custom and example) or the Sunnis (see Glossary). The Sunnis believe they



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are the followers of orthodoxy. The ascendancy of the Umayyads and the events at Karbala, in contrast, led to a Shia Islam which, although similar to Sunni Islam in its basic tenets, maintains important doctrinal differences that have had pervasive effects on the Shia world view. Most notably, Shias have viewed themselves as the opposition in Islam, the opponents of privilege and power. They believe that after the death of Ali and the ascension of the "usurper" Umayyads to the caliphate, Islam took the wrong path; therefore, obedience to existing temporal authority is not obligatory. Furthermore, in sacrificing his own life for a just cause, Husayn became the archetypal role model who inspired generations of Shias to fight for social equality and for economic justice.

During his caliphate, Ali had made Al Kufah his capital. The transfer of power to Syria and to its capital at Damascus aroused envy among Iraqis. The desire to regain preeminence prompted numerous rebellions in Iraq against Umayyad rule. Consequently, only men of unusual ability were sent to be governors of Al Basrah and Al Kufah. One of the most able was Ziyad ibn Abihi, who was initially governor of Al Basrah and later also of Al Kufah. Ziyad divided the residents of Al Kufah into four groups (not based on tribal affiliation) and appointed a leader for each one. He also sent 50,000 beduins to Khorasan (in northeastern Iran), the eastern-most province of the empire, which was within the jurisdiction of Al Basrah and Al Kufah.

The Iraqis once again became restive when rival claimants for the Umayyad caliphate waged civil war between 687 and 692. Ibn Yusuf ath Thaqafi al Aajjay was sent as provincial governor to restore order in Iraq in 694. He pacified Iraq and encouraged both agriculture and education.

## The Abbasid Caliphate, 750–1258

Many unsuccessful Iraqi and Iranian insurrectionists had fled to Khorasan, in addition to the 50,000 beduins who had been sent there by Ziyad. There, at the city of Merv (present-day Mary in the Soviet Union), a faction that supported Abd al Abbas (a descendant of the Prophet's uncle), was able to organize the rebels under the battle cry, "the House of Hashim." Hashim, the Prophet Muhammad's grandfather, was an ancestor of both the Shia line and the Abbas line, and the Shias therefore actively supported the Hashimite leader, Abu Muslim. In 747, Abu Muslim's army attacked the Umayyads and occupied Iraq. In 750, Abd al Abbas (not a Shia) was established in Baghdad as the first caliph of the Abbasid Dynasty. The Abbasids, whose line was called "the blessed dynasty" by it supporters, presented themselves to the people as



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divine-right rulers who would initiate a new era of justice and prosperity. Their political policies were, however, remarkably similar to those of the Umayyads.

During the reign of its first seven caliphs, Baghdad became a center of power where Arab and Iranian cultures mingled to produce a blaze of philosophical, scientific, and literary glory. This era is remembered throughout the Arab world, and by Iraqis in particular, as the pinnacle of the Islamic past. It was the second Abbasid caliph, Al Mansur (754–75), who decided to build a new capital, surrounded by round walls, near the site of the Sassanid village of Baghdad. Within fifty years the population outgrew the city walls as people thronged to the capital to become part of the Abbasids' enormous bureaucracy or to engage in trade. Baghdad became a vast emporium of trade linking Asia and the Mediterranean (see fig. 3). By the reign of Mansur's grandson, Harun ar Rashid (786–806), Baghdad was second in size only to Constantinople. Baghdad was able to feed its enormous population and to export large quantities of grain because the political administration had realized the importance of controlling the flows of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. The Abbasids reconstructed the city's canals, dikes, and reservoirs, and drained the swamps around Baghdad, freeing the city of malaria.

Harun ar Rashid, the caliph of the *Arabian Nights,* actively supported intellectual pursuits, but the great flowering of Arabic culture that is credited to the Abbasids reached its apogee during the reign of his son, Al Mamun (813–33). After the death of Harun ar Rashid, his sons, Amin and Al Mamun, quarreled over the succession to the caliphate. Their dispute soon erupted into civil war. Amin was backed by the Iraqis, while Al Mamun had the support of the Iranians. Al Mamun also had the support of the garrison at Khorasan and thus was able to take Baghdad in 813. Although Sunni Muslims, the Abbasids had hoped that by astute and stern rule they would be able to contain Shia resentment at yet another Sunni dynasty. The Iranians, many of whom were Shias, had hoped that Al Mamun would make his capital in their own country, possibly at Merv. Al Mamun, however, eventually realized that the Iraqi Shias would never countenance the loss of prestige and economic power if they no longer had the capital. He decided to center his rule in Baghdad.

Disappointed, the Iranians began to break away from Abbasid control. A series of local dynasties appeared: the Tahirids (821–873), the Suffarids (867–ca. 1495), and the Samanids (819–1005). The same process was repeated in the West: Spain broke away in 756, Morocco in 788, Tunisia in 800, and Egypt in 868. In Iraq there



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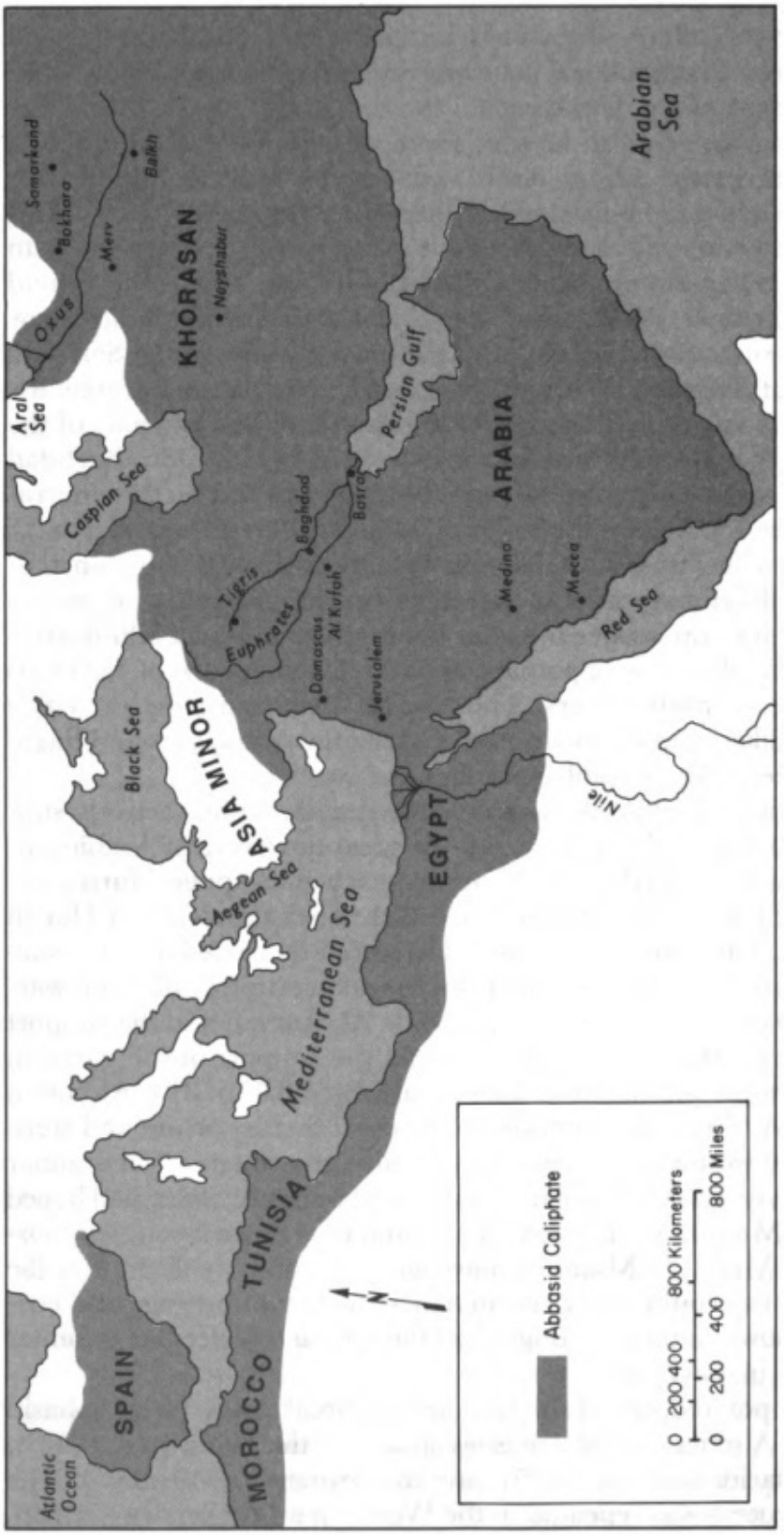


Source: Based on information from Philip K. Hitti, *Makers of Arab History*, New York, 1968, 56.

*Figure 3. The Abbasid Caliphate, A.D. 750*



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was trouble in the south. In 869, Ali ibn Muhammad (Ali the Abominable) founded a state of black slaves known as Zanj. The Zanj brought a large part of southern Iraq and southwestern Iran under their control and in the process enslaved many of their former masters. The Zanj Rebellion was finally put down in 883, but not before it had caused great suffering.

The Sunni-Shia split had weakened the effectiveness of Islam as a single unifying force and as a sanction for a single political authority. Although the intermingling of various linguistic and cultural groups contributed greatly to the enrichment of Islamic civilization, it also was a source of great tension and contributed to the decay of Abbasid power.

In addition to the cleavages between Arabs and Iranians and between Sunnis and Shias, the growing prominence of Turks in military and in political affairs gave cause for discontent and rivalry at court. Nomadic, Turkic-speaking warriors had been moving out of Central Asia into Transoxiana (i.e., across the Oxus River) for more than a millennium. The Abbasid caliphs began importing Turks as slave-warriors (Mamluks) early in the ninth century. The imperial palace guards of the Abbasids were Mamluks who were originally commanded by free Iraqi officers. By 833, however, Mamluks themselves were officers and gradually, because of their greater military proficiency and dedication, they began to occupy high positions at court. The mother of Caliph Mutasim (who came to power in 833) had been a Turkish slave, and her influence was substantial. By the tenth century, the Turkish commanders, no longer checked by their Iranian and Arab rivals at court, were able to appoint and depose caliphs. For the first time, the political power of the caliphate was fully separated from its religious function. The Mamluks continued to permit caliphs to come to power because of the importance of the office as a symbol for legitimizing claims to authority.

In 945, after subjugating western Iran, a military family known as the Buwayhids occupied Baghdad. Shias from the Iranian province of Daylam south of the Caspian Sea, the Buwayhids continued to permit Sunni Abbasid caliphs to ascend to the throne. The humiliation of the caliphate at being manipulated by Shias, and by Iranian ones at that, was immense.

The Buwayhids were ousted in 1055 by another group of Turkic speakers, the Seljuks. The Seljuks were the ruling clan of the Kinik group of the Oghuz (or Ghuzz) Turks, who lived north of the Oxus River. Their leader, Tughril Beg, turned his warriors first against the local ruler in Khorasan. He moved south and then west, conquering but not destroying the cities in his path. In 1055 the caliph



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in Baghdad gave Tughril Beg robes, gifts, and the title, "King of the East." Because the Seljuks were Sunnis, their rule was welcomed in Baghdad. They treated the caliphs with respect, but the latter continued to be only figureheads.

There were several lines of Seljuks. The main line, ruling from Baghdad, controlled the area from the Bosporus to Chinese Turkestan until approximately 1155. The Seljuks continued to expand their territories, but they were content to let Iraqis and Iranians simply pay tribute while administering and ruling their own lands. One Seljuk, Malek Shah, extended Turkish rule to the countries of the eastern Mediterranean, Asia Minor, and to parts of Arabia. During his rule, Iraq and Iran enjoyed a cultural and scientific renaissance. This success is largely attributed to Malek Shah's brilliant Iranian vizier, Nizam al Mulk, one of the most skillful administrators in history. An astronomical observatory was established in which Umar (Omar) Khayyam did much of his experimentation for a new calendar, and religious schools were built in all the major towns. Abu Hamid al Ghazali, one of the greatest Islamic theologians, and other eminent scholars were brought to the Seljuk capital at Baghdad and were encouraged and supported in their work.

After the death of Malek Shah in 1092, Seljuk power disintegrated. Petty dynasties appeared throughout Iraq and Iran, and rival claimants to Seljuk rule dispatched each other. Between 1118 and 1194, nine Seljuk sultans ruled Baghdad; only one died a natural death. The atabegs (see Glossary), who initially had been majordomos for the Seljuks, began to assert themselves. Several founded local dynasties. An atabeg originated the Zangid Dynasty (1127–1222), with its seat at Mosul. The Zangids were instrumental in encouraging Muslims to oppose the invasions of the Christian Crusaders. Tughril (1177–94), the last Seljuk sultan of Iraq, was killed by the leader of a Turkish dynasty, the Khwarizm shahs, who lived south of the Aral Sea. Before his successor could establish Khwarizm rule in Iraq, however, Baghdad was overrun by the Mongol horde.

## The Mongol Invasion

In the early years of the thirteenth century, a powerful Mongol leader named Temujin brought together a majority of the Mongol tribes and led them on a devastating sweep through China. At about this time, he changed his name to Chinggis (Genghis) Khan, meaning "World Conqueror." In 1219 he turned his force of 700,000 west and quickly devastated Bokhara, Samarkand, Balkh, Merv (all in what is now the Soviet Union), and Neyshabur (in present-day Iran), where he slaughtered every living thing. Before his death



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in 1227, Chinggis Khan, pillaging and burning cities along the way, had reached western Azarbaijan in Iran. After Chinggis's death, the area enjoyed a brief respite that ended with the arrival of Hulagu Khan (1217–65), Chinggis's grandson. In 1258 he seized Baghdad and killed the last Abbasid caliph. While in Baghdad, Hulagu made a pyramid of the skulls of Baghdad's scholars, religious leaders, and poets, and he deliberately destroyed what remained of Iraq's canal headworks. The material and artistic production of centuries was swept away. Iraq became a neglected frontier province ruled from the Mongol capital of Tabriz in Iran.

After the death in 1335 of the last great Mongol khan, Abu Said (also known as Bahadur the Brave), a period of political confusion ensued in Iraq until a local petty dynasty, the Jalayirids, seized power. The Jalayirids ruled until the beginning of the fifteenth century. Jalayirid rule was abruptly checked by the rising power of a Mongol, Tamerlane (or Timur the Lame, 1336–1405), who had been atabeg of the reigning prince of Samarkand. In 1401 he sacked Baghdad and massacred many of its inhabitants. Tamerlane killed thousands of Iraqis and devastated hundreds of towns. Like Hulagu, Tamerlane had a penchant for building pyramids of skulls. Despite his showy display of Sunni piety, Tamerlane's rule virtually extinguished Islamic scholarship and Islamic arts everywhere except in his capital, Samarkand.

In Iraq, political chaos, severe economic depression, and social disintegration followed in the wake of the Mongol invasions. Baghdad, long a center of trade, rapidly lost its commercial importance. Basra, which had been a key transit point for seaborne commerce, was circumvented after the Portuguese discovered a shorter route around the Cape of Good Hope. In agriculture, Iraq's once-extensive irrigation system fell into disrepair, creating swamps and marshes at the edge of the delta and dry, uncultivated steppes farther out. The rapid deterioration of settled agriculture led to the growth of tribally based pastoral nomadism. By the end of the Mongol period, the focus of Iraqi history had shifted from the urban-based Abbasid culture to the tribes of the river valleys, where it would remain until well into the twentieth century.

## The Ottoman Period, 1534–1918

From the sixteenth to the twentieth century, the course of Iraqi history was affected by the continuing conflicts between the Safavid Empire in Iran and the Ottoman Turks. The Safavids, who were the first to declare Shia Islam the official religion of Iran, sought to control Iraq both because of the Shia holy places at An Najaf and Karbala and because Baghdad, the seat of the old Abbasid



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Empire, had great symbolic value. The Ottomans, fearing that Shia Islam would spread to Anatolia (Asia Minor), sought to maintain Iraq as a Sunni-controlled buffer state. In 1509 the Safavids, led by Ismail Shah (1502–24), conquered Iraq, thereby initiating a series of protracted battles with the Ottomans. In 1514 Sultan Selim the Grim attacked Ismail's forces and in 1535 the Ottomans, led by Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (1520–66), conquered Baghdad from the Safavids. The Safavids reconquered Baghdad in 1623 under the leadership of Shah Abbas (1587–1629), but they were expelled in 1638 after a series of brilliant military maneuvers by the dynamic Ottoman sultan, Murad IV (see fig. 4).

The major impact of the Safavid-Ottoman conflict on Iraqi history was the deepening of the Shia-Sunni rift. Both the Ottomans and the Safavids used Sunni and Shia Islam respectively to mobilize domestic support. Thus, Iraq's Sunni population suffered immeasurably during the brief Safavid reign (1623–38), while Iraq's Shias were excluded from power altogether during the longer period of Ottoman supremacy (1638–1916). During the Ottoman period, the Sunnis gained the administrative experience that would allow them to monopolize political power in the twentieth century. The Sunnis were able to take advantage of new economic and educational opportunities while the Shias, frozen out of the political process, remained politically impotent and economically depressed. The Shia-Sunni rift continued as an important element of Iraqi social structure in the 1980s (see Religious Life, ch. 2).

By the seventeenth century, the frequent conflicts with the Safavids had sapped the strength of the Ottoman Empire and had weakened its control over its provinces. In Iraq, tribal authority once again dominated; the history of nineteenth-century Iraq is a chronicle of tribal migrations and of conflict. The nomadic population swelled with the influx of beduins from Najd, in the Arabian Peninsula. Beduin raids on settled areas became impossible to curb. In the interior, the large and powerful Muntafiq tribal confederation took shape under the leadership of the Sunni Saadun family of Mecca. In the desert southwest, the Shammar—one of the biggest tribal confederations of the Arabian Peninsula—entered the Syrian desert and clashed with the Anayzah confederation. On the lower Tigris near Al Amarah, a new tribal confederation, the Bani Lam, took root. In the north, the Kurdish Baban Dynasty emerged and organized Kurdish resistance. The resistance made it impossible for the Ottomans to maintain even nominal suzerainty over Iraqi Kurdistan (land of the Kurds). Between 1625 and 1668, and from 1694 to 1701, local shaykhs ruled Al Basrah and the



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marshlands, home of the Madan (Marsh Arabs). The powerful shaykhs basically ignored the Ottoman governor of Baghdad.

The cycle of tribal warfare and of deteriorating urban life that began in the thirteenth century with the Mongol invasions was temporarily reversed with the reemergence of the Mamluks. In the early eighteenth century, the Mamluks began asserting authority apart from the Ottomans. Extending their rule first over Basra, the Mamluks eventually controlled the Tigris and Euphrates river valleys from the Persian Gulf to the foothills of Kurdistan. For the most part, the Mamluks were able administrators, and their rule was marked by political stability and by economic revival. The greatest of the Mamluk leaders, Suleyman the II (1780–1802), made great strides in imposing the rule of law. The last Mamluk leader, Daud (1816–31), initiated important modernization programs that included clearing canals, establishing industries, training a 20,000-man army, and starting a printing press.

The Mamluk period ended in 1831, when a severe flood and plague devastated Baghdad, enabling the Ottoman sultan, Mahmud II, to reassert Ottoman sovereignty over Iraq. Ottoman rule was unstable; Baghdad, for example, had more than ten governors between 1831 and 1869. In 1869, however, the Ottomans regained authority when the reform-minded Midhat Pasha was appointed governor of Baghdad. Midhat immediately set out to modernize Iraq on the Western model. The primary objectives of Midhat's reforms, called the *tanzimat,* were to reorganize the army, to create codes of criminal and commercial law, to secularize the school system, and to improve provincial administration. He created provincial representative assemblies to assist the governor, and he set up elected municipal councils in the major cities. Staffed largely by Iraqi notables with no strong ties to the masses, the new offices nonetheless helped a group of Iraqis gain administrative experience.

By establishing government agencies in the cities and by attempting to settle the tribes, Midhat altered the tribal-urban balance of power, which since the thirteenth century had been largely in favor of the tribes. The most important element of Midhat's plan to extend Ottoman authority into the countryside was the 1858 TAPU land law (named after the initials of the government office issuing it). The new land reform replaced the feudal system of land holdings and tax farms with legally sanctioned property rights. It was designed both to induce tribal shaykhs to settle and to give them a stake in the existing political order. In practice, the TAPU laws enabled the tribal shaykhs to become large landowners; tribesmen, fearing that the new law was an attempt to collect taxes more effectively or to impose conscription, registered community-owned



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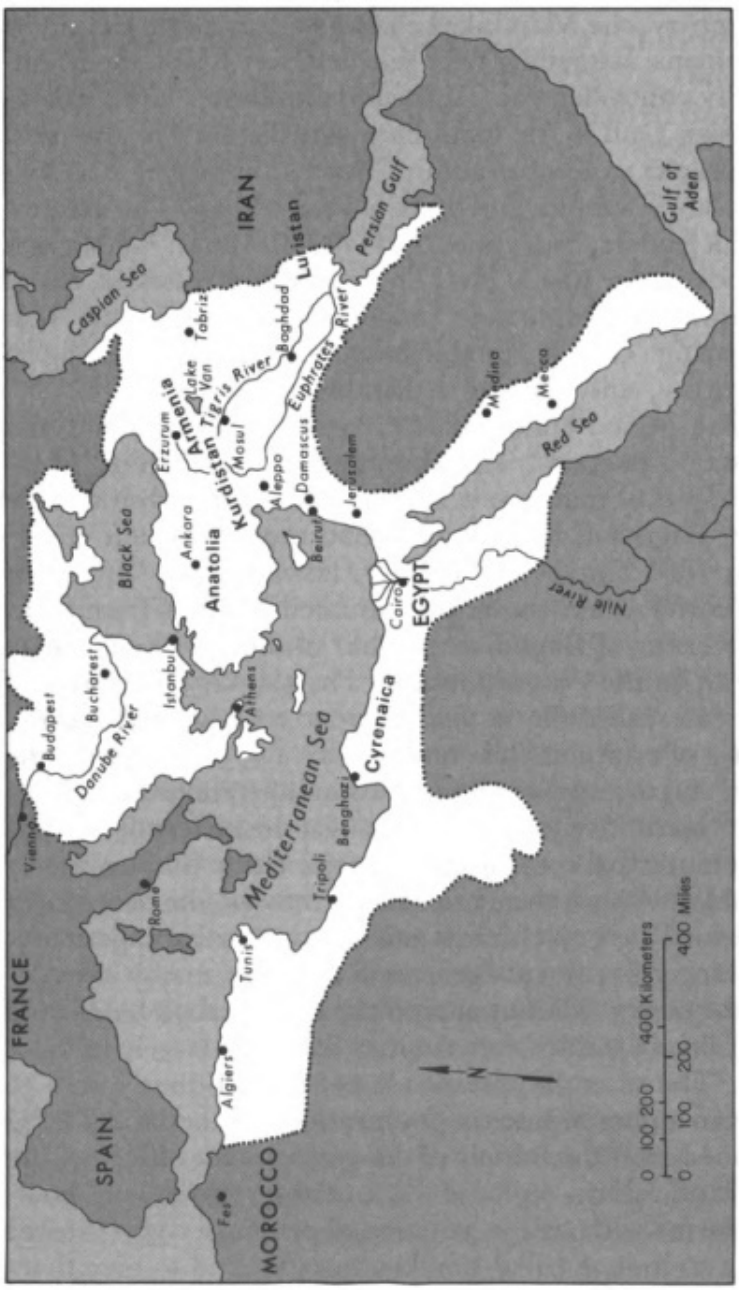


Source: Based on information from Roderic H. Davidson, *Turkey*, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1968, 51; and Philip K. Hitti, *The Near East in History*, New York, 1961, 334.

*Figure 4. The Ottoman Empire in the Mid-Seventeenth Century*



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tribal lands in their shaykhs' names or sold them outright to urban speculators. As a result, tribal shaykhs gradually were transformed into profit-seeking landlords while their tribesmen were relegated to the role of impoverished sharecroppers.

Midhat also attempted to replace Iraq's clerically run Islamic school system with a more secular educational system. The new, secular schools provided a channel of upward social mobility to children of all classes, and they led slowly to the growth of an Iraqi intelligentsia. They also introduced students for the first time to Western languages and disciplines.

The introduction of Western disciplines in the schools accompanied a greater Western political and economic presence in Iraq. The British had established a consulate at Baghdad in 1802, and a French consulate followed shortly thereafter. European interest in modernizing Iraq to facilitate Western commercial interests coincided with the Ottoman reforms. Steamboats appeared on the rivers in 1836, the telegraph was introduced in 1861, and the Suez Canal was opened in 1869, providing Iraq with greater access to European markets. The landowning tribal shaykhs began to export cash crops to the capitalist markets of the West.

In 1908 a new ruling clique, the Young Turks, took power in Istanbul. The Young Turks aimed at making the Ottoman Empire a unified nation-state based on Western models. They stressed secular politics and patriotism over the pan-Islamic ideology preached by Sultan Abd al Hamid. They reintroduced the 1876 constitution (this Ottoman constitution set forth the rights of the ruler and the ruled, but it derived from the ruler and has been called at best an "attenuated autocracy"), held elections throughout the empire, and reopened parliament. Although the Iraqi delegates represented only the well-established families of Baghdad, their parliamentary experience in Istanbul proved to be an important introduction to self-government.

Most important to the history of Iraq, the Young Turks aggressively pursued a "Turkification" policy that alienated the nascent Iraqi intelligentsia and set in motion a fledgling Arab nationalist movement. Encouraged by the Young Turks' Revolution of 1908, nationalists in Iraq stepped up their political activity. Iraqi nationalists met in Cairo with the Ottoman Decentralization Party, and some Iraqis joined the Young Arab Society, which moved to Beirut in 1913. Because of its greater exposure to Westerners who encouraged the nationalists, Basra became the center from which Iraqi nationalists began to demand a measure of autonomy. After nearly 400 years under Ottoman rule, Iraq was ill-prepared to form a nation-state. The Ottomans had failed to control Iraq's rebellious



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tribal domains, and even in the cities their authority was tenuous. The Ottomans' inability to provide security led to the growth of autonomous, self-contained communities. As a result, Iraq entered the twentieth century beset by a complex web of social conflicts that seriously impeded the process of building a modern state.

The oldest and most deeply ingrained conflict was the competition between the tribes and the cities for control over the food-producing flatlands of the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers. The centralization policies of the Sublime Porte (Ottoman government), especially in the nineteenth century, constituted a direct threat to the nomadic structure and the fierce fighting spirit of the tribes. In addition to tribal-urban conflicts, the tribes fought among themselves, and there was a fairly rigid hierarchy between the most powerful tribes, the so-called "people of the camel," and the weaker tribes that included the "people of the sheep," marshdwellers, and peasants. The cities also were sharply divided, both according to occupation and along religious lines. The various guilds resided in distinct, autonomous areas, and Shia and Sunni Muslims rarely intermingled. The territory that eventually became the state of Iraq was beset, furthermore, by regional differences in orientation; Mosul in the north had historically looked to Syria and to Turkey, whereas Baghdad and the Shia holy cities had maintained close ties with Iran and with the people of the western and southwestern deserts.

Although Ottoman weakness had allowed Iraq's self-contained communities to grow stronger, the modernization initiated by the Sublime Porte tended to break down traditional autonomous groupings and to create a new social order. Beginning with the *tanzimat* reforms in 1869, Iraq's mostly subsistence economy slowly was transformed into a market economy based on money and tied to the world capitalist market. Social status traditionally had been determined by noble lineage, by fighting prowess, and by knowledge of religion. With the advent of capitalism, social status increasingly was determined by property ownership and by the accumulation of wealth. Most disruptive in this regard was the TAPU land reform of 1858. Concomitantly, Western social and economic penetration increased; for example, Iraq's traditional crafts and craftsmen gradually were displaced by mass-produced British machine-made textiles.

The final Ottoman legacy in Iraq is related to the policies of the Young Turks and to the creation of a small but vocal Iraqi intelligentsia. Faced with the rapidly encroaching West, the Young Turks attempted to centralize the empire by imposing upon it the Turkish language and culture and by clamping down on newly won



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political freedoms. These Turkification policies alienated many of the Ottoman-trained intelligentsia who had originally aligned themselves with the Young Turks in the hope of obtaining greater Arab autonomy. Despite its relatively small size, the nascent Iraqi intelligentsia formed several secret nationalist societies. The most important of these societies was Al Ahd (the Covenant), whose membership was drawn almost entirely from Iraqi officers in the Ottoman army. Membership in Al Ahd spread rapidly in Baghdad and in Mosul, growing to 4,000 by the outbreak of World War I. Despite the existence of Al Ahd and of other, smaller, nationalist societies, Iraqi nationalism was still mainly the concern of educated Arabs from the upper and the middle classes.

## World War I and the British Mandate

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the Ottoman territories had become the focus of European power politics. During the previous century, enfeebled Ottoman rule had invited intense competition among European powers for commercial benefits and for spheres of influence. British interest in Iraq significantly increased when the Ottomans granted concessions to Germany to construct railroad lines from Konya in southwest Turkey to Baghdad in 1899 and from Baghdad to Basra in 1902. The British feared that a hostile German presence in the Fertile Crescent would threaten vital lines of communication to India via Iran and Afghanistan, menacing British oil interests in Iran and perhaps even India itself.

In 1914 when the British discovered that Turkey was entering the war on the side of the Germans, British forces from India landed at Al Faw on the Shatt al Arab and moved rapidly toward Basra. By the fall of 1915, when British forces were already well established in towns in the south, General Charles Townshend unsuccessfully attempted to take Baghdad. In retaliation, the Turks besieged the British garrison at Al Kut for 140 days; in April 1916, the garrison was forced to surrender unconditionally. The British quickly regrouped their forces, however, and resumed their advance under General Stanley Maude in December 1916. By March 1917 the British had captured Baghdad. Advancing northward in the spring of 1918, the British finally took Mosul in early November. As a result of the victory at Mosul, British authority was extended to all the Iraqi *wilayat* (sing., *wilayah*-province) with the exception of the Kurdish highlands bordering Turkey and Iran, the land alongside the Euphrates from Baghdad south to An Nasiriyah, and the Shia cities of Karbala and An Najaf.

On capturing Baghdad, General Maude proclaimed that Britain intended to return to Iraq some control of its own affairs. He



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stressed that this step would pave the way for ending the alien rule that the Iraqis had experienced since the latter days of the Abbasid caliphate. The proclamation was in accordance with the encouragement the British had given to Arab nationalists, such as Jafar al Askari; his brother-in-law, Nuri as Said; and Jamil al Midfai, who sought emancipation from Ottoman rule. The nationalists had supported the Allied powers in expectation of both the Ottoman defeat and the freedom many nationalists assumed would come with an Allied victory.

During the war, events in Iraq were greatly influenced by the Hashimite family of Husayn ibn Ali, sharif of Mecca, who claimed descent from the family of the Prophet Muhammad. Aspiring to become king of an independent Arab kingdom, Husayn had broken with the Ottomans, to whom he had been vassal, and had thrown in his lot with the British. Anxious for his support, the British gave Husayn reason to believe that he would have their endorsement when the war ended. Accordingly, Husayn and his sons led the June 1916 Arab Revolt, marching northward in conjunction with the British into Transjordan, Palestine, and Syria.

Anticipating the fulfillment of Allied pledges, Husayn's son, Prince Faisal (who was later to become modern Iraq's first king), arrived in Paris in 1919 as the chief spokesman for the Arab cause. Much to his disappointment, Faisal found that the Allied powers were less than enthusiastic about Arab independence.

At the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, under Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant, Iraq was formally made a Class A mandate entrusted to Britain. This award was completed on April 25, 1920, at the San Remo Conference in Italy. Palestine also was placed under British mandate, and Syria was placed under French mandate. Faisal, who had been proclaimed king of Syria by a Syrian national congress in Damascus in March 1920, was ejected by the French in July of the same year.

The civil government of postwar Iraq was headed originally by the high commissioner, Sir Percy Cox, and his deputy, Colonel Arnold Talbot Wilson. The British were confronted with Iraq's age-old problems, compounded by some new ones. Villagers demanded that the tribes be restrained, and tribes demanded that their titles to tribal territories be extended and confirmed. Merchants demanded more effective legal procedures, courts, and laws to protect their activities and interests. Municipal authorities appealed for defined powers and grants-in-aid in addition to the establishment of public health and education facilities. Landlords pressed for grants of land, for the building of canals and roads, and for the provision of tested seeds and livestock.



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*Entrance to the ruins of Babylon*
*Courtesy Ronald L. Kuipers*

The holy cities of An Najaf and Karbala and their satellite tribes were in a state of near anarchy. British reprisals after the murder of a British officer in An Najaf failed to restore order. The Anayzah, the Shammar, and the Jubur tribes of the western desert were beset by violent infighting. British administration had yet to be established in the mountains of Kurdistan. Meanwhile, from the Hakkari Mountains beyond Iraq's northern frontier and from the plains of Urmia in Iran, thousands of Assyrians began to pour into Iraqi territory seeking refuge from Turkish savagery. The most striking problem facing the British was the growing anger of the nationalists, who felt betrayed at being accorded mandate status. The nationalists soon came to view the mandate as a flimsy disguise for colonialism. The experienced Cox delegated governance of the country to Wilson while he served in Persia between April 1918 and October 1920. The younger man governed Iraq with the kind of paternalism that had characterized British rule in India. Impatient to establish an efficient administration, Wilson used experienced Indians to staff subordinate positions within his administration. The exclusion of Iraqis from administrative posts added humiliation to Iraqi discontent.

Three important anticolonial secret societies had been formed in Iraq during 1918 and 1919. At An Najaf, Jamiyat an Nahda al Islamiya (The League of the Islamic Awakening) was organized;



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its numerous and varied members included ulama (religious leaders), journalists, landlords, and tribal leaders. Members of the Jamiyat assassinated a British officer in the hope that the killing would act as a catalyst for a general rebellion at Iraq's other holy city, Karbala. Al Jamiya al Wataniya al Islamiya (The Muslim National League) was formed with the object of organizing and mobilizing the population for major resistance. In February 1919, in Baghdad, a coalition of Shia merchants, Sunni teachers and civil servants, Sunni and Shia ulama, and Iraqi officers formed the Haras al Istiqlal (The Guardians of Independence). The Istiqlal had member groups in Karbala, An Najaf, Al Kut, and Al Hillah.

Local outbreaks against British rule had occurred even before the news reached Iraq that the country had been given only mandate status. Upon the death of an important Shia *mujtahid* (religious scholar) in early May 1920, Sunni and Shia ulama temporarily put aside their differences as the memorial services metamorphosed into political rallies. Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, began later in that month; once again, through nationalistic poetry and oratory, religious leaders exhorted the people to throw off the bonds of imperialism. Violent demonstrations and strikes followed the British arrest of several leaders.

When the news of the mandate reached Iraq in late May, a group of Iraqi delegates met with Wilson and demanded independence. Wilson dismissed them as a "handful of ungrateful politicians." Nationalist political activity was stepped up, and the grand *mujtahid* of Karbala, Imam Shirazi, and his son, Mirza Muhammad Riza, began to organize the effort in earnest. Arab flags were made and distributed, and pamphlets were handed out urging the tribes to prepare for revolt. Muhammad Riza acted as liaison among insurgents in An Najaf and in Karbala, and the tribal confederations. Shirazi then issued a *fatwa* (religious ruling), pointing out that it was against Islamic law for Muslims to countenance being ruled by non-Muslims, and he called for a jihad against the British.

By July 1920, Mosul was in rebellion against British rule, and the insurrection moved south down the Euphrates River valley. The southern tribes, who cherished their long-held political autonomy, needed little inducement to join in the fray. They did not cooperate in an organized effort against the British, however, which limited the effect of the revolt. The country was in a state of anarchy for three months; the British restored order only with great difficulty and with the assistance of Royal Air Force bombers. British forces were obliged to send for reinforcements from India and from Iran.



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Ath Thawra al Iraqiyya al Kubra, or The Great Iraqi Revolution (as the 1920 rebellion is called), was a watershed event in contemporary Iraqi history. For the first time, Sunnis and Shias, tribes and cities, were brought together in a common effort. In the opinion of Hanna Batatu, author of a seminal work on Iraq, the building of a nation-state in Iraq depended upon two major factors: the integration of Shias and Sunnis into the new body politic and the successful resolution of the age-old conflicts between the tribes and the riverine cities and among the tribes themselves over the food-producing flatlands of the Tigris and the Euphrates. The 1920 rebellion brought these groups together, if only briefly; this constituted an important first step in the long and arduous process of forging a nation-state out of Iraq's conflict-ridden social structure.

The 1920 revolt had been very costly to the British in both manpower and money. Whitehall was under domestic pressure to devise a formula that would provide the maximum control over Iraq at the least cost to the British taxpayer. The British replaced the military regime with a provisional Arab government, assisted by British advisers and answerable to the supreme authority of the high commissioner for Iraq, Cox. The new administration provided a channel of communication between the British and the restive population, and it gave Iraqi leaders an opportunity to prepare for eventual self-government. The provisional government was aided by the large number of trained Iraqi administrators who returned home when the French ejected Faisal from Syria. Like earlier Iraqi governments, however, the provisional government was composed chiefly of Sunni Arabs; once again the Shias were underrepresented.

At the Cairo Conference of 1921, the British set the parameters for Iraqi political life that were to continue until the 1958 revolution; they chose Faisal as Iraq's first King; they established an indigenous Iraqi army; and they proposed a new treaty. To confirm Faisal as Iraq's first monarch, a one-question plebiscite was carefully arranged that had a return of 96 percent in his favor. The British saw in Faisal a leader who possessed sufficient nationalist and Islamic credentials to have broad appeal, but who also was vulnerable enough to remain dependent on their support. Faisal traced his descent from the family of the Prophet Muhammad, and his ancestors had held political authority in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina since the tenth century. The British believed that these credentials would satisfy traditional Arab standards of political legitimacy; moreover, the British thought that Faisal would be accepted by the growing Iraqi nationalist movement because of his role in the 1916 revolt against the Turks, his achievements as a



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leader of the Arab emancipation movement, and his general leadership qualities.

As a counterforce to the nationalistic inclinations of the monarchy and as a means of insuring the king's dependence, the British cultivated the tribal shaykhs, whose power had been waning since the end of the nineteenth century. While the new king sought to create a national consciousness, to strengthen the institutions of the emerging state, and especially to create a national military, the tribal shaykhs supported a fragmented community and sought to weaken the coercive power of the state. A major goal of the British policy was to keep the monarchy stronger than any one tribe but weaker than a coalition of tribes so that British power would ultimately be decisive in arbitrating disputes between the two.

Ultimately, the British-created monarchy suffered from a chronic legitimacy crisis: the concept of a monarchy was alien to Iraq. Despite his Islamic and pan-Arab credentials, Faisal was not an Iraqi, and, no matter how effectively he ruled, Iraqis saw the monarchy as a British creation. The continuing inability of the government to gain the confidence of the people fueled political instability well into the 1970s.

The British decision at the Cairo Conference to establish an indigenous Iraqi army was significant. In Iraq, as in most of the developing world, the military establishment has been the best organized institution in an otherwise weak political system. Thus, while Iraq's body politic crumbled under immense political and economic pressure throughout the monarchic period, the military gained increasing power and influence; moreover, because the officers in the new army were by necessity Sunnis who had served under the Ottomans, while the lower ranks were predominantly filled by Shia tribal elements, Sunni dominance in the military was preserved.

The final major decision taken at the Cairo Conference related to the new Anglo-Iraqi Treaty. Faisal was under pressure from the nationalists and the anti-British *mujtahids* of An Najaf and Karbala to limit both British influence in Iraq and the duration of the treaty. Recognizing that the monarchy depended on British support—and wishing to avoid a repetition of his experience in Syria—Faisal maintained a moderate approach in dealing with Britain. The twenty-year treaty, which was ratified in October 1922, stated that the king would heed British advice on all matters affecting British interests and on fiscal policy as long as Iraq was in debt to Britain, and that British officials would be appointed to specified posts in eighteen departments to act as advisers and inspectors. A subsequent financial agreement, which significantly increased the financial



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burden on Iraq, required Iraq to pay half the cost of supporting British resident officials, among other expenses. British obligations under the new treaty included providing various kinds of aid, notably military assistance, and proposing Iraq for membership in the League of Nations at the earliest moment. In effect, the treaty ensured that Iraq would remain politically and economically dependent on Britain. While unable to prevent the treaty, Faisal clearly felt that the British had gone back on their promises to him.

After the treaty had been signed, Iraq readied itself for the country-wide elections that had been provided for in the May 1922 Electoral Law. There were important changes in the government at this time. Cox resigned his position as high commissioner and was replaced by Sir Henry Dobbs; Iraq's aging prime minister, Abd ar Rahman al Gailani, stepped down and was replaced by Abd al Muhsin as Saadun. In April 1923, Saadun signed a protocol that shortened the treaty period to four years. As a result of the elections, however, Saadun was replaced by Jafar al Askari, a veteran of the Arab Revolt and an early supporter of Faisal.

The elected Constituent Assembly met for the first time in March 1924, and it formally ratified the treaty despite strong (and sometimes physical) opposition on the part of many in the assembly. The assembly also accepted the Organic Law that declared Iraq to be a sovereign state with a representative system of government and a hereditary constitutional monarchy. The newly ratified constitution—which, along with the treaty, had been hotly debated—legislated an important British role in Iraqi affairs. The major issue at stake in the constitutional debate revolved around the powers of the monarchy. In the final draft, British interests prevailed, and the monarchy was granted wide-ranging powers that included the right to confirm all laws, to call for a general election, to prorogue parliament, and to issue ordinances for the fulfillment of treaty obligations without parliamentary sanctions. Like the treaty, the constitution provided the British with a means of indirect control in Iraq.

After the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty was ratified, the most pressing issue confronting the newly established constitutional monarchy was the question of boundaries, especially in the former Ottoman *wilayah* of Mosul, now known as Mosul Province. The status of Mosul Province was complicated by two factors, the British desire to gain oil concessions and the existence of a majority Kurdish population that was seeking independence apart from either Iraq or Turkey. According to the Treaty of Sèvres, concluded in 1920 with the Ottoman sultan, Mosul was to be part of an autonomous Kurdish state. The treaty was scrapped, however, when nationalist



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leader Mustafa Kamal (1881–1938—also known as Atatürk) came to power in Turkey and established control over the Kurdish areas in eastern Turkey. In 1923, after two failed British attempts to establish an autonomous Kurdish province, London decided to include the Kurds in the new Iraqi state with the proviso that Kurds would hold government positions in Kurdish areas and that the Kurdish language would be preserved. The British decision to include Mosul in Iraq was based largely on their belief that the area contained large oil deposits.

Before the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the British-controlled Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC) had held concessionary rights to the Mosul *wilayah*. Under the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement—an agreement in 1916 between Britain and France that delineated future control of the Middle East—the area would have fallen under French influence. In 1919, however, the French relinquished their claims to Mosul under the terms of the Long-Berenger Agreement. The 1919 agreement granted the French a 25 percent share in the TPC as compensation.

Beginning in 1923, British and Iraqi negotiators held acrimonious discussions over the new oil concession. The major obstacle was Iraq's insistence on a 20-percent equity participation in the company; this figure had been included in the original TPC concession to the Turks and had been agreed upon at San Remo for the Iraqis. In the end, despite strong nationalist sentiments against the concession agreement, the Iraqi negotiators acquiesced to it. The League of Nations was soon to vote on the disposition of Mosul, and the Iraqis feared that, without British support, Iraq would lose the area to Turkey. In March 1925, an agreement was concluded that contained none of the Iraqi demands. The TPC, now renamed the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), was granted a concession for a period of seventy-five years.

In 1925 the League of Nations decided that Mosul Province would be considered a part of Iraq, but it also suggested that the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty be extended from four to twenty-five years as a protection for the Kurdish minority, who intensely distrusted the Iraqi government. The Iraqis also were to give due regard to Kurdish sensibilities in matters of culture and of language. Although reluctant to do so, the Iraqi assembly ratified the treaty in January 1926. Turkey was eventually reconciled to the loss by being promised one-tenth of any oil revenues that might accrue in the area, and a tripartite Anglo-Turco-Iraqi treaty was signed in July 1926. This settlement was to have important repercussions, both positive and negative, for the future of Iraq. Vast oil revenues would accrue from the Mosul Province, but the inclusion of a large number



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of well-armed and restless Kurds in Iraqi territory would continue to plague Iraqi governments.

With the signing of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty and the settling of the Mosul question, Iraqi politics took on a new dynamic. The emerging class of Sunni and Shia landowning tribal shaykhs vied for positions of power with wealthy and prestigious urban-based Sunni families and with Ottoman-trained army officers and bureaucrats. Because Iraq's newly established political institutions were the creation of a foreign power, and because the concept of democratic government had no precedent in Iraqi history, the politicians in Baghdad lacked legitimacy and never developed deeply rooted constituencies. Thus, despite a constitution and an elected assembly, Iraqi politics was more a shifting alliance of important personalities and cliques than a democracy in the Western sense. The absence of broadly based political institutions inhibited the early nationalist movement's ability to make deep inroads into Iraq's diverse social structure. Thus, despite the widely felt resentment at Iraq's mandate status, the burgeoning nationalist movement was largely ineffective.

Nonetheless, through the late 1920s, the nationalists persisted in opposing the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty and in demanding independence. A treaty more favorable to the Iraqis was presented in December 1927. It remained unratified, however, because of nationalist demands for an unconditional promise of independence. This promise eventually was made by the new high commissioner, Sir Gilbert Clayton, in 1929, but the confusion occasioned by the sudden death of Clayton and by the suicide of Abd al Muhsin as Saadun, the most powerful Iraqi advocate of the treaty, delayed the writing of a new treaty. In June 1929, the nationalists received their first positive response from London when a newly elected Labour Party government announced its intention to support Iraq's admission to the League of Nations in 1932 and to negotiate a new treaty recognizing Iraq's independence.

Faisal's closest adviser (and soon-to-be Iraqi strongman), Nuri as Said, carried out the treaty negotiations. Despite widespread opposition, Nuri as Said was able to force the treaty through parliament. The new Anglo-Iraqi Treaty was signed in June 1930. It provided for a "close alliance," for "full and frank consultations between the two countries in all matters of foreign policy," and for mutual assistance in case of war. Iraq granted the British the use of air bases near Basra and at Al Habbaniyah and the right to move troops across the country. The treaty, of twenty-five years' duration, was to come into force upon Iraq's admission to the League of Nations. The terms of the treaty gained Nuri as Said



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favor in British eyes but discredited him in the eyes of the Iraqi nationalists, who vehemently opposed its lengthy duration and the leasing of air bases. The Kurds and the Assyrians also opposed the treaty because it offered no guarantees for their status in the new country.

## Iraq as an Independent Monarchy

On October 13, 1932, Iraq became a sovereign state, and it was admitted to the League of Nations. Iraq still was beset by a complex web of social, economic, ethnic, religious, and ideological conflicts, all of which retarded the process of state formation. The declaration of statehood and the imposition of fixed boundaries triggered an intense competition for power in the new entity. Sunnis and Shias, cities and tribes, shaykhs and tribesmen, Assyrians and Kurds, pan-Arabists and Iraqi nationalists—all fought vigorously for places in the emerging state structure. Ultimately, lacking legitimacy and unable to establish deep roots, the British-imposed political system was overwhelmed by these conflicting demands.

The Sunni-Shia conflict, a problem since the beginning of domination by the Umayyad caliphate in 661, continued to frustrate attempts to mold Iraq into a political community. The Shia tribes of the southern Euphrates, along with urban Shias, feared complete Sunni domination in the government. Their concern was well founded; a disproportionate number of Sunnis occupied administrative positions. Favored by the Ottomans, the Sunnis historically had gained much more administrative experience. The Shias' depressed economic situation further widened the Sunni-Shia split, and it intensified Shia efforts to obtain a greater share of the new state's budget.

The arbitrary borders that divided Iraq and the other Arab lands of the old Ottoman Empire caused severe economic dislocations, frequent border disputes, and a debilitating ideological conflict. The cities of Mosul in the north and Basra in the south, separated from their traditional trading partners in Syria and in Iran, suffered severe commercial dislocations that led to economic depression. In the south, the British-created border (drawn through the desert on the understanding that the region was largely uninhabited) impeded migration patterns and led to great tribal unrest. Also in the south, uncertainty surrounding Iraq's new borders with Kuwait, with Saudi Arabia, and especially with Iran led to frequent border skirmishes. The new boundaries also contributed to the growth of competing nationalisms; Iraqi versus pan-Arab loyalties would severely strain Iraqi politics during the 1950s and the 1960s, when Egyptian leader Gamal Abdul Nasser held emotional sway over the Iraqi masses.



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Ethnic groups such as the Kurds and the Assyrians, who had hoped for their own autonomous states, rebelled against inclusion within the Iraqi state. The Kurds, the majority of whom lived in the area around Mosul, had long been noted for their fierce spirit of independence and separatism. During the 1922 to 1924 period, the Kurds had engaged in a series of revolts in response to British encroachment in areas of traditional Kurdish autonomy; moreover, the Kurds preferred Turkish to Arab rule. When the League of Nations awarded Mosul to Iraq in 1925, Kurdish hostility thus increased. The Iraqi government maintained an uneasy peace with the Kurds in the first year of independence, but Kurdish hostility would remain an intractable problem for future governments.

From the start, the relationship of the Iraqi government with the Assyrians was openly hostile. Britain had resettled 20,000 Assyrians in northern Iraq around Zakhu and Dahuk after Turkey violently quelled a British-inspired Assyrian rebellion in 1918. As a result, approximately three-fourths of the Assyrians who had sided with the British during World War I now found themselves citizens of Iraq. The Assyrians found this situation both objectionable and dangerous. Thousands of Assyrians had been incorporated into the Iraq Levies, a British-paid and British-officered force separate from the regular Iraqi army. They had been encouraged by the British to consider themselves superior to the majority of Arab Iraqis by virtue of their profession of Christianity. The British also had used them for retaliatory operations against the Kurds, in whose lands most of the Assyrians had settled. Pro-British, they had been apprehensive of Iraqi independence.

The Assyrians had hoped to form a nation-state in a region of their own. When no unoccupied area sufficiently large could be found, the Assyrians continued to insist that, at the very least, their patriarch, the Mar Shamun, be given some temporal authority. This demand was flatly refused by both the British and the Iraqis. In response, the Assyrians, who had been permitted by the British to retain their weapons after the dissolution of the Iraq Levies, flaunted their strength and refused to recognize the government. In retaliation the Iraqi authorities held the Mar Shamun under virtual house arrest in mid-1933, making his release contingent on his signing a document renouncing forever any claims to temporal authority. During July about 800 armed Assyrians headed for the Syrian border. For reasons that have never been explained, they were repelled by the Syrians. During this time, King Faisal was outside the country for reasons of health. According to scholarly sources, Minister of Interior Hikmat Sulayman had adopted a policy aimed at the elimination of the Assyrians. This policy apparently



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was implemented by a Kurd, General Bakr Sidqi, who, after engaging in several clashes with the Assyrians, permitted his men to kill about 300 Assyrians, including women and children, at the Assyrian village of Simel (Sumayyil).

The Assyrian affair marked the military's entrance into Iraqi politics, setting a precedent that would be followed throughout the 1950s and the 1960s. It also paved the way for the passage of a conscription law that strengthened the army and, as increasing numbers of tribesmen were brought into military service, sapped strength from the tribal shaykhs. The Assyrian affair also set the stage for the increased prominence of Bakr Sidqi.

At the time of independence, tribal Iraq was experiencing a destabilizing realignment characterized by the waning role of the shaykhs in tribal society. The privatization of property rights, begun with the *tanzimat* reforms in the late 1860s, intensified when the British-supported Lazmah land reform of 1932 dispossessed even greater numbers of tribesmen. While the British were augmenting the economic power of the shaykhs, however, the tribal-urban balance was rapidly shifting in favor of the cities. The accelerated pace of modernization and the growth of a highly nationalistic intelligentsia, of a bureaucracy, and of a powerful military, all favored the cities. Thus, while the economic position of the shaykhs had improved significantly, their role in tribal society and their status in relation to the rapidly emerging urban elite had seriously eroded. These contradictory trends in tribal structure and authority pushed tribal Iraq into a major social revolution that would last for the next thirty years.

The ascendancy of the cities and the waning power of the tribes were most evident in the ease with which the military, led by Bakr Sidqi, put down tribal unrest. The tribal revolts themselves were set off by the government's decision in 1934 to allocate money for the new conscription plan rather than for a new dam, which would have improved agricultural productivity in the south.

The monarchy's ability to deal with tribal unrest suffered a major setback in September 1933, when King Faisal died while undergoing medical treatment in Switzerland. Faisal's death meant the loss of the main stabilizing personality in Iraqi politics. He was the one figure with sufficient prestige to draw the politicians together around a concept of national interest. Faisal was succeeded by his twenty-one-year-old son, Ghazi (1933–39), an ardent but inexperienced Arab nationalist. Unlike his father, Ghazi was a product of Western education and had little experience with the complexities of Iraqi tribal life. Ghazi also was unable to balance nationalist and British pressures within the framework of the Anglo-Iraqi



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*A statue of a lion at Babylon*
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*Bas relief, Babylon*
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alliance; increasingly, the nationalist movement saw the monarchy as a British puppet. Iraqi politics during Ghazi's reign degenerated into a meaningless competition among narrowly based tribal shaykhs and urban notables that further eroded the legitimacy of the state and its constitutional structures.

In 1936 Iraq experienced its first military coup d'état—the first coup d'état in the modern Arab world. The agents of the coup, General Bakr Sidqi and two politicians (Hikmat Sulayman and Abu Timman, who were Turkoman and Shia respectively), represented a minority response to the pan-Arab Sunni government of Yasin al Hashimi. The eighteen-month Hashimi government was the most successful and the longest lived of the eight governments that came and went during the reign of King Ghazi. Hashimi's government was nationalistic and pan-Arab, but many Iraqis resented its authoritarianism and its suppression of honest dissent. Sulayman, a reformer, sought to engineer an alliance of other reformers and minority elements within the army. The reformers included communists, orthodox and unorthodox socialists, and persons with more moderate positions. Most of the more moderate reformers were associated with the leftist-leaning *Al Ahali* newspaper, from which their group took its name.

The Sidqi coup marked a major turning point in Iraqi history; it made a crucial breach in the constitution, and it opened the door to further military involvement in politics. It also temporarily displaced the elite that had ruled since the state was founded; the new government contained few Arab Sunnis and not a single advocate of a pan-Arab cause. This configuration resulted in a foreign policy oriented toward Turkey and Iran instead of toward the Arab countries. The new government promptly signed an agreement with Iran, temporarily settling the question of boundary between Iraq and Iran in the Shatt al Arab. Iran maintained that it had agreed under British pressure to the international boundary's being set at the low water mark on the Iranian side rather than the usual international practice of the midpoint or thalweg.

After Bakr Sidqi moved against Baghdad, Sulayman formed an Ahali cabinet. Hashimi and Rashid Ali were banished, and Nuri as Said fled to Egypt. In the course of the assault on Baghdad, Nuri as Said's brother-in-law, Minister of Defense Jafar Askari, was killed.

Ghazi sanctioned Sulayman's government even though it had achieved power unconstitutionally; nevertheless, the coalition of forces that gained power in 1936 was beset by major contradictions. The Ahali group was interested in social reform whereas Sidqi and his supporters in the military were interested in expansion.



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Sidqi, moreover, alienated important sectors of the population: the nationalists in the army resented him because of his Kurdish background and because he encouraged Kurds to join the army; the Shias abhorred him because of his brutal suppression of a tribal revolt the previous year; and Nuri as Said sought revenge for the murder of his brother-in-law. Eventually, Sidqi's excesses alienated both his civilian and his military supporters, and he was murdered by a military group in August 1937.

In April 1939, Ghazi was killed in an automobile accident and was succeeded by his infant son, Faisal II. Ghazi's first cousin, Amir Abd al Ilah, was made regent. The death of Ghazi and the rise of Prince Abd al Ilah and Nuri as Said—the latter one of the Ottoman-trained officers who had fought with Sharif Husayn of Mecca—dramatically changed both the goals and the role of the monarchy. Whereas Faisal and Ghazi had been strong Arab nationalists and had opposed the British-supported tribal shaykhs, Abd al Ilah and Nuri as Said were Iraqi nationalists who relied on the tribal shaykhs as a counterforce against the growing urban nationalist movement. By the end of the 1930s, pan-Arabism had become a powerful ideological force in the Iraqi military, especially among younger officers who hailed from the northern provinces and who had suffered economically from the partition of the Ottoman Empire. The British role in quelling the Palestine revolt of 1936 to 1939 further intensified anti-British sentiments in the military and led a group of disgruntled officers to form the Free Officers' Movement, which aimed at overthrowing the monarchy.

As World War II approached, Nazi Germany attempted to capitalize on the anti-British sentiments in Iraq and to woo Baghdad to the Axis cause. In 1939 Iraq severed diplomatic relations with Germany—as it was obliged to do because of treaty obligations with Britain. In 1940, however, the Iraqi nationalist and ardent anglophobe Rashid Ali succeeded Nuri as Said as prime minister. The new prime minister was reluctant to break completely with the Axis powers, and he proposed restrictions on British troop movements in Iraq.

Abd al Ilah and Nuri as Said both were proponents of close cooperation with Britain. They opposed Rashid Ali's policies and pressed him to resign. In response, Rashid Ali and four generals led a military coup that ousted Nuri as Said and the regent, both of whom escaped to Transjordan. Shortly after seizing power in 1941, Rashid Ali appointed an ultranationalist civilian cabinet, which gave only conditional consent to British requests in April 1941 for troop landings in Iraq. The British quickly retaliated by landing forces at Basra, justifying this second occupation of Iraq



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by citing Rashid Ali's violation of the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1930. Many Iraqis regarded the move as an attempt to restore British rule. They rallied to the support of the Iraqi army, which received a number of aircraft from the Axis powers. The Germans, however, were preoccupied with campaigns in Crete and with preparations for the invasion of the Soviet Union, and they could spare little assistance to Iraq. As the British steadily advanced, Rashid Ali and his government fled to Egypt. An armistice was signed on May 30. Abd al Ilah returned as regent, and Rashid Ali and the four generals were tried in absentia and were sentenced to death. The generals returned to Iraq and were subsequently executed, but Rashid Ali remained in exile.

The most important aspect of the Rashid Ali coup of 1941 was Britain's use of Transjordan's Arab Legion against the Iraqis and their reimposition by force of arms of Abd al Ilah as regent. Nothing contributed more to nationalist sentiment in Iraq, especially in the military, than the British invasion of 1941 and the reimposition of the monarchy. From then on, the monarchy was completely divorced from the powerful nationalist trend. Widely viewed as an anachronism that lacked popular legitimacy, the monarchy was perceived to be aligned with social forces that were retarding the country's development.

In January 1943, under the terms of the 1930 treaty with Britain, Iraq declared war on the Axis powers. Iraq cooperated completely with the British under the successive governments of Nuri as Said (1941–44) and Hamdi al Pachachi (1944–46). Iraq became a base for the military occupation of Iran and of the Levant (see Glossary). In March 1945, Iraq became a founding member of the British-supported League of Arab States (Arab League), which included Egypt, Transjordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen. Although the Arab League was ostensibly designed to foster Arab unity, many Arab nationalists viewed it as a British-dominated alignment of pro-Western Arab states. In December 1945, Iraq joined the United Nations (UN).

World War II exacerbated Iraq's social and economic problems. The spiraling prices and shortages brought on by the war increased the opportunity for exploitation and significantly widened the gap between rich and poor; thus, while wealthy landowners were enriching themselves through corruption, the salaried middle class, including teachers, civil servants, and army officers, saw their incomes depreciate daily. Even worse off were the peasants, who lived under the heavy burden of the 1932 land reform that permitted their landlords (shaykhs) to make huge profits selling cash crops to the British occupying force. The worsening economic situation of the mass



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of Iraqis during the 1950s and the 1960s enabled the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) to establish deep roots during this period.

In addition to its festering socioeconomic problems, post-World War II Iraq was beset by a leadership crisis. After the 1941 Rashid Ali coup, Iraqi politics had been dominated by the pro-British Nuri as Said. The latter's British orientation and autocratic manner increasingly were at variance with the liberal, reformist philosophy of Iraq's new nationalists. Even before the end of the war, nationalists had demanded the restoration of political activity, which had been banned during the war in the interest of national security. Not until the government of Tawfiq Suwaidi (February–March 1946), however, were political parties allowed to organize. Within a short period, six parties were formed. The parties soon became so outspoken in their criticism of the government that the government closed or curtailed the activities of the more extreme leftist parties.

Accumulated grievances against Nuri as Said and the regent climaxed in the 1948 Wathbah (uprising). The Wathbah was a protest against the Portsmouth Treaty of January 1948 and its provision that a board of Iraqis and British be established to decide on defense matters of mutual interest. The treaty enraged Iraqi nationalists, who were still bitter over the Rashid Ali coup of 1941 and the continued influence of the British in Iraqi affairs. The uprising also was fueled by widespread popular discontent over rising prices, by an acute bread shortage, and by the regime's failure to liberalize the political system.

The Wathbah had three important effects on Iraqi politics. First, and most directly, it led Nuri as Said and the regent to repudiate the Portsmouth Treaty. Second, the success of the uprising led the opposition to intensify its campaign to discredit the regime. This activity not only weakened the monarchy but also seriously eroded the legitimacy of the political process. Finally, the uprising created a schism between Nuri as Said and Abd al Ilah. The former wanted to tighten political control and to deal harshly with the opposition; the regent advocated a more tempered approach. In response, the British increasingly mistrusted the regent and relied more and more on Nuri as Said.

Iraq bitterly objected to the 1947 UN decision to partition Palestine and sent several hundred recruits to the Palestine front when hostilities broke out on May 15, 1948. Iraq sent an additional 8,000 to 10,000 troops of the regular army during the course of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War; these troops were withdrawn in April 1949. The Iraqis had arrived at the Palestine front poorly equipped and undertrained because of the drastic reduction in defense expenditures



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imposed by Nuri as Said following the 1941 Rashid Ali coup. As a result, they fared very poorly in the fighting and returned to Iraq even more alienated from the regime. The war also had a negative impact on the Iraqi economy. The government allocated 40 percent of available funds for the army and for Palestinian refugees. Oil royalties paid to Iraq were halved when the pipeline to Haifa was cut off in 1948. The war and the hanging of a Jewish businessman led, moreover, to the departure of most of Iraq's prosperous Jewish community; about 120,000 Iraqi Jews emigrated to Israel between 1948 and 1952.

In 1952 the depressed economic situation, which had been exacerbated by a bad harvest and by the government's refusal to hold direct elections, triggered large-scale antiregime protests; the protests turned especially violent in Baghdad. In response, the government declared martial law, banned all political parties, suspended a number of newspapers, and imposed a curfew. The immense size of the protests showed how widespread dissatisfaction with the regime had become. The middle class, which had grown considerably as a result of the monarchy's expanded education system, had become increasingly alienated from the regime, in large part because they were unable to earn an income commensurate with their status. Nuri as Said's autocratic manner, his intolerance of dissent, and his heavy-handed treatment of the political opposition had further alienated the middle class, especially the army. Forced underground, the opposition had become more revolutionary.

By the early 1950s, government revenues began to improve with the growth of the oil industry. New pipelines were built to Tripoli, Lebanon, in 1949 and to Baniyas, Syria, in 1952. A new oil agreement, concluded in 1952, netted the government 50 percent of oil company profits before taxes. As a result, government oil revenues increased almost fourfold, from US$32 million in 1951 to US$112 million in 1952. The increased oil payments, however, did little for the masses. Corruption among high government officials increased; oil companies employed relatively few Iraqis; and the oil boom also had a severe inflationary effect on the economy. Inflation hurt in particular a growing number of urban poor and the salaried middle class. The increased economic power of the state further isolated Nuri as Said and the regent from Iraqi society and obscured from their view the tenuous nature of the monarchy's hold on power.

In the mid-1950s, the monarchy was embroiled in a series of foreign policy blunders that ultimately contributed to its overthrow. Following a 1949 military coup in Syria that brought to power Adib Shishakli, a military strongman who opposed union with Iraq, a



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split developed between Abd al Ilah, who had called for a Syrian-Iraqi union, and Nuri as Said, who opposed the union plan. Although Shishakli was overthrown with Iraqi help in 1954, the union plan never came to fruition. Instead, the schism between Nuri as Said and the regent widened. Sensing the regime's weakness, the opposition intensified its antiregime activity.

The monarchy's major foreign policy mistake occurred in 1955, when Nuri as Said announced that Iraq was joining a British-supported mutual defense pact with Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. The Baghdad Pact constituted a direct challenge to Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser. In response, Nasser launched a vituperative media campaign that challenged the legitimacy of the Iraqi monarchy and called on the officer corps to overthrow it. The 1956 British-French-Israeli attack on Sinai further alienated Nuri as Said's regime from the growing ranks of the opposition. In 1958 King Hussein of Jordan and Abd al Ilah proposed a union of Hashimite monarchies to counter the recently formed Egyptian-Syrian union. At this point, the monarchy found itself completely isolated. Nuri as Said was able to contain the rising discontent only by resorting to even greater oppression and to tighter control over the political process.

## Republican Iraq

The Hashimite monarchy was overthrown on July 14, 1958, in a swift, predawn coup executed by officers of the Nineteenth Brigade under the leadership of Brigadier Abd al Karim Qasim and Colonel Abd as Salaam Arif. The coup was triggered when King Hussein, fearing that an anti-Western revolt in Lebanon might spread to Jordan, requested Iraqi assistance. Instead of moving toward Jordan, however, Colonel Arif led a battalion into Baghdad and immediately proclaimed a new republic and the end of the old regime. The July 14 Revolution met virtually no opposition and proclamations of the revolution brought crowds of people into the streets of Baghdad cheering for the deaths of Iraq's two "strong men," Nuri as Said and Abd al Ilah. King Faisal II and Abd al Ilah were executed, as were many others in the royal family. Nuri as Said also was killed after attempting to escape disguised as a veiled woman. In the ensuing mob demonstrations against the old order, angry crowds severely damaged the British embassy.

Put in its historical context, the July 14 Revolution was the culmination of a series of uprisings and coup attempts that began with the 1936 Bakr Sidqi coup and included the 1941 Rashid Ali military movement, the 1948 Wathbah Uprising, and the 1952 and 1956 protests. The revolution radically altered Iraq's social structure,



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destroying the power of the landed shaykhs and the absentee landlords while enhancing the position of the urban workers, the peasants, and the middle class. In altering the old power structure, however, the revolution revived long-suppressed sectarian, tribal, and ethnic conflicts. The strongest of these conflicts were those between Kurds and Arabs and between Sunnis and Shias.

Despite a shared military background, the group of Free Officers (see Glossary) that carried out the July 14 Revolution was plagued by internal dissension. Its members lacked both a coherent ideology and an effective organizational structure. Many of the more senior officers resented having to take orders from Arif, their junior in rank. A power struggle developed between Qasim and Arif over joining the Egyptian-Syrian union. Arif's pro-Nasserite sympathies were supported by the Baath Party, while Qasim found support for his anti-union position in the ranks of the communists. Qasim, the more experienced and higher ranking of the two, eventually emerged victorious. Arif was first dismissed, then brought to trial for treason and condemned to death in January 1959; he was subsequently pardoned in December 1962.

Whereas he implemented many reforms that favored the poor, Qasim was primarily a centrist in outlook, proposing to improve the lot of the poor while not dispossessing the wealthy. In part, his ambiguous policies were a product of his lack of a solid base of support, especially in the military. Unlike the bulk of military officers, Qasim did not come from the Arab Sunni northwestern towns nor did he share their enthusiasm for pan-Arabism: he was of mixed Sunni-Shia parentage from southeastern Iraq. Qasim's ability to remain in power depended, therefore, on a skillful balancing of the communists and the pan-Arabists. For most of his tenure, Qasim sought to counterbalance the growing pan-Arab trend in the military by supporting the communists who controlled the streets. He authorized the formation of a communist-controlled militia, the People's Resistance Force, and he freed all communist prisoners.

Qasim's economic policies reflected his poor origins and his ties with the communists. He permitted trade unions, improved workers' conditions, and implemented land reform aimed at dismantling the old feudal structure of the countryside. Qasim also challenged the existing profit-sharing arrangements with the oil companies. On December 11, 1961, he passed Public Law 80, which dispossessed the IPC of 99.5 percent of its concession area, leaving it to operate only in those areas currently in production. The new arrangement significantly increased oil revenues accruing to the government. Qasim also announced the establishment of an Iraq National Oil Company (INOC) to exploit the new territory.



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In March 1959, a group of disgruntled Free Officers, who came from conservative, well-known, Arab Sunni families and who opposed Qasim's increasing links with the communists, attempted a coup. Aware of the planned coup, Qasim had his communist allies mobilize 250,000 of their supporters in Mosul. The ill-planned coup attempt never really materialized and, in its aftermath, the communists massacred nationalists and some well-to-do Mosul families, leaving deep scars that proved to be very slow to heal.

Throughout 1959 the ranks of the ICP swelled as the party increased its presence in both the military and the government. In 1959 Qasim reestablished diplomatic relations between Iraq and Moscow, an extensive Iraqi-Soviet economic agreement was signed, and arms deliveries began. With communist fortunes riding high, another large-scale show of force was planned in Kirkuk, where a significant number of Kurds (many of them either members of, or sympathetic to, the ICP) lived in neighborhoods contiguous to a Turkoman upper class. In Kirkuk, however, communist rallies got out of hand. A bloody battle ensued, and the Kurds looted and killed many Turkomans. The communist-initiated violence at Kirkuk led Qasim to crack down on the organization, by arresting some of the more unruly rank-and-file members and by temporarily suspending the People's Resistance Force. Following the events at Mosul and at Kirkuk, the Baath and its leader, Fuad Rikabi, decided that the only way to dislodge the Qasim regime would be to kill Qasim (see Coups, Coup Attempts, and Foreign Policy, this ch.). The future president, Saddam Husayn, carried out the attempted assassination, which injured Qasim but failed to kill him. Qasim reacted by softening his stance on the communists and by suppressing the activities of the Baath and other nationalist parties. The renewed communist-Qasim relationship did not last long, however. Throughout 1960 and 1961, sensing that the communists had become too strong, Qasim again moved against the party by eliminating members from sensitive government positions, by cracking down on trade unions and on peasant associations, and by shutting down the communist press.

Qasim's divorce from the communists, his alienation from the nationalists, his aloof manner, and his monopoly of power—he was frequently referred to as the "sole leader"—isolated him from a domestic power base. In 1961 his tenuous hold on power was further weakened when the Kurds again took up arms against the central government.

The Kurds had ardently supported the 1958 revolution. Indeed, the new constitution put forth by Qasim and Arif had stipulated that the Kurds and the Arabs would be equal partners in the new



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