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Kurds and Kurdistan in the View of British Travellers in the Nineteenth Century

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Qadir Muhammad Muhammad

School of History, Politics & International Relations

University of Leicester

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Abstract

Qadir Muhammad Muhammad

This thesis is the first critical study of British travel writing on Kurdistan in the nineteenth century based upon travellers' accounts and unpublished reports of diplomats. The principal aim is to identify which aspects of Kurdish society and culture were highlighted by the British and to analyse what factors influenced British representations of the region and its people. The travellers' emphasis upon Kurdish culture and the Kurds' tribal culture, for example, is discussed in terms of contemporary interest in enlightenment sociology and the emergence of anthropology. A second key aim is to establish how far the British understood Kurds from their perspective on people in the East, whether they saw them as part of a homogeneous group of people, and the extent to which they recognised Kurds as culturally, socially, politically, and geographically. Finally, this thesis examines the importance of the Kurdish regions to the British imperial agenda.

This research has made some important findings: firstly, it has confirmed that the British travellers were inclined to represent the Kurds as different from the other Muslim societies and therefore complicates our understanding of British views of the Ottoman and Persian empires in the nineteenth century. It shows that although the British depicted the Kurds as barbarous and quarrelsome, their accounts of Kurdistan did not fit a straightforward 'Orientalist' model, particularly with regard to their observations on Kurdish women and the decline of the nomadic lifestyle. As nationalism was a common ideology throughout nineteenth-century Europe, a number of British travellers tried to depict Kurdish movements as nationalist activities; however, it is argued that these accounts should not be taken as straightforward evidence for the existence of nationalist sentiment. Finally, one of the key motives for British travel in the region was to further the imperial economic agenda by identifying potential markets and resources. British travellers had a significant impact on British

policy makers, as the presence of oilfields which they had identified led the British to keep Kurdistan under its mandate after the First World War.

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Table of Content

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Content.....	iv
List of Figures	vii
List of Abbreviations	viii
Introduction	1
Importance of the Research.....	3
Research Focus.....	5
Selected travellers.....	12
Research questions	23
Sources	24
Thesis structure.....	25
Chapter 1 Travel Writing and British Perspectives	28
Introduction	28
Travel Writing.....	29
Genres of Travel Writing	31
Patterns of Travel.....	35
Who Travelled	38
Travellers in the Middle East.....	40
Travellers and antiquity	44
Anthropology	48
Conclusion.....	52
Chapter 2 The Kurds and Kurdistan in the view of British travellers	53
Introduction	53
The Origin of the Kurds	53

Travellers' observations on the characteristics of Tribal and Non-Tribal Kurds	59
Christian Denominations.....	66
Geography of Kurdistan	73
Conclusion	81
Chapter 3 Kurdish Nationalism in the View of the British Travellers.....	82
Introduction	82
The Role of Ethnicity in Emerging Nationalism	84
British observations on Kurdish Emirates movements and self-rule.....	91
British travellers' observations on the Soran Emirate	94
British observations on the Baban Emirate	98
British Travellers' observations on the Bohtan Emirate	101
Kurdish Nationalism in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century and Sheikh Ubaidullah's Movement.....	105
Conclusion.....	113
Chapter 4 British Travelers' Observations of the Ottoman Empire, Persian Rule in Kurdistan, and Kurdish Tribal Society	116
Introduction	116
British travellers' views on the Ottoman Empire and Persian Rule in Kurdistan.....	118
Perceptions of Misgovernment and corruption	118
Judicial System	125
The socio-political function of the tribes	126
Primitive democracy among tribes	126
The authority of the chief	130
Growing Kurdish Tribes	133
Tribal Boundaries	134
The martial characteristics of the tribal Kurds.....	137
Violence and feuds in Kurdish tribal society	145
Conclusion	148
Chapter 5 Aspects of Kurdish Culture from the Perspective of British Travellers	150
Introduction	150
Kurdish language.....	152
Travellers' observation on the Religions of the Kurds	156
Islam	156
Finding the Roots of ancient religions	158
Travellers' observations on Kurdish Dress.....	162
Hospitality among Kurds	164

The differences between Kurds and other regional ethnicities.....	167
Decline of the Nomadic Lifestyle	169
Robbery among Kurds.....	173
Conclusion	175
Chapter 6 British Travellers' Views on Kurdish Women	176
Introduction	176
Role of European Primitive Women	179
Liberty of Kurdish Women	181
British travellers' observations on the political and Martial role of Kurdish women.....	187
Women's clothing	195
Travellers' observations on marriage	198
Conclusion	202
Chapter 7 Economy of Kurdistan in the Nineteenth Century	204
Introduction	204
The Importance of the Kurdish territories to the British	206
British travellers' observations on trade in Kurdistan	210
British observations on industry	216
British observations on mineral wealth	220
The economic role of the Christians	223
British travellers' observations on agriculture.....	224
Conclusion	226
Conclusion	228
Bibliography	240
Primary resources	240
Unpublished sources.....	240
The National Archives	240
British Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons	240
Nineteenth Century British Newspapers	241
Newspaper in Kurdish Language.....	242
Printed Primary Sources.....	242
Primary Sources in Arabic Languages	250
Secondary sources	250
Published Secondary sources in English	250
Unpublished Secondary Sources.....	264
Secondary sources in Kurdish languages	265
Secondary Sources in Arabic Languages	265

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Map of Railway line in the Ottoman Empire in 1914 from S. Akgüngör et al., ‘The Effect of Railway Expansion on Population in Turkey’, <i>Journal of Interdisciplinary History</i> , 42, no. 1 (2011), p. 140.....	37
Figure 2.1: Map of the Persian Empire showing Khorasan from T. Holland, <i>Persian Fire the First World Empire and the Battle for the West</i> (New York, 2005), pp. 2-3.	57
Figure 2.2: The Kurdistan which was discussed by Millingen in <i>Wild Life among the Koords</i> , pp. 144-53.....	79
Figure 2.3: The Map of Kurdistan from Maunsell, ‘Kurdistan’, p. 93.....	80
Figure 4.1: A tribal Jaf, sketched by Rich, <i>Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan</i> , vol. 1, p. 112.....	140
Figure 4.2: A Kurd in Soujbulack holding a weapon, sketched by Bird, <i>Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan</i> , vol. 2, p. 208.....	141
Figure 4.3: Ibrahim Bey Chief of Takuri Kurds, Maunsell, ‘Central Kurdistan’, p.127.....	142
Figure 6.1: picture of Kurdish female leader Kara Fatima riding through Constantinople taken from the article in <i>The Illustrated London News</i> , 22 April 1854.....	191
Figure 6.2: Kurds’ dancing, sketched by Rich, <i>Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan</i> , vol. 1, p.282	201

List of Abbreviations

B.P.P., HC	British Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons
FO	Foreign Office
PKK	Partiya Karker Kurdistan (Kurdistan Worker's Party)
RGS_IBG	Royal Geographical Society with IBG
RAI	Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland
TNA	The National Archive
YPG	Partiya Karker Kurdistan (Kurdistan Worker's Party)

Introduction

This thesis provides a critical analysis of the narrative accounts of British travellers who visited Kurdistan in the nineteenth century. It evaluates the extent to which the British understood the Kurds, and how the British applied their preconceptions to Kurds. It investigates the extent to which British travellers recognised the Kurds as a culturally, socially, politically, and geographically distinct group of people. Also, it attempts to understand to what extent Kurdish regions were important to the travellers and the British Empire's 'soft imperial power' agendas.

British travellers' accounts reveal many aspects of Kurdish culture and society, as Kurdistan was a popular destination in the nineteenth century. For example, in his 1894 article on Kurdistan, the British traveller Francis R. Maunsell noted that many travellers visited various areas of Kurdistan, which at the time was part of the Ottoman Empire.¹ There are several reasons for its popularity among British travellers, in addition to their desire to write about its people and lands. The researcher Maria T. O'Shea argues that Kurdistan was of geo-political interest to many empires, as it was the middle ground between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, who were powerful rivals in the nineteenth century. It also played its part in the imperial competition between the Persian and the Ottoman Empires in the first half of that century. Powerful European states such as Britain, France, and Germany also saw the importance of Kurdistan's geographical location, as it was situated on the route from Britain to India.² Kurdish lands became even more significant in the 1830s, as British policy changed towards both the Persian and the Ottoman Empires. British interests increased in particular when the British considered the two empires as a barrier to Russia. It was feared that Russia would occupy roads linking British India to the Mediterranean, and that the Russian empire would encroach upon the

¹ F. R. Maunsell, 'Kurdistan', *The Geographical Journal*, 3, no. 2 (1894), p. 81.

² M. T. O'Shea, 'The Image from the Outside: European Travellers and Kurdistan Before the Great War', *Geopolitics and International Boundaries*, 2, no. 3 (1997), p. 72.

borders of India.³ The new British policy thus had an impact on the number of travellers visiting Kurdistan as a part of the Ottoman Empire and Persia.

Sociological and anthropological motives also led to British travellers visiting Kurdistan in the nineteenth century, due to an interest in Muslim Kurdish culture and other minor religious groups such as the Ali-Ilahis and Yazidis.⁴ The social structure of Kurdish society was interpreted by the British as primitive in comparison with European cultures. Kurdish society was organised around tribes, with interesting features including hospitality, kinship, material culture, religion, language, and dialect. These aspects of Kurdish society became the subjects of study among anthropological, sociological, and historical European circles in the nineteenth century, which witnessed the ‘birth’ of anthropology. During this time, European travellers and scientists theorized a racial hierarchy that situated white Europeans at the top of the evolutionary and civilised ladder, with Aboriginal and Pacific Islanders, along with people from Asia-Minor, who were ranked lowest as primitive versions of the human race.⁵

Throughout the nineteenth century, Christians living in Kurdistan attracted the attention of British travellers for two main reasons. The British came as missionaries to these Christians in order to revive their religion, and to reinforce Christian values among them. Besides this, they aimed to exert a political influence over the regions via these Christians, and to compete with other powers such as France. It is apparent that the subsequent close relationship between the British and groups such as the Armenians and Nestorians influenced their understanding of the Kurds.⁶ In 1838, William Francis Ainsworth (1807-1896) visited the Nestorians with Chaldean Christians and the British deputy in Mosul, the Christian Anthony Rassam (1808-1872), in order to support their

³ M. Eppel, ‘The Demise of the Kurdish Emirates: The Impact of Ottoman Reforms and International Relations of Kurdistan during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 44, no. 2 (2008), p. 245.

⁴ O’Shea, ‘The Image from the Outside: European Travellers and Kurdistan Before the Great War’, p. 73.

⁵ Anthropology will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 1.

⁶ O’Shea, ‘The Image from the Outside: European Travellers and Kurdistan Before the Great War’, p. 73

society because of shared bonds of faith.⁷ Since the Christians and Kurds lived together in many areas, the British used the former to gather much of their information on the latter.

Finally, the important position of the country attracted British travellers to visit Kurdistan. At the same time, they were interested in understanding the characteristics of Kurds, and the help they were given by local Christians led them to write about Kurds. Therefore, they compiled a substantial amount of information about Kurds and Kurdistan throughout the nineteenth century. These travel accounts reflect their own perspectives but also contain factual information.

Importance of the Research

Based upon an analysis of the accounts of nineteenth-century British travellers, this thesis makes two important contributions. Firstly, these sources reveal details of Kurdish life that were ignored by Persian and Turkish authorities, due to the particular interests of British travellers. Second, it adds to existing secondary literature in which these primary sources are underused, and tend to be regarded simply as a source of empirical facts rather than as reflecting perspectives shaped by the travellers' own cultures and backgrounds.

By analysing British travellers' accounts, aspects of Kurdish life that have often been overlooked emerge. In the nineteenth century most Kurds were illiterate and were thus unable to write about their own society, with only one notable exception: Mullah Mahmud Bayazidi (1797-1860), a Kurdish religious scholar, wrote a book on the customs of the Kurds in the nineteenth century.⁸ The observations of British travellers therefore provide crucial information about the Kurds and their customs. As Reinhold Schiffer argues, the travellers' considerations were influenced by ideology, but at the same time, they provide significant factual information about the people of the Ottoman Empire.⁹

⁷ Y. Anzerliog̃lu, 'The Revolts of Nestorian Christians against the Ottoman Empire and Republic of Turkey', *The Muslim World*, 100 (2000), p. 46.

⁸ 'Risalat fe Adat u Altaqalid al Akrad' [Arabic text The Letter of Kurdish Traditions and Customs] (Beirut, 2005).

⁹ R. Schiffer, *Oriental Panorama, British Travellers in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam, 1999), p. 1.

Furthermore, British travellers recorded some crucial information regarding Kurdish society, primarily about the Kurdish Emirates,¹⁰ and the travellers' accounts contain a wealth of information about the policies of both the Ottoman and Persian Empires. British travellers' testimonies are also significant because they detail encounters with a wide range of Kurdish individuals, including princes, chiefs, government officials, and ordinary citizens. During their interviews with these dignitaries and ordinary people, travellers were able to obtain valuable information, which they would not have been able to access anywhere else.

The British travel accounts work particularly well to counteract the limitations of the Turkish and Persian accounts of the Kurds. Turkish sources at that time said very little about the social life of people in the Ottoman Empire, and so British accounts are particularly valuable.¹¹ In the twentieth century, Persian scholars wanted to deny Kurdish nationalism and argued that Kurds and Persians had the same origin, thus ignoring the distinctive features of Kurdish society. For example, one Persian scholar, Nader Entessar, tried to show that Kurds lacked their own language, spoke several different languages,¹² and that all dialects originated from the Persian language.¹³ In fact, as British travellers noted, the Kurds had their own language, which includes several dialects.

By critically assessing the assumptions of British travellers, this thesis uses primary sources that have never been systematically used in research specifically about Kurds and Kurdistan. Most research discussing travel literature either examines the heartland of the Ottoman Empire and Persia, or discusses the whole Middle East together. For example, Reinhold Schiffer's *Oriental Panorama: British Travellers in Nineteenth Century Turkey* focuses on Constantinople, and other important places in the heartland of the Ottoman Empire, neglecting the outskirts of the Empire.¹⁴ As such, he covers very little material about Kurdistan, merely arguing that the Kurds did not have a problem with being part of

¹⁰ Which lasted from the sixteenth century until the first half of the nineteenth century, when they were destroyed by the Ottoman Empire. See Chapter 3 for more detailed information on the Kurdish Emirates.

¹¹ Schiffer, *Oriental Panorama*, p. 1.

¹² A. Hassanpour, [review], 'Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism* (London, 1992)', *Middle East Journal*, 47, no.1 (1993), pp. 119-20.

¹³ N. Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism* (London, 1992), pp. 13, 49.

¹⁴ N. Leask, Review of 'Reinhold Schiffer, *Oriental Panorama: British Travellers in Nineteenth-Century Turkey* (Amsterdam, 1999)', *The Review of English Studies*, 52, no. 205 (2011), pp. 135-6.

the Ottoman Empire.¹⁵ As a consequence of this previous academic focus, most scholarly analysis of the area during that time concerns Turkish culture, and so this current study aims to fill this gap in the extant literature by investigating the Kurds from the perspective of nineteenth-century British travellers.

Geoffrey Nash wrote two books about the Middle East, the first of which, published in 2005, takes into account the narratives of several travellers in the nineteenth century but focuses on Turkey, Egypt, Persia, and what is now Saudi Arabia.¹⁶ He discusses large numbers of travellers who visited the Middle East from the nineteenth century until 1950,¹⁷ and the work includes two of the travellers who are case-studies in this current thesis: James Baillie Fraser (1783-18560) and Mark Sykes (1879-1919). The book provides a short biography of each, but unlike this thesis it does not mention their connection to Kurdistan. Other studies also exist, such as that of Wadie Jwaideh, who in his important book used the British travellers' texts for factual detail alongside other sources, but did not analyse their background in detail.¹⁸ Sabah Abdullah Ghalib's doctoral thesis makes use of a wealth of British travel literature, alongside Arabic and Kurdish sources, but the author did not discuss the background of the travellers.¹⁹

Research Focus

For reasons of space, it is impossible to analyse the entire nineteenth century in sufficient depth. Instead, I examine two decades of particular importance both in terms of change in Kurdistan and increased British interest in the area: 1830-1840 and 1890-1900. The first period is chosen because in the middle of the decade, Kurdish emirates began to concede control as the Ottoman Empire introduced a new policy to centralise the country. The Kurdish Emirates were occupied by the Ottoman army, and these provinces began to be governed directly by Ottoman officials.

¹⁵ Schiffer, *Oriental Panorama*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁶ *From Empire to Orient: Travellers to the Middle East 1830-1926* (London, 2005).

¹⁷ *Travellers to the Middle East from Burckhardt to Thesiger* (London, 2009).

¹⁸ *Kurdish National Movement Its Origin and Development* (Syracuse, 2006).

¹⁹ S. A. Ghalib, 'The Emergence of Kurdism with Special Reference to the Three Kurdish Emirates within the Ottoman Empire, 1800-1850', PhD thesis (University of Exeter, 2011).

This decade also saw an increase in British interest in world-wide travel, including to the Kurdish region, and a rapid increase in the numbers of British travellers throughout the world. One consequence of this development was the establishment of the Royal Geographical Society with IBG in 1830, which meant that travellers could publish their writings in the society's journal.²⁰ As a result, not only is there a plethora of sources written by British travellers, but these sources provide a perspective on changing political circumstances in Kurdistan.

The last decade of the nineteenth century, 1890-1900, is important because the situation in the Middle East as a whole underwent significant change. At that time nationalism was emerging throughout the Ottoman lands, and many ethnic groups inside the Empire in places such as modern-day Serbia, Bulgaria, and Romania were influenced by waves of nationalism and fought to achieve their rights.²¹ Muslim ethnic groups, including the Kurds, were also active in demanding their own political rights. Therefore, in this thesis I investigate how British travellers perceived these changes as the Kurds began to understand their own political, cultural, and social identity in new nationalistic ways.

The British were also particularly interested in the Kurds in 1890-1900. The Armenian conflict with the Ottoman Empire, which culminated in the Armenian Issue, began after the Russo-Turkish war (1877-1878), when the Armenians were encouraged by Russia to separate from the Turkish Empire as a nation-state. To counter it, the Ottomans encouraged the Turks, Circassians, and Kurds to unite against the Armenians, which resulted in open fighting between the two sides, reaching its peak in the 1890s and resulting in several genocides against the Armenians in many places. As several provinces in the Ottoman Empire were the residences of both Kurds and Armenians, such as Van, Erzurum, and Diyarbakir, these places became arenas of violence because several Kurdish tribes were recruited from 1891 onwards by the Ottoman Empire, under the name of *Hamidiye Cavalry*, to fight against the Armenians.²² This bitter conflict attracted British attention, with writers such as Isabella Lucy Bird commenting on how the Armenians were oppressed

²⁰ F. Driver and L. Jones (eds.), *Hidden Histories of Exploration: Researching the RGS-IBG Collections* (London, 2009), p. 13.

²¹ J. L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East* (Oxford, 2011), p. 56.

²² For more information about recruiting the Hamidiye Cavalry, see J. Klein, *The Margins of Empire Kurdish Militias in the Ottoman Tribal Zone* (Stanford, 201).

by the Kurds. Mark Sykes, who visited Kurdistan in 1898, also wrote in detail about the Armenian issue in his books.

The period 1890-1900 also saw increased commercial relations between the Ottoman Empire and Western Europe (including Britain) due to the low cost of transportation by steamship.²³ This meant agricultural products from Anatolia could be easily transported to Europe. As a further result of this technology, Europeans, including the British, started to explore mines in Anatolia, including copper and coal mines.²⁴

The protection of British interests from the Russian menace became an established principle in the 1890s. In order to monitor Russia's interests, the British sent some officers, including Maunsell, to investigate the strategic places that lay between the Persian Gulf and the Russian Caucasus. These were mostly located in Central Kurdistan, a region covering the north of Persia and Erzurum and Bitlis to the Gulf of Alexandretta.²⁵ These Kurdish areas were geopolitically significant in the rivalry between Russia and Great Britain in the last decade of the nineteenth century, and when Russia gained the Persian railway concession in the 1890s and strengthened its economic interests, the British officials became worried.²⁶ Therefore, many British travellers came to the country in that decade to report on these events.

By the end of the nineteenth century, British agents had settled in several Persian towns including Kermanshah, Shiraz, Isfahan, and Tabriz. The majority of these individuals were newspaper journalists, but they also monitored British interests and acted as consuls.²⁷ The existence of British consuls in cities and towns heartened many British travellers who came to Persia, including Kurdish areas, during this decade, because these consuls gave advice and assistance to these travellers. For example, Bird greatly appreciated the

²³ S. Pamuk and J. G. Williamson, 'Ottoman De-industrialization 1800-1913: Assessing the Magnitude, Impact and Response', *The Economic History Review*, 64, S1 (2011), p. 163.

²⁴ D. Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance 1881-1908: Reaction to European Penetration* (New York, 1983), p. 9, 41-2.

²⁵ P. Collier, 'Covert Mapping the Ottoman Empire: The Career of Francis Maunsell', *Proceedings of the 26th International Cartographic Conference* (August 25-30, 2013, Dresden, Germany).

²⁶ P. Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (London, 1938), p. 38.

²⁷ S. Searight, *the British in the Middle East* (London, 1979), p. 143.

hospitality of the son of the British agent in Kermanshah, and his assistance to her when she wanted to visit the ruins of Takht-e-Bestun.²⁸

There are other reasons for focussing on the 1830s and 1890s. During the nineteenth century, dramatic changes happened in the Ottoman Empire which had a direct impact on the situation in Kurdistan. When Mahmud II (1808-1839) became Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, the country faced several problems. Some ethnicities in different parts of the Empire had obtained independence, which threatened the Sultan. Of particular significance was Egypt, which had begun to separate from the Ottoman Empire from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Ottomans had lost some parts of their lands as Russia controlled Trabzon and Erzurum in 1828-1829. Furthermore, during 1821-1832 Greece was successfully established as an independent state.²⁹

The situation in the Ottoman Empire alarmed the Sultan. In order to reassert the past glories of the empire, or at least protect the remaining parts of the country held by the Ottomans, he and his successors instituted some military and civil reforms.³⁰ The so called Tanzimat programme consisted of administrative changes designed to centralise, modernise, regulate, and strengthen the Ottoman Empire. The most important aspects of the reform were two ordinances passed in 1839, and 1856 respectively. The Hatti-ı Şerif in 1839 reformed some of the religious and traditional institutions.³¹ The Ottomans introduced another important edict in 1856 which was known as the Hattı Hümayûn which gave equality to all people in the Ottoman Empire without taking account of religious differences, as all were judged equal with regard to courts, payment of taxes, and military service. All citizens were eligible to study in military and civil schools, and all had an equal chance of employment. Mixed courts were established for issues which related equally to non-Muslims and Muslims. Some economic reforms took place and Ottomans employed Europeans to improve banks and the economic sectors.³² However, while the Tanzimat programme was implemented in the heartland of the empire, in remote places like

²⁸ I. L. Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2 (London, 1891), pp. 99-100.

²⁹ M. V. Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State the Social and Political Structure of Kurdistan* (London, 1992), p. 176.

³⁰ Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement*, p. 75.

³¹ Klein, *Margins of Empire*, p. 59.

³² Klein, *Margins of Empire*, p. 59.

Kurdistan, the Ottomans tried first to destroy the local powers, and then to apply the Tanzimat programme.

Significant changes occurred in Kurdistan during the 1830s. The Kurdish emirates were in a strong position at the time, but their decline began in the same decade. Initially the situation in Kurdistan was not favourable to the Ottomans, as in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Kurdish emirates had almost full authority over their regions with the Ottomans maintaining only a nominal degree of control.³³ In order to obtain direct control the Ottomans started to destroy these Kurdish princedoms from the mid1830s onwards. The Ottomans managed successfully to destroy the emirates, but they failed to rule Kurdistan properly. In particular, the government could not fill the political vacuum, which appeared as the result of the destruction of the Kurdish emirates, and it did not have enough power to control the large territories.³⁴

As a result the situation deteriorated in Kurdistan. The large areas of the territories of the former Kurdish emirates such as Baban, Bohtan, Soran, Hakkari, and Bahdinan were left without proper government, because the Ottomans could not fill the political vacuum which occurred as a result of the demise of the Kurdish emirates. Each princedom fragmented into several tribes, each of which tried to obtain more power. Tribe fought against tribe. During the time of the emirates, princes had been able to rule these rival tribes and introduce order among them. Generally, Kurdish regions faced unrest and blood-feud spread throughout the region, because the Turkish rulers who were recruited by the government had neither legitimate control over the tribes nor information about tribal issues.³⁵ Therefore, the Ottomans failed to properly control the Kurdish regions, but often instituted punitive campaigns against the troublesome tribes, in particular in the remote areas.³⁶ The participants of these expeditions were often deliberately selected from tribal contingents, which increased the risk of instability and blood feuds. Threat and insecurity

³³ H. Özoğlu, *Kurdish Notables and the Ottoman State* (New York, 2004), p. 59.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p. 229

³⁶ S. H. Longrigg, *Four Centuries in Modern Iraq* (Oxford, 1925), pp. 285-6.

spread throughout the regions, commerce was at a standstill, and most parts of the country were in a state of ruin or decay.³⁷

Gradually the unstable political situation in Kurdistan paved the way for the appearance of a new kind of leadership among Kurds, and Sheikhs (religious men) led Kurds instead of the former Kurdish Princes. The change of leadership happened as a result of a number of factors. First, these Sheikhs were considered as heads of the two religious Sufi doctrines Naqshbandi and Qadiri. In the nineteenth century in particular the Naqshbandi doctrine became very popular in Kurdistan.³⁸ The Sheikhs were seen as political as well as religious leaders in Kurdish society.³⁹ The unstable situation led the Sheikhs to involve themselves in political affairs. When the government lacked sufficient power and legitimacy to solve the conflicts among the rival tribes, it gave the Sheikhs the opportunity to interfere in tribal issues as the tribes had respect for Sheikhs.⁴⁰ Gradually, the power of the Sheikhs increased and transcended tribal boundaries, and most of the Kurdish tribes submitted to their orders. Besides, the Sheikhs often protected weak tribes or peasants from strong ones: for example, Barzani Sheikhs safeguarded some vulnerable peasants from the Zibari tribe.⁴¹ Their followers brought gifts to the Sheikhs, which increased their wealth. In addition, the Sheikhs obtained lands from their Murids in gratitude for their intercession.⁴² These huge amounts of wealth gave more power to the Sheikhs, and paved the way to involve them more in political issues. The unstable situation and lack of security as a result of the demise of the Kurdish emirates also played its part. Religious feeling was becoming stronger among many Kurds.⁴³ As people sought the help of religious people in solving their problems, that gave Sheikhs the chance to exert their power over the Kurds, and the Kurds readily submitted to the Sheikhs' orders. Due to these factors, by the late nineteenth century, Sheikhs had become prominent leaders in Kurdish society. Sheikh Ubaidullah Nahri was one of the obvious examples, since he could collect

³⁷ Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement*, p. 75.

³⁸ D. McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London, 2004), pp. 50-2.

³⁹ Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement*, p. 76.

⁴⁰ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p. 229

⁴¹ McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 52.

⁴² Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p. 248.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 232-4

most of the Kurdish rival tribes under his banner, and revolted against Persia and the Ottomans.

The last decade of the nineteenth century was chosen for study because of its importance, as the Ottomans applied some new policies towards the Kurdish regions. Although Ottoman centralisation was not a success, in the last decade of the century the Ottomans applied a special policy to give them more control over Kurdistan. The Ottomans established the Hamidiye Light Cavalry from some of the Kurdish tribes. Their aim in establishing the tribal army was to obtain the loyalty of these Kurds, to strengthen their power in Kurdistan, and to use these Kurds against the threat of Armenian nationalism which had grown quickly and was challenging the Ottomans.⁴⁴

In the 1890s the Ottomans took further steps to integrate Kurds with Ottoman society, through religious and educational means. The Ottomans established the Tribal School or (Mekteb-I Aşiret) in 1892.⁴⁵ Besides education, the aim in building the school was to collect the sons of Kurds and Arabs together, and to bring them up to be loyal to the Sultan. Through this policy the Ottomans aimed to unify Muslim ethnicities and strengthen the feeling of brotherhood among them, via these young officials.⁴⁶ The Ottomans aimed to indoctrinate the Hamidiye Kurds in Eastern Anatolia beside the sons of chiefs. For that purpose they established mosques and schools among them. As Kurds were considered to have strayed from the right way, Ottomans believed they should be returned to the right path of religion by spreading religious guides, printed religious books in Turkish and Kurdish.⁴⁷ In reality they aimed to convert them to Sunni Hanafi doctrine in order to religiously integrate them in Ottoman policy, and reduce the sense of nationalism among them. In addition to the Ottoman policy towards the Muslim Kurds, in the 1890s the Ottomans tried to convert Yazidis to the Sunni Hanafi doctrine, opened some schools and mosques, and distributed religious books and pamphlets among them, but to no avail. The Ömer Pasha Wali of Mosul sent a punitive campaign under the leadership of his son Asim

⁴⁴ Klein, *Margins of Empire*, p. 21.

⁴⁵ M. Sykes, *Dar-UL-Islam; a Record of A Journey through Ten Asiatic Provinces of Turkey* (London, 1904), p.254.

⁴⁶ S. Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains* (London, 19980), p. 104.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-2; McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 59.

Bey against the Yazidis in Sheikhan, and that expedition caused destruction and death in the region.⁴⁸

These changes which happened in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire led me to concentrate upon two different decades, in order to investigate the extent to which the travellers' comments on Kurdish society reflected the political, religious and economic developments and how far the changes influenced the way in which travellers perceived Kurdistan, influenced the travellers' accounts.

By comparing these two decades (1830-1840 and 1890-1900), this thesis identifies a shift in the political and social situation in Kurdistan. The study shows differences between the decades in terms of the situation of the urban centres, culture, and language, through a comparison of the texts of travellers who visited specific cities or areas in both decades. Michael Eppel argues that after the fall of the Kurdish Emirates in the first half of the century the stratum of urban merchants was stifled; cities became smaller, and Kurdish literature was put under pressure, because the region faced political instability. It is crucial to establish whether these changes were reflected in the narratives of British travellers.⁴⁹ In the first decade studied British travellers focused more on the Kurds as primitive people, and sought to understand their characteristics, namely the political style of primitive people. Whilst comments on the region's commerce and economic potential were rare in the 1830s it is clear that by the end of the nineteenth century they were aiming to investigate the economic aspects of the country.

Selected travellers

Travel writing had a long history in Britain, but in the nineteenth century in the imperial era, and during the emergence of scientific theories, it became more complicated. The political and educational situation of the travellers' own country was reflected in travellers' accounts when they wrote about the people they visited. The aim of the travellers was to collect knowledge, and writing about travelling was common in powerful countries such as

⁴⁸ Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains*, pp. 72-3.

⁴⁹ Eppel, 'The Demise of the Kurdish Emirates: The Impact of Ottoman Reforms and International Relations of Kurdistan during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century', p. 256.

Britain. The travellers would begin their journeys with a sense of the power of their empire or nation, which protected them economically, militarily, spiritually, and intellectually. Whilst on their trip, the travellers would make notes, recording their observations and experiences, often with their particular audience in mind (e.g., colleagues, friends, decision makers). The writer's awareness of such an audience had an influence on the information they included, according to which aspects of the country were of interest at that time.⁵⁰

According to Schiffer, travellers in the nineteenth century were normally divided into three groups in term of how they thought.⁵¹ The first group were travellers under the influence of the ideas of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, who considered that there were no fundamental differences between the ethnicities and viewed all people as equal. The second group, influenced more by Victorian morals, grappled with the virtues and vices of Oriental society. The third group, increasingly influenced by racial theories, firmly believed that British (and more broadly western) culture was superior to non-European cultures.⁵² But despite this classification, each individual traveller was unique. To understand the purpose of the travellers, consideration of their educational background and personal experiences are important. For example, when military officers or officials, such as Henry Rawlinson (1810 –1895) or James Baillie Fraser (1783-1856), visited a place, they often had a political agenda and tried to collect information about political or military aspects of the territory. Furthermore, the British Empire's relationship with the regional powers in the Middle East had a bearing on the number of travellers and why they visited these areas. British travellers included scientific explorers, diplomats, merchants, and missionaries, all of whom participated in British expansion and were part of the so-called 'informal empire' and 'unofficial imperialism'.⁵³ Engagement with the travellers' accounts exposes their diverse aims, and thus this thesis focuses on specific travellers.

Travellers frequently used earlier accounts by their predecessors when travelling to a new place, and Kurdistan was no exception. The writers would use these previous narratives to guide their own journeys, but often argued against the earlier interpretations in

⁵⁰ R. Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient* (Glasgow, 1996), p. 1.

⁵¹ The travellers' perspectives will be discussed in detail in Chapter 1.

⁵² Schiffer, *Oriental Panorama*, p. 2.

⁵³ P. Hulme and T. Youngs (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* (Cambridge, 2nd ed., 2002), p. 53.

their own writings. Many travellers in the nineteenth century who came to Kurdistan after Claudius James Rich (1786/7-1821) used his writings to some extent. One such was Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (1810-1896), who obtained information about the geography of the areas between Kermanshah and Sulaymaniah.⁵⁴ In addition, Mark S. Bell wrote a book about his visits to Kurdistan, Lurestan, and North-West Persia, in which he directly quoted Fredrick Millingen's book *The Wild Life Among The Koords* (1870).

For my analysis, I have selected nine travellers' works, spread as evenly as possible across the nineteenth century: one from the 1820s, three from the 1830s, one from the late 1860s, and four from the last decade of the century. The travellers represent varied backgrounds, as a number were sent to Kurdistan as civil servants or military officers, some were financed by the Geographical Society, and others were missionaries. These nine travellers were chosen from among their counterparts, first because they wrote more detailed accounts of Kurds and Kurdistan than their colleagues. Second, these selected travellers' writings are more focussed on Kurds and Kurdistan or on a particular a region, while others travellers discussed Kurds and Kurdistan within the context of the bigger region, and some simply discussed what they saw when crossing Kurdistan. Furthermore, there are some British writers who did not visit the country in person, which means their information was second hand. For these reasons the writings of these selected nine travellers are more significant than the accounts of the others.

This thesis' first traveller, Claudius James Rich (1786/7-1821), journeyed to Kurdistan in the 1820s, remaining there for more than six months, a longer time than most others. He became close friends with the Baban Emirate dynasty (...-1847), which gave him access to valuable and reliable insights into the lives of the Kurds who trusted him.⁵⁵ Rich was a cadet in the East India Company and knew several languages including Greek, Latin, Chaldean Neo-Aramaic, Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, and some Chinese.⁵⁶ He later added Italian and Turkish to the list of his linguistic accomplishments, and it was his

⁵⁴ H.C. Rawlinson, 'Notes on a March from Zohab, at the Foot of Zagros, along the Mountains of Khuzistan(Susiana), and from Thence Through the Province of Luristan to Kirmanshah, in the Year 1836', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 9 (1839), p. 29

⁵⁵ O'Shea, 'The Image from the Outside: European Travellers and Kurdistan Before the Great War,' p. 75

⁵⁶ C. J. Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan, and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh*, vol.1 (London, 1836), p. 18.

linguistic capability that allowed him to choose a civil career instead of a military one. After a series of journeys to Asia Minor to gather information, Rich became a member of the British General Council in Cairo, and he made several journeys to Palestine, Syria, Damascus, Baghdad, Mardin, and Basrah whilst employed there, and also returned to India. After that he was sent to Baghdad and worked in a British residence, and in his spare time began investigating coins and collecting rare manuscripts. In 1820, he faced illness, and therefore decided to travel to Kurdistan to recuperate, staying in Sulaymaniah among the local people. It was based on this experience that he wrote a valuable book entitled *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh*, in two volumes, which is considered to be one of the most interesting travel books on Kurdish society, including a discussion of the archaeology and local geography of Sulaymaniah and on towards Sina in the eastern part of Kurdistan.⁵⁷ He was selected because his information about Kurds was crucial. He was a pioneer in discussing several aspects of Kurdish society. For example, he was the first British traveller who classified Kurds into tribal and non-tribal people. He knew the Kurdish language well enough to understand Kurdish society better than other travellers who relied on interpreters. He also discussed aspects of Kurdish society in detail. For these reasons it is almost inevitable that any researcher who wants to investigate Kurdish society in the nineteenth century is reliant on Rich's account.

The 1830s was important because the demands of empire encouraged the British to travel widely and to document their journeys. The phenomenon paved the way for the establishment of the Royal Geographical Society, which helped to publish and even fund the travellers. There was keen competition between Britain and Russia over Kurdistan, and Britain sent many officers to Kurdistan to observe Russia's interests. Three travellers from the 1830s were chosen because they wrote more than any other travellers in the same decade, and they visited the region several times, thus gaining more information than some of their counterparts. The second traveller this thesis will focus on is James Baillie Fraser (1783-1856), who was widely travelled and thus visited many different nations and regions, enabling him to compare the Kurds with other nations and people in his accounts and to

⁵⁷ S. Lane-Poole, rev. Elizabeth Baigent, S. Lane-Poole, and E. Baigent (eds) 'Rich, Claudius James (1786/7-1821)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) accessed on 25 March 2017 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23483>]

identify what was distinctive about them. He travelled to India and Persia, and in doing so crossed Kurdistan.⁵⁸ He was sent to the region by the British Foreign Office to monitor Russia during its expansion towards the Ottoman Empire in 1833, during which time he made several expeditions through Kurdish lands. He was selected because he was a prolific traveller and wrote extensively about the region in his travel books.⁵⁹ Through his journey, he investigated the political situation and the social fabric of Kurdish society. In particular, he came to Kurdistan when the Soran Emirate (...1836) was at the peak of its power. Therefore, his information about the Soran Emirate is valuable because he was close to the emirate and discussed the situation in detail, recording the size of the army and the mode of rule. As an artist, he was also able to record faithfully the visible characteristics and ethnic features of the local people.⁶⁰ This enabled him to document the differences between Kurdistan and the Ottoman Empire. He also tried to identify differences between Kurds and Turkomans.

Henry Creswicke Rawlinson (1810-1895) was another traveller who visited Kurdistan in the first decade under study. Because of his military service in the East India Company, he knew several oriental languages, one of which was Persian.⁶¹ He is a particularly valuable source because he stayed for a long time in Persia and Baghdad, travelled extensively through Kurdistan, and visited several areas within, including the Zagros chain of mountains in the south-eastern side of the country,⁶² and also the area from Tabriz southward to the Kurdish regions.⁶³ During two journeys, he wrote extensively about the social structure of Kurdish tribes, and discussed the situation of the Kurdish princedoms, namely the Soran Emirate. Furthermore, his linguistic ability allowed him to

⁵⁸ T. Falk, 'Fraser, James Baillie (1783-1856)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) accessed on 24 March 2017 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10111>].

⁵⁹ J. B. Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan and Mesopotamia, Including an Account of Parts of Those Countries Hitherto Unvisited by Europeans with Sketches of the Character and Manners of Koordish and Arab Tribes*, 2 vols (London, 1840) ; idem, *Historical and Descriptive Account of Persia from the Earliest Time to the Present Day* (New York, 1834); idem, *Mesopotamia and Assyria from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time* (New York, 1842); *A Winter's Journey (Tatar) from Constantinople to Tehran* (London, 1838).

⁶⁰ Falk, 'Fraser, James Baillie (1783-1856)'.

⁶¹ Obituary: Sir Henry Rawlinson, *Journal of the American Geographical Society of New York*, 27, no. 1 (1895), pp. 84-85.

⁶² Rawlinson, 'Notes on a March from Zoháb, at the Foot of Zagros'.

⁶³ Idem, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, Through Persian Kurdistan, to the Ruins of Takhti-Soleiman from Thence by Zenján and Tárom, to Gílán, in October and November, 1838; With a Memoir on the Site of the Atropatenian Ecbatana', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 10 (1840).

read about the history of the area, including the sixteenth-century text *Sharafnama*, written by a Kurdish prince.⁶⁴ This factor differentiates him from the other travellers, because his knowledge of the history of the Kurds allowed him a better understanding of their society. When he wrote about Kurds, he not only relied on what he saw on the ground and his knowledge of earlier European sources like Xenophon, but supported his accounts with sources which were written by the local people. In addition, he was interested in searching for minorities such as Ali Ilahis. Later travellers depended on his information about them for their own accounts.

William Francis Ainsworth's (1807–1896) papers are of relevance to this thesis because he visited most parts of the country during 1830s, and travelled to Kurdistan for several purposes. One of his aims was to support the British political and commercial interests in remote areas of Mesopotamia and Anatolia, including by finding local minerals. He also investigated the Euphrates' potential as a new route to India.⁶⁵ He produced both individual books and articles⁶⁶ and pieces co-written with Colonel Chesney.⁶⁷ His selection is important for the thesis, because he visited different regions of the country and wrote extensively on Kurds and Kurdistan, discussed diverse aspects of the region and its people, and focused on the minor religious groups such as the Yazidis. Generally, he, alongside the two other travellers above mentioned, visited and wrote more significant information than any other travellers in the 1830s.

⁶⁴ S. Biltisi in 1597 *Sharafnama or, the History of Kurdish Nation*, transl. Mehrdad R. Izady (New York, 2005).

⁶⁵ E. Baigent, 'Ainsworth, William Francis (1807-1896)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, online edn (2009) accessed on 25 March 2017 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/242>])

⁶⁶ W.F. Ainsworth, 'Notes Taken on a Journey from Constantinople to Mōsul, in 1839-40', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, vol. 10 (1840); idem, 'An Account of a Visit to the Chaldeans, Inhabiting Central Kurdistan; And of an Ascent of the Peak of Rowandiz (Ṭur Sheikhiwa) in Summer in 1840', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, vol. 11 (1841); idem, *Travels and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, 2 vols (London, 1842); idem, 'The Assyrian origin of the Izedis or Yezidis-the so-called- Devil Worshippers', *Transactions of the Ethnographical Society of London*, 1 (1861); idem, *Personal Narrative of the Euphrates Expedition*, vol. 1-2 (London, 1888); idem, 'The Sources of Euphrates', *The Geographical Journal*, 6, no. 2 (1895)

⁶⁷ Idem, 'A General Statement of the Labours and Proceedings of Expedition to the Euphrates, under the Command of Colonel Chesney, Royal Artillery', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 7 (1837).

Fredrick Millingen (1836-1901) is one of the most important travellers in the nineteenth century who investigated Kurdish society. He was born in Constantinople, the son of an English father and French mother. He was connected with the Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland, where he presented his paper on the ‘Negro Slaves of Turkey’ in 1870. His book *Wild Life Among The Koords*, was referenced in the society’s 1870 bibliography of work published by RAI in the field.⁶⁸ He had a taste for anthropology, and discussed several aspects of Kurdish culture in great detail. He also tried to apply racial theory to the Kurds in his accounts, and considered them to be the descendants of Arians,⁶⁹ and kinsmen of Europeans. Convinced of their superiority, he lavished praise on the Kurds in his writings. He also reflected on the history of the region in the 1830s, and aimed to show the movements of Kurdish princedoms as nationalist activities, despite writing in the late 1860s. His importance in the field of Kurdish studies is similar to that of Rich. Therefore, it would be difficult to write about British travel narratives on the Kurds without referring to the work of Millingen. Finally, because he had grown up in Constantinople, he was more familiar with the culture of the Eastern ethnicities through their connection to the Ottoman Empire.

There are some travellers in the last decade who were chosen in order to compare their accounts with those of travellers who visited in the first decade, because over time the nature of travel writing changed, as will be discussed in chapter 1. Isabella Lucy Bird (1831-1903), a British traveller who visited Kurdistan in the last decade of the nineteenth century, wrote a two-volume book entitled *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*.⁷⁰ In both volumes she discussed the geography of the country and the lifestyle and customs of the local people in Kurdistan. Bird is the only female traveller whose writings I will be examining, as she was the only British female traveller in the nineteenth century who visited most parts of Kurdistan, and discussed the life of the Kurds. Her work is important in demonstrating a different gendered understanding of society. As M. E. Yapp (2003) has argued, there is reason to believe that female travellers had more access to the local women

⁶⁸ Anon, ‘Bibliography’, *The Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1871), p. 358; Anon ‘Report of the Council of the Anthropological Society, for 1870’ *The Journal of the Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1 (1872), pp.19-24.

⁶⁹ F. Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords* (London, 1870), pp. 259-60

⁷⁰ I. L. Bird, *Journey in Persia and Kurdistan* (London, 1891), vol. 1, p. 2.

than male travellers.⁷¹ Therefore, it is important to understand how she wrote about Kurdish women in comparison with the other male travellers and to ascertain whether there is a difference in perspective. In addition she discussed the economic and political situation in Kurdistan. She was also well travelled already, having visited, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA, and after visiting Kurdistan she went to China, Japan and Korea which enabled her to adopt a comparative approach in her analysis of Kurdistan. Furthermore, she had a religious background, having travelled to Persia and Kurdistan with the Anglican Missionary Society,⁷² which differentiates her from the rest of the travellers. As a religious person she was keen to focus on the Christians in Kurdistan, and tried to distinguish the Christian sects. For example, she differentiated between Armenians and Assyrians, praising Armenians because she believed that they were civilised. When she visited Armenians in Hamadan, she noted that in the Armenian quarter the people were calm, there was no crushing, and shouting; they were a polite and hospitable people.⁷³ In contrast, she considered that Tyari Assyrians in Hakkari were lawless, wild, quarrelsome, but also hardy, and brave. Their priests, like the ordinary people, were illiterate and sunk in ignorance. They were, she considered, a wild and vengeful people, as fierce as the Kurds.⁷⁴ These judgements persuaded me to use her accounts as a primary source of data.

Another traveller is Francis Maunsell (1828-1914), who was born in Limerick to an Anglo-Irish family. He studied at Cheltenham College, then joined the Royal Military Academy Woolwich and was commissioned as an officer in the Royal Artillery. His career as an intelligence officer began in 1888 when he visited Kurdistan, Mesopotamia, Luristan and North-west Persia, in order to gather information about the local people and the roads in these regions. The Intelligence Branch in Simla published his report of his journey in 1890. His next appointment was as a correspondent for RGS_IBG in Armenia.⁷⁵ In 1897 he was appointed as a Vice Consul in Sivas, and then was transferred to Trebizond in 1898 and later to Van. Alongside his political career, he worked as a cartographer, and when he

⁷¹ M. E. Yapp, 'Some European Travellers in the Middle East', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 10, no. 2 (2003), p. 225.

⁷² J. Scarce, 'Isabella Bird Bishop (1831–1904) and Her Travels in Persia and Kurdistan in 1890', *Iranian Studies*, 44, no. 2 (2011), p. 244.

⁷³ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol.2, p. 146-7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 314-16.

⁷⁵ Collier, 'Covert Mapping the Ottoman Empire: The Career of Francis Maunsell'.

travelled through Kurdistan in the mid-1890s he drew maps of the areas he visited, which were later printed by the Intelligence Branch of the War Office. Many of these are preserved in the National Archives in London. He also drew a sketch map that illustrated the strategically significant positions in Central Kurdistan for the Intelligence Branch in Simla, but the War Office's copy was destroyed in 1932.⁷⁶ Since he was a cartographer it is not surprising that he wrote an article on Kurdistan that was published by *The Geographical Journal*.⁷⁷ The most important reason for including him in this thesis is that he worked as vice-consul in Kurdistan and so was able to visit every area in Kurdistan. He wrote about every town's position and the routes that linked each one, including a commentary on the ethnicity of each town and village. Also, he wrote about the fertility of the soil and, most importantly, searched for oil in Mesopotamia. Therefore, through reading his accounts it becomes obvious that beside the importance of his accounts of Kurdish society in general, Maunsell's writings help us to understand the economic situation of the country about which he wrote extensively. Finally, beside the economic situation, his accounts include discussion of the political and social structure of Kurdish society, and therefore they should not be under estimated.

Walter Burton Harris (1866-1933) was born in London to a wealthy family, and studied at Harrow and Cambridge University. He married Lady Mary Saville, the daughter of the Earl of Mexborough,⁷⁸ and became an author, explorer, and traveller.⁷⁹ Aged twenty-one, he started his world tour, having joined William Kirby-Green's mission to Marrakech in Morocco, and began his career as a correspondent for *The Times*.⁸⁰ He was a member of *L'Académie des Sciences Coloniales* in Paris. Harris is relevant to this study because he wrote articles about his travels in Kurdistan.⁸¹ He published a book entitled *From Batum to Baghdad - Via Tiflis, Tabriz, and Persian Kurdistan* (1896), and later published some of his travel writing in the *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*. In his book and articles, which documented his visits to many Kurdish towns and villages, he discussed

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ E. Percy and F. R. Maunsell, 'Central Kurdistan: Discussion', *The Geographical Journal*, 18, no. 2 (1901).

⁷⁸ J. Fisher, 'An Eagle Whose Wings are not Always Easy to Clip', in J. Fisher and A. Best (ed.) *On the Fringes of Diplomacy: Influences on the British Foreign Policy* (Farnham, 1988), p. 155.

⁷⁹ *Who's Who and Who Was Who*, 2016.

⁸⁰ Fisher, 'An Eagle Whose Wings are not Always Easy to Clip', p. 155.

⁸¹ 'A Journey in Persian Kurdistan', *The Geographical Journal*, 6, No. 5 (1895).

the features of various Kurdish tribes. His accounts are important because his career was different from that of the other travellers, as he was the only traveller who was in the area as a newspaper correspondent. As such his style of expression was less subtle than the others; often when he numbered tribes, he listed them in a chart in his book. When he visited the multi-ethnic towns and cities he listed the ethnicities in a table. He added more photos than other travellers of the same decade. Besides that, he was selected because he travelled to large areas of Kurdistan, and recorded significant information about the Kurds, in particular about the political situation in the region.

Finally, Mark Sykes (1879-1919) is the last traveller selected. He was the son of Sir Tatton Sykes the fifth baronet, and father and son travelled to India, Egypt, and the Middle East. As such, Sykes is useful for his comparative insight, like many of the other travellers. He visited lands in the Ottoman Empire for the first time in 1899, and stayed in Syria for nearly four months. He then travelled to Baghdad, Aleppo, Mosul, Van, and Ararat, before finally crossing to Erivan and Batum, later publishing his experiences in a book entitled *Through Five Turkish Provinces* (1900).⁸² His other books were published during the early years of the twentieth century, and include *Dur ul-Islam* (1904), and *The Caliphs' Last Heritage* (1915). He was a devout Christian but saw the value of other religions, including Islam. He was chosen for several reasons. First, his texts are of importance to this current thesis because they provide a different perspective to those offered by some of the other travel writers. Second, he obtained much information about the Kurds, during his several journeys. He criticized some aspects of the Kurds, such as their quarrelsome nature, and at the same time praised other features. For example, he experienced a sense of equality and fraternity among the Kurds;⁸³ in this thesis, I therefore try to understand how he saw the Kurdish people within the broader understanding of eastern ethnicities. Furthermore, he visited Kurdistan during different periods, and observed changes and developments among Kurdish society. In particular, in *The Caliphs' Last Heritage* he tried to discuss the changes that occurred among the Kurdish tribes and to illustrate the improvements to Kurdish towns. Finally, he is important because in the aftermath of the First World War, he had a

⁸² M. Sykes, *Through Five Turkish Provinces* (London, 1900), p. 7.

⁸³ L. James, 'Sykes, Sir Mark, sixth baronet (1879-1919)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004-2016) accessed on 25 March 2017
[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36394>]

significant role in reshaping the Ottoman Empire. In the thesis, I attempt to understand to what extent his travels had a role in shaping his arguments about Kurds.

Beside these nine travellers above, there are other British travel writers who wrote about Kurds and Kurdistan, but for different reasons they were not selected as primary sources of data in this thesis. However, their accounts are also used in the thesis. There are a number of reasons why other women travellers besides Bird were not selected. One possible candidate was Lucy Mary Jane Garnett (1849-1936) who wrote *The Women of Turkey and their Folk-Lore* (London, 1890) in which she discussed the situation of women of several ethnicities in the Ottoman Empire, including Kurdish females. She was not selected because she just focused on Kurdish women rather than Kurdish society as a whole, while this research investigates several aspects of Kurdish society, and is not solely dedicated to women's issues. In addition, it is unclear whether she herself visited Kurdistan or not, as she may have obtained information from her reading and other sources. In contrast, Bird visited many cities, towns and villages in Kurdistan and her observations form the basis of her accounts. Gertrude Bell (1868-1926) was a British traveller and politician who visited several regions of Kurdistan in different years in the early twentieth century, and wrote about Kurds, but she was not chosen because she travelled so much later. The same reason is true for M.E. Hume-Griffith who wrote a book entitled *Behind the Veil in Persia and Turkish Arabia* (London, 1909) about her experience among eastern women including Kurdish females in the early twentieth century. In addition, Elizabeth N. Macbean Ross visited Kurdistan in the early twentieth century and wrote a book entitled *A Lady Doctor in Bakhtiari Land* (London, 1921). She discussed the Bakhtyaris in great detail, and provided important information about the Bakhtyari women, but her work appeared too late to be studied here.

There were also other male travellers who visited Kurdistan, in the 1830s. Robert Mignan was one such, but he was not chosen for study for a number of reasons. First, he only made a short visit and spent less time than the three travellers who were selected above as they visited the country several times. Second, he only gave a general description of Kurds rather than discussing Kurds in different regions. Furthermore, out of the travellers who came to Kurdistan in the nineteenth century but not in the two selected

decades, mention might be made of the famous British diplomat and archaeologist Austen Henry Layard (1817-1894), who wrote about Kurds and Kurdistan during his journeys and excavations in Nineveh in the 1840s-1850s, and who therefore falls outside main focus of the current periods of study. Besides that, his focus was more on Kurds in areas surrounding Mesopotamia, in particular in Nineveh, and its environs. Another British officer, John George Taylor, came to Kurdistan in the 1860s, and wrote four articles about Kurds, and Kurdistan. In the latter decades of the century more travellers can be uncovered; George Nathaniel Curzon (1859-1925), a British politician and traveller who visited Persia and wrote *Persia and the Persian Question* (1892), mostly focused on Persia and its political issues and within the Persian context he discussed some aspects of Kurdish customs and geographic location, but not in detail. It also remains unclear whether he actually visited Kurdistan himself.

The reason for choosing just one missionary traveller alongside the other eight British politicians, diplomats or officers, was that most of the famous British travellers who visited Kurdistan and wrote about Kurds, were engaged in business related to the British empire and came to the region for the sake of their country. This proves that Britain was more interested in the politics and economics of the region than its religious customs. However, most of the well-known American writers who discussed Kurds and Kurdistan in the same century were missionaries; beside their diaries they wrote significant information in the series *Missionary of Herald*.

Research questions

In order to critically analyse the ideas of British travellers who visited Kurdistan in the nineteenth century, the thesis aims to answer three questions:

- 1) To what extent did British travellers consider the Kurdish to be primitive people, and consider themselves to be in a higher stage of development?
- 2) To what extent did British travellers recognise differences between Kurds and other ethnicities in the East?

- 3) To what extent did the political, religious and economic interests of the British in Kurdistan influence the travellers' experiences in Kurdistan, and their accounts of the country and people?

Sources

When examining these texts, it is important to understand which aspects of Kurdish society were discussed by travellers, and even more importantly, why these selections were made. As well as broader ideologies already outlined, travellers were of course influenced by their own backgrounds. As a result, it is not always clear whether the information they recorded was factual or more reflective of their own existing and biased beliefs. So in order to understand the subjective nature of British travellers' accounts fully, it is important to supplement them with other sources. This study analyses British travel texts, in particular the accounts of these travellers who were chosen, and in order to support or challenge the ideas expressed, it will refer to the texts of other British travellers in the nineteenth century.

In addition to British travellers' accounts, the thesis will also utilise political documents that were written by British consuls and correspondents, because some of the travellers were also political consuls (e.g., Maunsell). The foreign office file FO 881 has an enormous amount of information regarding Kurdistan as part of Asia Minor, and in addition to political news also provides a record of the ethnicities in the country and the local Kurdish customs, focussing particularly on the northern part of Kurdistan in the last decade because of the Armenian conflict.

Another source is the British House of Commons' Parliamentary Papers, which include significant information about the economic situation in Kurdistan, in particular the export of raw materials from Kurdistan to Britain and elsewhere. In addition, they include information about the demand for British products in the Kurdish territories within the Ottoman Empire.

British newspapers are part of the primary source base because they include extensive and useful information about the political situation in these areas. In addition,

they provide information about the Kurdish economy and British commercial activity in the Kurdish regions, especially the demand for Kurdish carpets. They have been digitised, and so the information can be obtained easily via keyword searches.

Finally, the thesis will use twentieth-century ethnographic writings by anthropologists who visited Kurdistan, as these can be used as a point of comparison in order to examine and verify the information provided by the British travellers. One of the most interesting anthropological studies on the Kurds in the twentieth century is Martin van Bruinessen's book *Agha, Sheikh, and State: The Social and Political Structure of Kurdistan* (1992). The thesis makes extensive reference to the texts of selected travellers, but using these other sources as well provides different perspectives on aspects of the Kurdish culture, economy, and political situation.

Thesis structure

Chapter 1 focuses on British travel writers and their writing from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, providing a discussion of the pattern of travelling and who travelled. It also aims to illustrate how and why the direction of travelling changed from being Eurocentric to encompassing a broader appreciation of Greece and Asia Minor. The importance of the Middle East, or Mesopotamia, will be discussed in this chapter, as will the perspectives of the British travellers, including their general perceptions of Middle Eastern people. The primary anthropological concepts in the nineteenth century will be discussed in that chapter. The accusation that the writers possessed ideological preconceptions about Muslims and other non-western populations will be acknowledged.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the Kurds and Kurdistan from the view of British travellers. The origin of the Kurds will be discussed as it was reported by British travellers, and the chapter will explore which sources were used to support their various arguments. In addition, the origin of tribal and non-tribal Kurds will be discussed in this chapter. The travellers' perspectives on Christians' denomination will be discussed in the chapter. Finally, the travellers' perspectives on local geography.

The emergence of Kurdish nationalism in the view of British travellers is presented in Chapter 3, which investigates the concept of nationalism, particularly in relation to the theories of Anthony Smith. His considerations are particularly appropriate to Kurdish nationalism in the nineteenth century because he focuses on the role of ethnicity in emerging nationalism, and he argues that a sense of national feeling has existed in humans since ancient history. Here the thesis investigates the extent to which British travellers perceived Kurdish movements in terms of nationalism, in particular the actions of the Kurdish Prince against the Ottoman Empire during the first half of the century. It also examines the British travellers' accounts in order to understand how travellers saw the shift in leadership from monarchy to religious leaders in the late nineteenth century, after the demise of the Kurdish Emirates.

Chapter 4 is about the internal political situation in Kurdistan, and consists of two main sections. The first explores British travellers' observations regarding the Persian and Ottoman dominance over Kurdistan after the destruction of the Kurdish Princedoms in the first half of the century, illustrating how British travellers mapped the political situation in the two empires. The second section looks at British travellers' consideration of the Kurdish tribes' political functions, and their idea of a 'primitive democracy'. In addition, it attempts to understand the role of the chief and his house within tribal society, and after that it discusses the growing Kurdish tribes. The tribal boundary will be discussed. Another sub-subsection is about the warrior characteristics of the Kurdish tribes. Then violence among Kurdish tribes will be discussed.

Chapter 5 analyses British accounts of Kurdish culture, including language, religion, defining the nomadic lifestyle, hospitality, and robbery among Kurds. However, many Europeans (including the British) possessed orientalist preconceptions, and I will attempt to examine the travellers' accounts in order to ascertain to what extent the British observed differences between the Kurds and other ethnicities. Robbery and theft in Kurdistan were discussed by the British travellers in significant detail, and the chapter explores whether the British travellers considered all Kurdish tribes to be engaged in such actions or whether they pinpointed specific tribes who were involved.

Chapter 6 focuses on Kurdish women from the viewpoint of the British travellers, it discusses role of European primitive women, then exploring how and why the travellers highlighted the level of liberty among the Kurdish women and their participation in political issues. The chapter reveals and challenges the frequent depiction of oriental women as sensual. It presents British travellers' perspectives on the style of Kurdish women's clothing, and the final section will discuss marriage in nineteenth-century Kurdish society.

Chapter 7 examines the economy of Kurdistan as presented in British travel narratives. The chapter will discuss the importance of Kurdistan as a region in the view of the British. It then focuses on British travellers' thoughts about trade in Kurdistan, and how British travellers in their accounts discussed routes which crossed the country and concentrated on the commercial centres in the region. In addition, crafts and small industries were discussed by the British travellers, who viewed them as undeveloped. The chapter will focus on the role of Christians in both commerce and industry. British travellers commented upon mines, such as the iron, coal, and sulphur mines around Van,⁸⁴ and by the latter part of the nineteenth century were showing signs of being particularly interested in oil. The agricultural lifestyle of the Kurds was discussed in detail by the travellers, who commented upon what they perceived to be its drawbacks and suggested methods for improvement. In the conclusion the findings of the thesis are discussed.

⁸⁴ Millingen, *Wild Life Among the Koords*, p. 154.

Chapter 1 Travel Writing and British Perspectives

Introduction

This chapter is about British travel writing and British travellers' perspectives on non-western people. It illustrates how the British travelled, wrote their accounts, and came to Ottoman and Persian lands and the Kurdistan region. More specifically, it attempts to show why the British travelled to Kurdistan and to explore their views on the Kurds and Kurdistan. It discusses important influences that shaped British perspectives, including the role of anthropology, to show why they focused on particular aspects of Kurdish culture.

This chapter will therefore consider how travel writing developed in Britain up to the end of the nineteenth century, including changes to the style of writing and the pattern of travelling. In addition, it is important to show which ideas and perspectives shaped travellers' descriptions of the Kurds within Eastern society. The chapter is divided into two sections: the first offers a brief history of travel writing, and divided into five subsections the first looks at the genre of travel writing from the eighteenth century until the end of the nineteenth century. The second subsection looks at patterns of travelling, discussing the role technological developments played in increasing the opportunity to travel and thus produce written accounts of trips. The third subsection focuses on the travellers, concentrating on their changing profile, which leads on to a fourth subsection that looks specifically at travellers to the Middle East, exploring the reasons why the area was of interest to the British. The fifth subsection discusses interest in antiquity as a reason for visiting Kurdistan. The second section looks at the discipline of social anthropology, which during the nineteenth century influenced travellers' thinking, encouraging the classification of people into hierarchical categories based on the size of their skulls. The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter, looking at how travel among the British developed, and common perspectives on it.

Travel Writing

This section offers a short history of travelling. Subsequent discussion covers the genre of travel writing, the pattern of travel writing, who travelled, travellers in the Middle East and travellers and antiquity. These subsections include discussion of the changes which occurred in the profile of travellers, and their motivation for travelling to the Middle East including Kurdistan. From the Grand Tour in the second half of the seventeenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century, many British subjects travelled to Europe and beyond, intending to record their travels in order to understand aspects of their own life and the lives of others. After finishing their studies, wealthy young men would embark upon their grand tour to other European countries, with the primary goal of gaining an education and understanding of the roots of European culture, which came from the Roman Empire. As such, most trips involved a visit to Italy because it had been the capital of the Roman Empire.¹ The Grand Tour served as a kind of cultural pilgrimage that enabled travellers to view classical sculptures and the architecture of the Roman Empire, as well as subsequent masterpieces from the Italian Renaissance.²

Travellers during the eighteenth century also sought to understand the nature of humanity, asking themselves questions such as ‘was the European way of life the only possible form of civilisation, and if so, was it God-given, or had we invented it ourselves? Was civilisation a necessary development of nature, or a contradiction of it?’³ Travel was thus an attempt to obtain information about why Europeans had become more powerful than other people. However, many travellers also visited other countries for their own pleasure.⁴

By the end of the eighteenth century, the purpose of travelling had begun to change. As a result of the rapid development of industry, from the early nineteenth century onwards Britain became very powerful within Europe, and due to the historic situation of the Western countries in relation to the rest of the world, Europeans tended to travel with the

¹ J. Buzard, ‘The Grand Tour and after (1660-1840)’, in Hulme, and Youngs (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, pp. 38

² P. Whitfield, *Travel: A Literary History* (Oxford, 2011), p. 154.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-6.

⁴ This factor will be discussed in the section on the identity of the travellers.

idea of political domination and a significant agenda of ‘intellectual reconnaissance’.⁵ In order to accomplish this goal and expand their Empire, the British used several methods including diplomacy, trade, scientific investigation, and missionary efforts. These are often considered to have been a form of ‘unofficial imperialism’ and ‘informal empire’.⁶

Throughout the nineteenth century, Britain’s global influence gradually increased. Between 1876 and 1915 a quarter of the globe was divided between six empires. During this time, the British colonies increased by about four million square km across the world.⁷ In the late nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century, France, Britain, and other Western powers greatly expanded their influence over the world and experienced what is known as ‘high imperialism’. As a result of that expansion, they controlled around 85% of the world before the outbreak of the First World War.⁸ As a result of this preoccupation with power, there is a belief that one of the main aims of travelling in the nineteenth century was to support the expansion of the British Empire. However, whilst most travellers visiting places such as the Middle East during that time did so with the aim of furthering British expansion, this does not mean that every single traveller to the region did so for this reason.⁹

This colonial agenda is particularly evident in some of the travel narratives produced in the late nineteenth century. One such writer, Henry Morton Stanley, wrote *Through the Dark Continent* (1878), which was the product of a three-year journey across central Africa. Although Stanley aimed to gather ethnographical and geographical information, the statistics he collected were designed to demonstrate that the area was highly significant to the Western colonial agenda, in particular central and eastern parts of Africa.¹⁰ Moving away from the African context, this thesis seeks to explore the importance of Kurdistan to travellers during the late nineteenth century, many of whom sought to find resources there. For example, F. R. Maunsell, in his article *The Mesopotamian Petroleum Field* (1897), intensively and accurately investigated the petrol mines in southern

⁵ Whitfield, *Travel a Literary History*, pp. 180-1.

⁶ R. Bridges, ‘Exploration and travel outside Europe (1720-1914)’, in Hulme, and Youngs (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, p. 53.

⁷ E. Hobsbawm, *the Age of Empire 1875-1914* (London, 1987), p. 59.

⁸ E. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 2003), p. 6.

⁹ Nash, *Travellers to the Middle East From Burckhardt to Thesiger*, p. 11.

¹⁰ C. Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London, 2011), pp. 137-138.

Kurdistan, demonstrating that a huge amount of oil could be found in several different mines, and rightly observed that an investment in petrol would be highly profitable in the future.¹¹

Genres of Travel Writing

As a genre, travel writing remains disputed. Tim Youngs argues that travel narratives are not a specific genre, but rather that travellers used other forms and genres of literature to write about their journeys.¹² In contrast, other scholars argue that travel narratives are a genre of their own, through which travellers are able to represent themselves in their accounts.¹³ As a result, travel narratives are an ambiguous and complex kind of writing. However, travel writers all have in common two conflicting tasks. First, they must serve as informers by accurately describing their experiences and relating the knowledge that they obtained throughout their journeys. Second, they must become compelling narrators in order to attract the attention of the reader, provide enjoyment and entertainment, and present their accounts in a digestible fashion.¹⁴

In particular, in the eighteenth century narratives were largely descriptive, as in the case of Johan George Keyssler (1693–1743) who travelled through Hungary, Germany, Switzerland, Bohemia, Lorrain, and Italy, and who aimed to describe everything that he observed during his journey in his narrative,¹⁵ not only for the enjoyment of his readers but also for prospective travellers who planned to visit these places. In order to be informative, he discussed the landscape, political history, literature, laws, customs, coins, architecture, manufacture, commerce, sculpture, and paintings of the countries which he visited. Even Edward Gibbon used Keyssler's authoritative book on his own journey.¹⁶ As such, in

¹¹ F. Maunsell, 'The Mesopotamian Petroleum Fields', *The Geographical Journal*, 5, no. 9 (1897).

¹² T. Youngs, *Travellers in Africa; British Travelogues, 1815-1900* (Manchester, 1994), p. 4.

¹³ G. Moroz, *Travellers, Novelists, and Gentlemen* (Frankfurt am Main, 2013), p. 12.

¹⁴ Thompson, *Travel Writing*, p. 27.

¹⁵ Keyssler wrote a book entitled *Travels through Germany, Bohemia, Hungary, Switzerland, Italy and Lorraine* (German 1740; English 1756-1757).

¹⁶ C. Batten, *Pleasurable Instruction Form and Convention Eighteenth Century Travel Literature* (London, 1987), pp. 83-4.

addition to narration, it was expected that the text should be written as a journal, and convey information in a clear and plain way.¹⁷

Some travel writings were written as fictional accounts, but as they nevertheless retained factual elements the two became blended.¹⁸ In the fictional style of travel writing, the travellers often attempted to blend their personal observations with information from other books. For example, Defoe's *Tour thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724) contains fictional elements inspired by his personal observations from various visits around Great Britain as well as facts from other books.¹⁹ This technique allowed authors to choose to tell real stories but in an inaccurate manner, weaving fact and fiction and selectively embellishing certain experiences through the use of their own imaginations.²⁰

Travellers in the eighteenth century often documented their journeys in an epistolary manner,²¹ which is important because they discussed current situations in the visited country through letters that expressed their feelings and emotions about the situation. Sometimes they compared the situation with similar ones from their own homes. A notable example is Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who wrote many letters about her life in Constantinople in the eighteenth century.²² Most of the travellers wrote their accounts for themselves or for friends. For example, Patrick Campbell wrote a journal of his voyage to North America for his own amusement and personal gratification, and Patrick M. Robert wrote his travel book *Tour through Parts of the North Provinces of America* (1776) for the amusement of some close friends.²³

In the nineteenth century, the genre of travel writing changed. Travellers began to provide information about the countries for the sake of their nation's imperial agenda, and in addition they attempted to be as literary as possible.²⁴ In the early nineteenth century, the

¹⁷ A. M. Stenton, 'Late eighteenth-century home tours and travel narratives: Genre, culture and space' unpublished PhD in King's College, University of London (2003), p. 30

¹⁸ J. Rubies, 'Travel Writing as a Genre: Facts, Fictions and the Invention of a Scientific Discourse in Early Modern Europe', *Journeys*, 1, Issues 1-2, pp. 10-11.

¹⁹ Batten, *Pleasurable Instruction*, p. 26.

²⁰ Thompson, *Travel Writing*, p. 16.

²¹ Batten, *Pleasurable Instruction*, p. 20.

²² G. M. MacLean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel* (New York, 2004), p. 18.

²³ Batten, *Pleasurable Instruction*, p. 45.

²⁴ P. D. Smecca, 'Cultural Migrations in France and Italy: Travel Literature from Translation to Genre', *TTR: traduction, terminologie, rédaction*, 16, no. 2 (2003), p. 46.

European understanding of science became developed, specialised, and rigorous, resulting in European travellers writing in an expert style, which in turn meant that these travel writers made important contributions to the development of the sciences.²⁵ Like other European travel writers, British travel writers were influenced by these developments. For example, a twenty-volume description of Egypt was composed during Napoleon's invasion of the country, and the text includes Egyptian natural history, contemporary politics and culture, and also antiquity.²⁶ During this time, travellers wrote about these unknown aspects of countries in order to further scientific discovery. From the 1830s onwards, many impersonal, non-narrative, scientific, and graphically illustrated books were written, containing graphs, charts, and tables. The information was the central focus, and the texts lacked the personal style that earlier books had demonstrated.²⁷ This new and specialist style of writing contained more scientific vocabulary, and the authors did not fill their work with a sense of chronology and narrative style, but rather focused on presenting their travel accounts in a scientific, imperial, and even bureaucratic style.²⁸

Most travellers who visited Kurdistan were in the service of the British Empire and thus wrote for the British agenda. Of the travellers discussed in this thesis, James Baillie Fraser was sent by the British Foreign Office to observe Russia's interests and Henry Creswicke Rawlinson was an officer of the East Indian Company. William Francis Ainsworth was sent to investigate the River Euphrates, and wrote about its suitability for navigation, the topography of the lands around it, and the hydrography of the lake of Van as a branch to the river.²⁹ F. R. Maunsell was the British Vice-Consul in Kurdistan and worked as a cartographer to collect information about the geography of the country. He also aimed to collect statistics about people in Kurdistan and its routes. Whenever he visited any city, town, or village, he therefore recorded the population, ethnicity of the people, the main sources of their economy, and the routes that linked the town or city to the surrounding places.³⁰ Another British traveller, Lieutenant-Colonel Mark S. Bell, wrote a book about his

²⁵ Thompson, *Travel Writing*, p. 81.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁹ Ainsworth, 'The Sources of Euphrates', pp. 173-77.

³⁰ F. R. Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan, North-West Persia and Luristan from Apr to Oct 1880*, vol. 2 (Simla, 1890).

journey in Asia Minor entitled *Reconnaissance in Mesopotamia, Armenia, Kurdistan and Azerbaijan in 1885-1886*, in which he documented the climate, geography, cultivation, and population of the regions that he visited. For example, he discussed the cultivation in Van and the plentiful supply of grain particularly at harvest time, but noted that it was very cheap because it could not be transported to the markets.³¹ He did not discuss the chronology of his journey or his personal experiences. This is because, like most of the travellers in the nineteenth century, Bell was writing with a particular purpose in order to serve the interests of the British Empire by gathering information. Due to this change in the reason for travelling, the style of writing also changed because the narratives were no longer reflections on the author's most personal interests and experiences, but were rather records of the information collected about these countries. However, some travellers continued to write about their personal interests at the end of the nineteenth century, for example Isabella Bird, whose work frequently expressed her feelings. When she visited she wrote that she was very happy and impressed by the excellent work that had been done by the American Missionary in Van, who had, in her opinion, managed to enlighten a heathen area and educate the local children with Christian values.³² She spoke about the confidence of women in a village near Kermanshah named Sannah: 'The house is full of people, and the women come in and out without scruple, and I am really glad to see them,...'³³ Sometimes she recorded how tired she was during her journey, as when she was near Kum in Persia: 'I have had many a severe ride in traveling, but never anything equal to the last two hours. The severe pain and want for food made me so faint that I was obliged to hold on to the saddle'.³⁴ However overall, the genre of travel writing had changed; by the end of the century personal narrative had been largely superseded by other agendas.

³¹ M. S. Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia Sections II and III Reconnaissance in Mesopotamia, Armenia, Kurdistan and Azerbaijan in 1885-1886* (Simla, 1889), p. 290.

³² Bird, *Journey in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 335.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

Patterns of Travel

Travelling was not an easy task, and journeys to regions such as the Ottoman Empire and Greece required intellectual and practical readiness. Books by former travellers to these areas would have offered some beneficial recommendations to individuals preparing to embark.³⁵ The travellers who visited Kurdistan, located within the Asiatic Ottoman lands, usually travelled to Constantinople and Izmir by boat, and then continued their journey by land,³⁶ whilst other travellers, such as Rich, came from India via the Persian Gulf to the port of Basra (now an Iraqi city), before moving on to Baghdad and then Kurdistan.³⁷

In the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire had more direct contact with the West than it had in the past as a result of technological advancements, and the number of travellers to the Middle East rapidly increased.³⁸ The advent of the steam engine facilitated an increase in travelling³⁹ because journeys by steamship⁴⁰ were cheaper, quicker, more convenient, had systematic schedules, and more accommodation,⁴¹ thus allowing more people to travel abroad. In the late 1820s steamships were used in the eastern Mediterranean for commercial purposes and for trading with the Ottoman Empire.⁴² In 1828 the first steamship came to the shore of Constantinople.⁴³

In addition, the railway also had an important role in developing travelling.⁴⁴ This was largely because rail travel simplified the means of getting to distant places, enabling travellers to start their journeys in Paris and travel by rail all the way to Constantinople, thus cutting out many of the hardships that earlier travellers had endured.⁴⁵ Gradually in the nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire established railways on its lands, providing easier

³⁵ H. Angelomatis-Tsougaris, *The Eve of the Greek Revival; British Travellers' Perceptions of Early Nineteenth-Century Greece* (New York, 1990), p. 9.

³⁶ Schiffer, *Oriental Panorama*, p. 35.

³⁷ Lane-Pool, Rich, Claudius James (1786/7-1821) Traveller and Collector of Manuscripts and Antiquity'.

³⁸ U. Baram, 'Seeing Differences: Travellers to Ottoman Palestine and Accounts of Diversity', *Journeys*, 3, no. 2 (2002), pp. 34-5.

³⁹ Thompson, *Travel Writing*, p. 45.

⁴⁰ The first time the steamship was used successfully was in 1783, P. P. Bernard, 'How Not to Invent the Steamship', *East European Quarterly*, 14, no.1 (1980), p. 5.

⁴¹ Buzard, 'The Grand Tour and after (1660-1840)', p. 47.

⁴² Pamuk and Williamson, 'Ottoman De-industrialization, 1800-1913: Assessing the Magnitude, Impact, and Response', pp.1 162-3.

⁴³ Schiffer, *Oriental Panorama*, p. 38.

⁴⁴ Thompson, *Travel Writing*, p. 45.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

accessibility to the region. The Oriental Railway Company had obtained a concession to establish a railway in the Ottoman Empire between Izmir and Iyidin in 1856, which was 133 km, and it was developed again in 1866.⁴⁶ Then in 1888, Deutsche Bank made a contract with the Ottoman officials to establish the Anatolia Railroad and started to build the railway from Haydarpasha which crossed the Bosphorus and then Constantinople, and which by 1892 had reached Ankara. This encouraged the Ottomans to establish the railway to Konia.⁴⁷ From 1856 until 1923, the length of the railroad in the Ottoman Empire grew to an estimated 8,619 km.⁴⁸ After this, the Baghdad railway was established in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁴⁹ This gradual connection between distant lands enabled an increasing number of British travellers to explore the Ottoman Empire. For example, during the 1850s the railroad enabled these British merchants who had settled in Izmir to transfer the raw material which they bought from Armenian and Greeks mediators to Britain and to bring British products to the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ S. Akgüngör et al, 'The Effect of Railway Expansion on Population in Turkey, 1856–2000', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 42, no.1 (2011), p. 138.

⁴⁷ D. Quataert 'Limited Revolution: The Impact of the Anatolian Railway on Turkish Transportation and the Provisioning of Istanbul, 1890-1908', *Business History Review*, 51, no. 2 (1977), pp. 140-1.

⁴⁸ Akgüngör et al, 'The Effect of Railway Expansion on Population in Turkey', p. 140, 3.

⁴⁹ Y. Bektas, 'Jonathan S. McMurray, Distant Ties, Germany, the Ottoman Empire, and the Constriction of the Baghdad Railway(review)' *Technology and Culture*, 45, no. 4 (2004), pp. 872-4.

⁵⁰ Akgüngör et al, 'The Effect of Railway Expansion on Population in Turkey, 1856–2000', p. 138.



Figure 1.1: Map of Railway line in the Ottoman Empire in 1914 from S. Akgüngör et al., ‘The Effect of Railway Expansion on Population in Turkey’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 42, no. 1 (2011), p. 140.

However, the establishment of the railways was gradual, and so whilst the Europeans were blessed with new shipping technology in the nineteenth century it did not aid them in their journeys beyond Constantinople, including to the Asian part of the Ottoman Empire, prior to the construction of the rail network. Upon disembarking at the port, they would have had to rely on primitive methods of travelling in order to visit places

such as Anatolia and Kurdistan, including riding horses and camels.⁵¹ Most of the travellers who visited Kurdistan in the nineteenth century did so on horseback or by riding mules due to the unavailability or unsuitability of other methods. One such traveller was James Baillie Fraser who visited Persia including Kurdistan from 1833 until 1835, during which time he travelled almost 10,000 miles on horseback.⁵² When Bird arrived at the Persian port of Bushir for the first time by ship, she moved on to Basrah,⁵³ after which she visited Kurdistan on horseback.⁵⁴ In January 1890 she travelled from Baghdad to Tehran, facing difficulties along the way. For nearly 45 days she struggled with drifting snow on the route, sleeping in filthy and overcrowded caravanserai at night.⁵⁵ As there were no railways in Kurdistan many travellers would have endured similar difficulties, limited to primitive methods of travel such as by horse and beset by severe weather. Thus, we can infer from such harsh conditions that Kurdistan was considered an important country for the British agenda, which led to travellers enduring the hardships that their trips presented.

Who Travelled

From the early modern period until the nineteenth century, the profile of the travellers changed. From the second half of the seventeenth century to the late eighteenth century, wealthy young men typically started the Grand Tour by passing through other European countries on the way to Italy.⁵⁶ However, this situation changed when people from other social backgrounds started to travel⁵⁷ as a result, in part, of the growth of industrialisation, with people migrating to cities and towns and the urban middle class increasing and developing a desire to travel for leisure. From that time on travelling ceased to be a

⁵¹ Schiffer, *Oriental Panorama*, pp. 44-45.

⁵² Falk, 'Fraser, James Baillie (1783-1856) Traveller and Artist'.

⁵³ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 1, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ D. Middleton, 'Bishop [Bird], Isabella Lucy (1831-1904)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, online edn 2005.

⁵⁶ Buzard, 'The Grand Tour and after (1660-1840)', pp. 38.

⁵⁷ J. Wilton-Ely, "'Classic Ground': Britain, Italy and the Grand Tour', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 28. No. 1(2004), p. 137.

privilege for aristocratic males.⁵⁸ After 1770, a wider range of British citizens started to travel. Some of them continued in the style of the Grand Tour, whilst others preferred to travel to regions that remained natural and were unaffected by modernity.⁵⁹

As to female travellers, in the early eighteenth century many women travellers did not want to publish their accounts, with the exception of Elizabeth Justice, who published a book entitled *A Voyage to Russia* (1746). The situation gradually changed, however, and the writings of female travellers were published, particularly in the nineteenth century.⁶⁰ Thompson believes that a characteristic of female travel writers was that, unlike their male counterparts, they often concentrated on their 'inner-landscapes', along with their personal likes and dislikes, which usually focused upon the 'feminine' features.⁶¹ On the differences between male and female travel writing, Jane Robinson believes that normally women concentrated on how and why, but men focused on where and what.⁶² As Pratt has observed, whilst the male travellers were interested in collecting everything that they saw, the female travellers were more interested in expressing themselves and their own experiences, such as the size of their rooms and their private lives.⁶³ This research looks at the writings of one female traveller, Isabella Bird, in order to find some differences between her narratives and those of male travellers.

Due to expansion and imperialism, the number of travellers increased during the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the type of traveller also changed, with soldiers, artists, merchants, explorers, surveyors, sailors, reporters, colonial administrators, and journalists pouring out of Europe and across the globe. This broadening of the occupational background of travellers resulted in a variety of different kinds of writing, such as literary travelogues, memoirs, newspaper reports, campaign tracts, and specialist documents, such as those intended for economists, policy makers, and scientists. However, what all these texts had in common was that they served, either directly or indirectly, the imperial

⁵⁸ J. Buzard, *The Beaten Track: European tourism, literature, and the ways to culture, 1800-1918* (Oxford, 1993), p. 18.

⁵⁹ Thompson, *Travel Writing*, p. 48.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 48-9.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 172.

⁶² J. Robinson, *Wayward Women A Guide to Women Travellers* (Oxford, 2nd 2002), p. 10.

⁶³ M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eye: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, 2008), p. 156.

agenda.⁶⁴ A reading of the documents of the British National Archives reveals that the number of British correspondents increased, particularly during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, as a result of the Armenian issue.⁶⁵ British travellers aimed to provide more information about the Kurdish people and their land, in order to collect information and provide data. In addition to this primary duty, some of them also provided ethnographic accounts of the Kurdish people. For example, Rich was the East India Company resident in Baghdad, and he travelled to Kurdistan in the spring of 1820 because of health problems and to escape from the hot temperatures, after which he wrote his famous book about his journey. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the geologist Ainsworth came to Kurdistan to investigate the Euphrates' suitability for navigation, and other travellers such as the British officer Rawlinson, and Fraser, who was sent to monitor Russia's interests in the region, also came to Kurdistan. Maunsell was a politician and cartographer, who searched for oil and mapped the country, Bird came as an Anglican missionary, and Harris was an officer and journalist. The British Consul-General for the Kurdish regions at Diyarbakir, John George Taylor, travelled through many Kurdish places in the 1860s and wrote several articles about Kurdistan, collecting data about trade and sources about the country.⁶⁶ By reading the profiles of such travellers who visited Kurdistan, it becomes apparent that most came or were sent to the region to serve the interests of their empire.

Travellers in the Middle East

In addition to the nineteenth-century aim of furthering the goals of the British Empire by travelling to the Middle East, as discussed above, there are several other reasons why travellers decided to make such journeys. One reason was the sudden importance of the Middle East during the Napoleonic period, in particular because the British were afraid of Napoleon's desire to control the region in order to use it as a strategic means to invade

⁶⁴ Thompson, *Travel Writing*, pp. 52-3.

⁶⁵ TNA: FO 881/4479, 1880, Enclosure, Memorandum in a Consular Service in Asiatic Turkey, Smyrna, December 1881.

⁶⁶ J. G. Taylor, 'Travel in Kurdistan with Notices of the Sources of the Eastern and Western Tigris and Ancient Ruins in their Neighbourhood', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 35 (1865), p. 21.

India;⁶⁷ the Ottoman Empire was considered to be a bridge between Europe, India, and the Far East, which was of particular concern for Great Britain.⁶⁸

After the decline of the Ottomans in the eighteenth century and the weakening of the Persian Empire and loss of territory in the nineteenth century, the British became increasingly concerned about the growing influence of Russia.⁶⁹ The rivalry between the two superpowers became known as the Great Game. From the British perspective, this was a response to the Treaties of Turkmanchay in 1828 and Adrianople in 1829, according to which Russia obtained important privileges for navigating the Ottoman Straits, including in the Dardanelles, as well as claims to territories in both the Persian and Ottoman Empires.⁷⁰ These treaties caused Great Britain to take more steps to limit the expansion of Russian influence. The Russian threat became more apparent when the Treaty of Unkair Skelessi was signed between Russia and the Ottoman Empire on 8th July, 1833. This was a military agreement according to which both parties were to help each other to guarantee the safety of their territories, and the Ottoman Empire would close the Strait of the Dardanelles against foreign fleets if required.⁷¹ Some intelligence officers were sent by Britain to monitor Russia's interests in the areas, and some of them visited Kurdistan. For example, Fraser was sent to monitor Russia's interests in Persia between 1833 and 1835. As a result of his journey he made a series of recommendations: firstly, Great Britain had to have more influence over the East from the Indus to the Bosphorus. Secondly, he argued that Afghanistan and Persia were strategically important in blocking Russia's advance. Thirdly, he recommended that British policy makers should increase their influence on Persia by encouraging the latter to employ pro-Britain officials and by helping the nation militarily by training her army to keep both frontiers in Azerbaijan and Khorasan. Finally, he

⁶⁷ Nash, *Travellers to the Middle East*, p. 11.

⁶⁸ Searight, *The British in the Middle East*, p. 49.

⁶⁹ J. Nash, 'Politics, Aesthetics and Quest in British Travel Writing on the Middle East', in T. Youngs (ed.), *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century Filling the Blank Space* (London, 2006), p. 56.

⁷⁰ E. Ingram, 'Great Britain's Great Game: An Introduction', *The International History Review*, 2, no. 2 (1981), p. 165.

⁷¹ F. E. Bailey, *British Policy and The Turkish Reform Movement: A Study of Anglo-Turkish Relations 1826-1853* (London, 1942), pp. 49-50.

proposed that the British should establish the Oriental Department in the British Foreign Office.⁷²

The British believed that the Ottoman Empire should remain in order to keep the balance of power, and for that reason the British cemented their relations with the Ottomans. Many British military officers thus visited the Ottoman lands, especially those close to the Russian sphere of influence, including some Kurdish lands situated to the north. They believed that if the Ottoman Empire collapsed, Russia could invade the northern part of the empire and become a threat to British interests in India and Asia Minor. For that reason, many British came to the Ottoman lands, with some believing that the old semi-independent dynasties should be destroyed by the Ottoman Empire in order for it to remain in power.⁷³

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Great Britain's interests in Persia also increased. British officials generally saw Persia as a strategic region for securing their interests in India and as a potential market for manufactured products as well as a source of raw materials. The need to protect British interests in India can be considered as the main factor shaping the former's attitudes towards southern Mesopotamia, Persia, and the Persian Gulf.⁷⁴ For that purpose, the British tried to use Persia as a buffer zone to protect their interests against Russia.⁷⁵ At the time, the Persian army was untrained and unorganised and required improvement,⁷⁶ which the British were able to assist with. The reform of the Persian army began in 1833, when British officers were sent to reorganise the Persian military. One such officer was Henry Rawlinson.⁷⁷

During the last quarter of the century, when Persia faced instability, both Russia and Britain tried to take advantage of the situation to consolidate their regional influence.⁷⁸

⁷² D. Wright, 'James Baillie Fraser: Traveller, Writer and Artist 1783-1856', *British Institute of Persian Studies, Iran*, 32 (1994), p. 131.

⁷³ Nash, 'Politics, Aesthetics and Quest in British Travel Writing on the Middle East', pp. 58-9.

⁷⁴ Searight, *The British in the Middle East*, p. 133.

⁷⁵ W. Roselezam (eds), 'The Exotic Portrayal of Women in Isabella Bird Bishop's Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan', *Iranian Studies*, 56, no.6 (2012), p. 780.

⁷⁶ L. Hunt (ed), 'Persian Army', *Examiner*, 3740, 4 Oct. 1879, p. 2.

⁷⁷ R. W. Dalley and, Stephanie Ferrier, 'Sir Henry Creswicke Rawlinson first baronet (1810-1895)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press (2004), p. 156.

⁷⁸ Searight, *The British in the Middle East*, p. 142.

Ultimately, these relations and the interests of the British in the areas had an impact on increasing the number of travellers to the regions and consequently their memoirs, detailing the people of the areas visited. One of the British travellers was George Nathaniel Curzon, who travelled to Persia (Sept 1889- Jan 1890) and investigated the military characteristics of the Kurds. He described them as fine horsemen, courageous and resourceful, and gentlemanly in manner. He added that the Kurds who settled in the north-eastern and north-western parts of the region, and also Lurs in the south-western part of the country, could be considered as the best frontier protectors in the world.⁷⁹ Their forefathers had the rebellious spirit, he said, and Shah Abas moved them from Kurdistan to keep the northern border safe. In comparison with the Persians, the Kurds, Turkomans, and Afghans were more warlike.⁸⁰

The political situation in Kurdistan also attracted the attention of the British, particularly the Ottoman campaign to control the Kurdish Emirates. The Ottoman army attacked the Kurdish lands in 1836, specifically the Soran Emirate, and this led the British to observe the situation closely. Richard Wood was a British politician and traveller who was sent to the region to provide daily reports to the British diplomats in Constantinople and Baghdad about what was happening in the Kurdish areas.⁸¹ Another traveller was British Colonel J. Shiel who visited Kurdistan during the Ottoman campaign in 1836 to control the Kurdish Princedoms. In the introduction to his account of the journey he explained that he aimed to visit the Turkish encampment in the northern region of Mosul and discussed how Rashid Pasha the leader of the Ottoman Army controlled the Botan Emirate.⁸²

In addition to the political situation of the country, another important reason for traveling to the East was missionary work, with some travellers visiting other countries to proselytise. One such traveller was Isabella Lucy Bird, who travelled to Kurdistan and other nearby places in the name of Christianity, along with a box of medicine. She travelled to poor regions in order to provide treatment for ill people, believing that the best

⁷⁹ G. N. Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1 (London, 1966), p. 277; idem, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 2 (London, 1966), p. 628.

⁸⁰ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, 1, pp. 117-18; Nash, *From Empire to Orient*, pp. 121-122.

⁸¹ A. B. Cunningham, *The Early Correspondence of Richard Wood 1831-1841* (London, 1966), pp. 90-101.

⁸² J. Shiel, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, through Kurdistan, via Van, Bitlis, Se'ert and Erbil, to Suleimaniyeh in July and August 1836', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 8 (1838), pp. 54, 87.

missionary was a medical one: 'no one follows in the Master's (Jesus) footprints so closely as the medical missionary'.⁸³ She claimed that her missionary work among the Bakhtriares changed the mind of the intolerant chief, who asked Bird to send them European *Hakims* (medical doctor). She also argued that no European was more warmly welcomed in Baghdad than the medical missionary Dr. Sutton.⁸⁴

Travellers and antiquity

In the early nineteenth century, the direction of the British travellers shifted from France and Italy and moved further east to incorporate Greece and the Ottoman Empire. Besides the importance of the Ottoman lands, Greek antiquity and culture had a significant position in the Western world, and some social and political factors played a role in that change, such as the expansion of British commerce and a shift from studying Roman antiquity to Greek classics.⁸⁵ Archaeological discoveries encouraged travellers to visit the homelands of the ancient civilisations. For example, within the Grand Tour period British travellers visited Italy and returned with examples of Italian architecture, art, and music, which the rich used to adorn and design their houses and gardens in the style of Italian antiquity, in order to demonstrate their knowledge and experience.⁸⁶

By visiting the ancient sites of Greece and Asia Minor, along with reviving the arts, travellers attempted to substantiate an imagined antiquity.⁸⁷ They also sought to discover or highlight the pathos and symbolism of Ancient Greek civilisation.⁸⁸ Investigating Greek civilisation was not only vital in order to understand its antiquity, but was also important for social life and modern democracy in the West.⁸⁹ In the nineteenth century, British travellers therefore searched for Greek antiquities and aimed to find traces of ancient customs among the Greeks.

⁸³ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 1, p. 39.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Angelomatis-Tsouarkis, *the Eve of the Greek Revival: British Travellers*, p. 1.

⁸⁶ R. Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour: The British in Italy, c. 1690-1820* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 1.

⁸⁷ D. Constantine, *Early Greek Travellers and the Hellenic Ideal* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 4.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

⁸⁹ C. K. Mahn, 'Journeys in the Palimpsest: British Women's Travel to Greece, 1840-1914', Unpublished PhD thesis (University of Glasgow, 2007), p. 4.

Despite the importance of Greece and Asia Minor, other places also attracted the attention of British travellers in the nineteenth century. Amongst these, the Near East, which included Egypt, the Holy Land, and Mesopotamia, was significant, because it offered a wealth of antiquities.⁹⁰ In some parts of the Ottoman Empire, the interest in history and biblical investigation produced a huge amount of literature.⁹¹ The travellers' primary purpose for travelling to the Middle East during this stage was to visit Palestine, from which to investigate the traces of biblical antiquity, and Mesopotamia was of interest because it was the territory of ancient Assyria. The lives of the local people were used as a lens through which to study biblical times. For example, the travellers investigated the Arabs' contemporary situation, viewing the style of clothing and the expressions used in speaking as examples of the past.⁹² This was deemed realistic because they considered the Arabs to be primitive and therefore decided that very little had changed over time: for example Burton saw Arabs as 'natural' people, finding them to be sincere, indomitable, brave, and humane.⁹³

Besides the importance of Persia's position, in the early nineteenth century German scholars and linguists established the theory of the Indo-European language family. The British had already considered Indo-European languages, but it was the Germans who developed the theory.⁹⁴ Bouckaert and his colleagues suggested that the Indo-European language originally came from Anatolia 9500 years ago, and the branches of that language spread to Europe and Asia, with one such branch being the Indo-Aryan one.⁹⁵ Then a French traveller, racial theorist, and diplomat, Comte Arthur de Gobineau (1816-82) applied the Indo-European theory to Persia in the latter stages of the nineteenth century. At this time, British travellers were trying to explore the ethnic origins of Persian people. Lord Curzon, who came to Persia in the late nineteenth century, believed that the Persian and the Modern European had many similarities and that they shared a common Aryan origin. For example, he said 'it ought not to be difficult to interest Englishmen in Persian people. They

⁹⁰ Nash, *Travellers to the Middle East*, p. xi.

⁹¹ Bridges, 'Exploration and Travel outside Europe (1720-1914)', p. 63.

⁹² F. P. Cobbe, *The Cities of the Past* (London, 1964), p. 75.

⁹³ A. Damiani, 'British Travel Attitude to the Near East in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' unpublished PhD thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1977), p. 229.

⁹⁴ J. Turner, *Philology the Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Oxford and Princeton, 2014), p. 127.

⁹⁵ R. Bouckaert, 'Mapping the Origins and Expansion of the Indo-European Language Family', *Science* 337, no. 24 (2012), p. 957.

have the same lineage as ourselves.⁹⁶ Curzon used that justification as a pretext to strengthen British interests in Persia.⁹⁷

As a region, the Middle East acquired increasing significance for the value of its archaeology over the nineteenth century. The first attempt to investigate the antiquity of the Middle East started in 1810 in the hands of engineers, civilians, military officers, navy officers, and army officers of the East India Company, and in 1825 the British Museum obtained around fifty pieces of fragmented sculptures, bricks, and Assyrian poetry which had been collected by Claudius James Rich.⁹⁸ His collection of these Assyrian antiquities was very important and led to further and proper investigations.

Austen Henry Layard, who became the most important figure of Assyrian archaeology, was sent to investigate the area and its antiquities as a result of his reputation, particularly his courage, education, health, and good relationship with the local Arabs and Turks,⁹⁹ along with his interest in ancient history and sound knowledge of ancient architecture.¹⁰⁰ Rich's Assyrian collection was the first of its kind in the British Museum, and as a result Assyriology became very important to the British and also the French because of the connection between Assyrians and the Old Testament. For example, Shalmaneser was an Assyrian King who invaded Samaria, the capital of the Northern kingdom of Israel, and in doing so captured the Ten Tribes. In the nineteenth century it was believed that these biblical stories lacked scientific support,¹⁰¹ and so both the French and British competed with each other to achieve the honour of uncovering significant information about their shared religion by excavating biblical sites such as Nineveh. Julius Mohl, a member of the French Asiatic Society, was inspired after seeing Rich's collection in London¹⁰² to direct the French government to obtain the right of excavation, and as a consequence appealed to the French Agent in Mosul to demand this right.¹⁰³ He then funded Paul Emile Botta, who was sent by France to excavate areas of Assyria, and in 1843

⁹⁶ Curzon, *Persia and Persian Questions*, vol.1, p. 5.

⁹⁷ Nash, *From Empire to Orient*, pp. 114-116.

⁹⁸ H. Hook, *Empires of the Imagination* (London, 2010), p. 253.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 253.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 253; K. Kubie, *Road to Nineveh the Adventures and Excavations of Sir Austen Henry Layard* (London, 1965), pp. 148, 152.

¹⁰¹ Kubie, *Road to Nineveh the Adventures and Excavations*, p. 148.

¹⁰² Hook, *Empires of the Imagination*, p. 255.

¹⁰³ Kubie, *Road to Nineveh*, p. 127.

he excavated the buildings of Sargon II in Khorasabad, to the north of Mosul.¹⁰⁴ Botta's discoveries were important and encouraged Layard to pursue his excavations. In 1845, Layard was particularly worried that the French would win accolades as the discoverers of valuable antiquities, and so he persuaded the British Ambassador in Constantinople, Stratford Canning, to fund his excavations, which subsequently began in October 1845 in Mosul. Canning managed to obtain permission from the Ottomans for Layard to excavate in 1846. Layard's excavations took place over two different periods, the first being 1845-7 and the second 1849-1851. During these times, he discovered many valuable Assyrian antiquities, including Shalmaneser III's Black Obelisk.¹⁰⁵ In 1845, he employed many Nestorians and Arabs for the digging and manual aspects of excavation.¹⁰⁶ For his second excavation, he obtained funds from the British Museum to conduct important work in Kuyunjik.¹⁰⁷

During his discoveries, Layard concluded that the Chaldeans who were living in Mosul and some parts of Kurdistan were descended from the ancient Assyrians and argued that the current language used by them was the language of the ancient Assyrians.¹⁰⁸ From that time, the Nestorians and Chaldeans came to be called Assyrian. During Layard's excavations in the ancient city of Nimrud, he found many archaeological treasures which are now in the British Museum he excavated eight areas in Nineveh, where he found references to four of the kings who were mentioned in the Old Testament: Tiglath-Pileser, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Shalmaneser. With these findings, he was able to prove that Nineveh was a real ancient city.¹⁰⁹

The inscriptions, which were later deciphered by Hincks, related to the campaigns of the Assyrian kings and proved that biblical and Assyrian history were both sides of the

¹⁰⁴ Hook, *Empires of the Imagination*, p. 253.

¹⁰⁵ J. Parry, 'Layard, Sir Austen Henry (1817-1894) archaeologist and politician' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004-2016), accessed on 25 March 2017, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16218>]; S. Malley, 'Shipping the Bull: Staging Assyria in the British Museum', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 26, no. 1 (2004), p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Hook, *Empires of the Imagination*, p. 255.

¹⁰⁷ Parry, 'Layard, Sir Austen Henry (1817-1894) archaeologist and politician'.

¹⁰⁸ A. H. Layard, *Nineveh and its Remains: with an Account of a Visit to the Chaldean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yazidis, or Devil-worshippers; and an Enquiry in to the Manner and Arts of the Ancient Assyrians* (London, 1849), p. 237.

¹⁰⁹ Kubie, *Road to Nineveh*, pp. 197, 209.

same coin.¹¹⁰ One of the most crucial aspects of Layard's discoveries was the corroboration of biblical history, which was important to the British and to western society in general.¹¹¹ His discoveries supported biblical texts, and he was able to prove that the events recounted in the Bible were historically true. For example, one of the Assyrian buildings that he had excavated was the same palace mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel.¹¹² Layard's excavations can, to some extent, be considered Christian missionary work, as they challenged doubts about the truth of the Bible,¹¹³ particularly in the wake of Darwinian biology and geological criticism of creationism and events such as the Flood.¹¹⁴ As a result of Layard's findings, he became a hero, and his book, *Nineveh and Its Remains* (1849), was widely read in Britain.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, as a source of Assyrian antiquity, Kurdistan became an important place to visit for British travellers.

Anthropology

As a result of the Europeans' voyages and explorations to non-European countries, a huge amount of ethnographic information was collected. Thus, the discipline of anthropology was developed in the nineteenth century in an attempt to address these findings and explain the differences between coeval societies.¹¹⁶ Most nineteenth-century approaches to anthropology claimed that all societies started off as primitive before becoming more civilised over time. A key consideration of anthropology in the late eighteenth century had been to classify the different societies, defining the stages through which it was thought all humans passed. This linear interpretation of history led to highly problematic (and subsequently criticised) critical theories of evolutionism and scientific racism that were

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 227.

¹¹¹ T. Larsen, 'Austen Henry Layard's Nineveh: The Bible and Archaeology in Victorian Britain', *Journal of Religious History*, 33, no. 1 (2009), p. 68.

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 68-69.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 71.

¹¹⁴ G. Weber, 'Science and Society in Nineteenth Century Anthropology', *History of Science*, 12, no. 4 (1974), p. 280.

¹¹⁵ Whitfield, *Travel: A Literary History*, p. 223.

¹¹⁶ J. S. Haller, 'Concepts of Race Inferiority in Nineteenth Century Anthropology', *Journal of the History of Medicine*, 25, no. 1 (1971), p. 40.

frequently used to justify the alleged European superiority.¹¹⁷ However, by assuming a linear understanding of history, cultural anthropologists during this period neglected the numerous interferences that had taken place in the past, and they failed to note that some cultural traits could have different meanings depending on the society from which they originated. This bias often caused them to focus solely on the differences between the civilised and the primitive. As Gay Weber notes, Victorian social organisations were believed to be healthy and natural, while the ‘savage’ institutions were regarded as very complex, and their complexity came from irrationality rather than sophistication.¹¹⁸ This section will therefore focus on two main points: an exploration of how European anthropologists divided and categorised different societies according to their physical appearance, and a discussion of their perspectives on so-called primitive people.

Anthropologists are principally concerned with humanity, viewing the differences between cultures like the differences between ‘natural species’.¹¹⁹ According to anthropology, people were hierarchically divided based on certain criteria such as physical appearance, putative intelligence, and the shape of the skull, a system that placed Anglo-Saxons at the top of the racial hierarchy.¹²⁰ One German anthropologist, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840), in his article *On the Natural Variety of Man Kind* (1781), investigated five different groups of people, Americans, Asiatics, Caucasians, Malaysians, and Ethiopians, categorising them according to their skull shape and size, and considered Caucasians to be the finest race of humanity.¹²¹ Another anthropologist, James Cowles Prichard, in his first book *Researches into the Physical History of Mankind* (1813), discussed a racial theory of a human hierarchy. His next book, entitled *The Natural History of Man* (1843), was based on his travels and provided an ethnological study. He measured the skulls of Africans and suggested the highly dangerous theory that the brains of black people are less developed than those of white people.¹²² William Frédéric Edward’s (1777-1842) book *The Physiological Character of Human Race, Considered in their Relationship*

¹¹⁷ R. McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939* (Carlton South, 1997), pp. 2-3.

¹¹⁸ Weber, ‘Science and Society in Nineteenth Century Anthropology’, p. 275.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

¹²⁰ J. S. Dixon, ‘Representations of the East in English and French Travel Writing 1798-1882 with Particular Reference to Egypt’, unpublished Ph.D. thesis (University of Warwick, 1991), p. 9.

¹²¹ Haller, ‘Concepts of Race Inferiority in Nineteenth Century Anthropology’, pp. 40-1.

¹²² Z. Sardar, *Orientalism* (Buckingham, 1999), p. 63.

to *History* (1829) also discussed the size and shape of the skull as a factor in determining human behaviour, which he believed was more important than skin colour. He divided the French people into two classes: those with long heads and those with short and narrow heads. He also used the Nordic people¹²³ as a basis for comparison with other races.¹²⁴

These kinds of interpretations of the division of humanity influenced European thinking about race, and so many of the British travellers in the nineteenth century tried to describe Kurds according to their skull size and shape, and facial appearance. For example, Fraser (1833-5), visiting a village named Zhallah in southern Sulaymaniah, claimed to have seen a very strange person who was different from the other people: despite being about 30 years old his body was that of a boy of around twelve. His head is described as inhuman, with Fraser stating ‘it was the exact face of an ape or monkey; the compressed nose, the protruding mouth, the flat retreating brow, and projecting eyes, the small conical skull, with ‘woeful lack of brains’, all bore the stamp of the beast which mocketh the form of man” Fraser also remarked that his speech was not understandable.¹²⁵ Fraser’s example illustrates the fact that the theories of anthropologists had a significant impact on travellers who visited the East. Other travellers tried to describe the face of the Kurds, including Harris, who said that they had dark skin, black colouring (eyes, eye brows, and lashes), fine mouths, and aquiline noses, along with oval or long faces.¹²⁶ Other travellers wrote about the shape of Kurds’ skulls, and noted that the Kurdish face is oval, the nose is aquiline or straight, the eyes are deep.¹²⁷

As mentioned above, anthropologists divided humanity into civilised and uncivilised. The aim of this section is to discuss some features of the latter, which was also considered to be primitive or savage. Social anthropologists have used the term ‘primitive societies’ to refer not only to ancient cultures but to any society they deem to be less developed than their own. Accordingly, primitive societies were described as possessing

¹²³ Without mentioning which kinds of Nordics.

¹²⁴ G. Jahoda, ‘Intra-European Racism in Nineteenth Century Anthropology’, *History and Anthropology*, 20, no. 1 (2009), p. 40.

¹²⁵ Fraser, *Travel in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 171.

¹²⁶ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, pp. 187-88.

¹²⁷ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 352.

many common features, regardless of geographic location.¹²⁸ Lubbock suggested that there was no difference between ‘primitive’ ancient peoples and modern tribal ethnicities, because both were in the initial stages of development: the ancient ‘primitives’ were alleged to be in a nascent stage of humanity, whilst modern ‘primitives’ could not record or write.¹²⁹

Although one of the aims of travel for the nineteenth-century British was to understand primitive people, the Middle East and its people had a long history that was familiar to British travellers.¹³⁰ They investigated many ethnicities and tribes, including the Arab Bedouins, in order to understand the nomadic culture and way of life. Melman argues that the British considered the nomads to be superior to the Levantines, the Turks, and the Arabs in cities and towns; they viewed the Bedouins as pure because they had not mixed with the outside world.¹³¹ M. E. Yapp suggests that the travellers viewed the Arab Bedouins romantically and as trustworthy, whilst they believed the Arabs who lived in cities to be untrustworthy.¹³² Kinglake, for example, attempted to research the lifestyle of nomads and found significant differences between their way of living and that of the city dwellers.¹³³ This is important, because it was understood that the people in the rural areas could protect their authentic culture, while the city dwellers’ culture was diluted. Regarding the travellers who came to Kurdistan, they certainly drew a distinction between Kurds in the rural areas and in towns. For example, in the 1890s Harris observed that the Kurds in the wild mountains regions such as Sardasht gave a high level of freedom to their females, and that these women never misused that privilege. In contrast, the Kurds in the towns who were ‘civilised’ like the Persian and Turks had lower moral standards.¹³⁴

Anthropologists in the nineteenth century believed that religion was an important feature of a primitive society. Religion was also viewed as linear, as something that gradually developed from ‘animism and polytheism to monotheism’, with some Darwinists

¹²⁸ R. Redfield, ‘The Folk Society’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 52, no. 4 (1947), p. 294.

¹²⁹ Turner, *Philology*, p. 302.

¹³⁰ Nash, *Travellers to the Middle East*, pp. 11-12.

¹³¹ B. Melman, ‘The Middle East/Arabia ‘the Cradle of Islam’, in Hulme, and Youngs, (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, p. 116.

¹³² Yapp, ‘Some European Travellers in the Middle East’, p. 208.

¹³³ Damiani, ‘British Travel Attitude to the Near East in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’, p. 246.

¹³⁴ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 218

adding rationalism and modern science as the last stage.¹³⁵ In relation to Kurdistan, nearly all travellers focused on the religion of the Kurds, and it is possible that some of them were under the influence of contemporary anthropologists, as they endeavoured to show that the roots of paganism still existed among the Kurds. Maunsell, for example, argued that whilst the Kurdish nomads were Muslim, they were still under the influence of paganism, which had probably been passed down through the generations from a very remote time.¹³⁶ This point was used to show that whilst religion (in its Western definition) existed among the Kurds, they remained undeveloped in the eyes of the British.

Conclusion

The nineteenth century was the era of British global expansion. As a result of the imperial agenda and technological developments, travelling rapidly increased and parts of the world were opened up to British travellers. One of these areas was Kurdistan, which at the time was an important territory situated between the Ottoman Empire and Persia. It became the arena for some of the most important political events, connecting the two empires as well as the United Kingdom and India. The antiquity of ancient Assyrians was another important point that attracted the attention of the British travellers, who used excavations as a means to add credence to their religious lore. However, most of the travellers who came to the country were sent by the British government, and therefore their writings, to varying extents, served the British Empire and the imperial agenda. These British travellers were influenced by ideas that were common in British Victorian society, and therefore perspectives offered by anthropology were reflected in their writings, including writings about the Kurds and Kurdistan. It is important to remember these factors as we endeavour to analyse the views of British travellers on Kurdistan as a geographical territory and their perspectives on the Kurds as an ethnic group.

¹³⁵ Weber, 'Science and Society in Nineteenth Century Anthropology', p. 276.

¹³⁶ Maunsell, 'Kurdistan', p. 82.

Chapter 2 The Kurds and Kurdistan in the view of British travellers

Introduction

This chapter provides background information about how British travellers viewed the Kurds and Kurdistan. It aims to investigate the British travellers' accounts in order to assess their knowledge and understanding regarding the Kurds and Kurdistan. One of the aims of the chapter is to investigate the origin of the Kurds, and to analyse the sources of information travellers used to support their arguments. As the basic organisation of Kurdish society was tribal, part of this chapter shows how British travellers discussed and portrayed the characteristics and origins of Kurdish tribes, and non-tribal communities within Kurdistan. It is also important to outline where Kurdistan is situated geographically today in relation to how British travellers depicted the boundary of Kurdistan in the nineteenth century, as the country was divided and incorporated into four countries after the First World War. This chapter will be divided into four sections that examine the following topics: the origins of the Kurds, and the origin and characteristic of the Kurdish tribal and non-tribal groups, Christian denominations the geography of Kurdistan and the boundaries of the country from the point of view of British travellers. Together, these sections will provide an analysis of what constituted the Kurds and Kurdish area for British travellers.

The Origin of the Kurds

British travellers considered that Kurds were descended from several different ancient races which existed in the region. One common argument was that Kurds belonged to the Carduchi race; according to another notion Kurds were Parthians, and the Medes were also considered as forefathers of the Kurds. The oldest source on which British travellers relied when researching the Kurds and Kurdistan was provided by Xenophon, the Ancient Greek

historian. Xenophon had a great influence on British society in the nineteenth century. According to Timothy Rood, as children, the British had learned in school about Xenophon's journey,¹ and so as adults, they were significantly influenced by his *Anabasis*. The British travellers who came to Asia Minor and Kurdistan aimed to find similarities between their travels and Xenophon's *Retreat of the Ten Thousand Greeks*. Rood discusses the traveller John Macdonald Kinneir, who compared his journey with *Anabasis* when he travelled through Asia Minor, Kurdistan, and Armenia, and wanted to follow the footsteps of Xenophon. He aimed to prove that Xenophon's information was reliable, as did most other travellers.² J. Shiel for example came to Kurdistan, visited areas seen by Xenophon and confirmed Xenophon's ideas.³ Millingen compared his journey with that of Xenophon, and noted that when Xenophon crossed the country had privileged by having ten thousand soldiers with to explore the villages, valleys, in that region, and also I have the same privilege as a commander of the Ottoman army⁴ to investigate the oriental isolation.⁵ Although Rood only refers to some of the travellers who followed Xenophon, most of those who came to the region wanted to use the roads which he had used. One such was Millingen, who closely followed Xenophon's path from the south to the north,⁶ and wrote in detail about the journey but is not mentioned by Rood. Bird also followed the path of Xenophon from the south to northern Kurdistan, reaching the Trabzon where the Greeks reached the sea.⁷ Nearly all the travellers in the nineteenth century who visited the region made at least one allusion to Xenophon.⁸

As to the origin of Kurds the majority of travellers relied on Xenophon, who believed that Kurds were descended from Carduchis.⁹ Some travellers wrote in detail about

¹ T. Rood, *The Shout of the Ten Thousand in the Modern Imagination The Sea! The Sea!* (London, 2004), p. 43.

² Rood, *The Shout of the Ten Thousand*, pp. 7, 137-38.

³ Shiel, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Kurdistan', pp. 54, 58, 90.

⁴ At that time Millingen was a commander of the Ottoman army.

⁵ Millingen, *Wild Life among Koords*, pp.132-3

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-144.

⁷ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 323-396; Rood, *The Shout of the Ten Thousand*, p. 152.

⁸ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 334-396.

⁹ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 109; Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, through Persian Kurdistan', p. 23; Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p.90; M. Sykes, 'The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 38 (1908), pp. 451-3; F. Millingen, 'On the Koords', *The Journal of Ethnological Society of London*(1869-1870), 2, no.2 (1870), p. 175.

the subject. Millingen and Maunsell considered the current Kurds to belong to different ancient inhabitants of the regions on the basis of Xenophon's comments on Kurdish ethnicity in *Anabasis*, where he suggested that the Kurds were originally descended from the people who settled in the Carduchian Mountains.¹⁰ Other travellers, including Fraser, Harris, and Bird had the same idea about the relationship between Kurds and Carduchis.¹¹ Of all the travellers, Millingen in the second half of the century provided the most detail about the subject. Millingen observed that during the retreat of the Greek army, it was harassed by the Persian cavalry and so Xenophon decided to change direction and go through the mountains. These were home to the Carduchis, and these mountains have since been identified by geographers as the Anti-Taurus Hakkary mountains, situated to the north of the Tigris River and now home to the Kurds.¹² Millingen argued: 'It is clear that our ethnological information will be more accurate if we extend our researches to those nations which, being nearer to the source, deserve to be looked upon as more competent authorities.'¹³ Ultimately, Millingen claimed the Kurds were the descendants of the Carduchis, attributing the differences in names to Xenophon's Greek pronunciation. This is a viable point, because even nowadays the Arabs, Persians, and Turks have different ways of saying 'Kurds'. For example, the Arabs say *Kart*, the Turks say *Kurt*, and the Persians said *Kurd*. So, for Millingen there was no doubt that the Kurds were the descendants of the Carduchis who had been mentioned by Xenophon over two thousand years earlier.¹⁴

In order to prove that Kurds were descendants of Carduchis, and at the same time to confirm that they were primitive and unchanged, British travellers tried to find similarities between the costume of nineteenth-century Kurds and Carduchis. Millingen also depended on Xenophon for information about the Carduchis' behaviour. The earlier account described the Carduchis as a warlike people who could fight with stones and arrows, whereas he observed in the nineteenth century that the Kurds were excellent horsemen who fought with swords and lances, and who could shoot accurately.¹⁵ In a similar vein, Bird

¹⁰ Millingen, *Wild Life among Koords*, p. 217; Percy and Maunsell, 'Central Kurdistan: Discussion', p. 140.

¹¹ Fraser, *Mesopotamia and Assyria*, P. 22; Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, 177; Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p.352.

¹² Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 206.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 205-6.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 205-7.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 208.

noted that Kurds like their ancestors had some barbarian customs, in particular in their style of dress.¹⁶ Both aimed to confirm that the warlike character of the Carduchis the ancestors of Kurds was passed down through generations to the Kurds in the nineteenth century, to give weight to Xenophon's argument that Kurds were descendants of the Carduchis. Twentieth and twenty-first century scholars confirmed that the Kurds descended from the Carduchis,¹⁷ which suggests that the arguments of British travellers continue to have an influence over these writers.

There is another argument, that Kurds came from Parthia, and even Millingen acknowledged that some of them probably did originate from this area. Strabo, Herodotus, and Marcus Junianus Justinus all claimed that there was a connection between the Carduchis and Parthians, although the former came originally from a place near the ancient Caspian sea which was known as Ghilan while the latter came from Khorasan (in the north east of the Persian empire), their ancient residence.¹⁸

¹⁶ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 352.

¹⁷ Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement*, pp. 11-2; M. T. O'Shea, *Trapped between Maps and Reality, Geography and Perceptions of Kurdistan* (London, 2004), p.63.

¹⁸ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 207-8.



Figure 2.1: Map of the Persian Empire showing Khorasan from T. Holland, *Persian Fire the First World Empire and the Battle for the West* (New York, 2005), pp. 2-3.

According to this perspective, the Carduchis and Parthians came from the same area. Millingen found another similarity between them, since both had a warlike tendency that has been recognised since the Assyrian era. Millingen argued that ‘Karduks sic (Carduchis) are the only people who, in that part of Asia, have maintained their nationality against the encroachments of either eastern or western conquerors; that is, Persians, Greeks and Romans’. They built the Parthian Empire, which lasted for 500 years until A.D. 220.¹⁹ The Parthians quickly disappeared after its fall. Therefore, the Carduchis were the former Parthians, and therefore they were not happy under the rule of the Turks and Persians.²⁰

¹⁹ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 208.

²⁰ Ibid.

Another argument, which suggested that the Kurds descended from the Medes, was promoted by Millingen, Harris, and particularly Maunsell. The idea was that the Medes had settled in Elam, now the region that stretches from Khuzestan to the Bakhtyaris' country and to Kermanshah.²¹ The twentieth-century Russian scholar Vladimir Minorsky (1877-1966) argued that the Kurds were obviously descended from the Medes, on the grounds that the Kurdish language was related to the Median language, and that when the Medes occupied the Assyrian Kingdom in 612 BC, many Median tribes migrated to the area. During the era of the Medes, their boundary extended to Lydia, an area now inhabited by Kurds.²² Minorsky may have obtained this idea from British travel writing because he worked as an academic in London, from 1933 as a reader of Persian in the University of London, and from 1938 as professor of Persian.²³

There are other less common ideas about the origin of Kurds. For example, Harris believed that the Kurds were descended from the Gardu or Kaurds, who in turn were descended from the Hittites.²⁴ Bell was alone in suggesting that the Kurds could have been descended from the Persians, justifying his argument by saying that the Kurdish language had its root in Persian, with the two languages sharing some common words.²⁵ Yet this argument was not sufficiently strong, especially since most of the other travellers and scholars were able to prove that the Kurds and Persians were distinctly different and had a long history of enmity. Thus, language alone was an insufficient link between the two, especially since the two are in fact distinct and the presence of common words is not unusual. All the languages in the regions share common words, because all the nations intermingled together, and thus Bell's argument is not robust.

Finally, Millingen aimed to show that Kurds also belonged to the Arian people, and were not related to the Mongols, Tatars, or Calmucks,²⁶ who came to the country from the eleventh century onwards. Millingen attempted to show that the Kurds and Europeans

²¹ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 300-301; F. R. Maunsell, 'The Land of Elam', *the Geographical Journal*, 65. no. 5 (May, 1925), p. 432; Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 177.

²² V. Minorsky, 'Tribes of Western Iran', *the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 75. no. 1-2 (1945), p. 78.

²³ *Who's who*, 2016.

²⁴ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 177.

²⁵ Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 220.

²⁶ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 207.

shared a common origin, reflecting contemporary interest in an Indo-European heritage, as discussed in the preceding chapter.

In general, the early British travellers did not share all the same perspectives or ideas regarding the origin of the Kurds, with each traveller often suggesting several ideas about the roots of that ethnic group. The differences between the travellers' ideology and their backgrounds and education is relevant in this respect. Finding ethnic roots is not an easy task, especially since ambiguities exist, and the Kurds are no exception. A second factor is that the Kurds did not have an ancient literature that could be used to confirm their ethnicity. A third factor could have been the geographical situation of the country in which the Kurds settled, since they were spread over a large terrain, resulting in regional differences between the tribes developing. Millingen more than any other travellers discussed the origin of the Kurds because he had a taste for anthropology, and in 1863 the *Royal Anthropological Society of Great Britain and Ireland* had been established. Travellers before him had shown little interest in anthropological studies, however.

Travellers' observations on the characteristics of Tribal and Non-Tribal Kurds

British travellers' perspectives on the origin of Kurdish tribes can be divided into two groups. The first group, which included Rich, Spottiswoode, and Bird believed that the Kurds were sharply divided into tribal and non-tribal groups. This binary division gave travellers the opportunity to apply their ideological perspectives to Kurds. For example, they wanted to argue that Kurds were racially different from each other, or to a lesser extent to consider the role of climate and topography on Kurds, and to discuss Kurdish manners. One traveller, Mark Sykes, who believed that the Kurds were composed of various different races, shared some ideas with the first group of travellers. The aim of these travellers generally was to impose their ideas about racial difference and to show that Kurds consisted of aboriginals and various other races. In the nineteenth century in particular race became a key element in investigating ethnicities. Therefore, the travellers were interested

to know about the origin of these tribal and non-tribal Kurds, and also wanted to find out the place of origin from which they had migrated to the country or been forcibly brought to Kurdistan. There is another group of travellers like Bell and Maunsell, who believed that the climate and topography played a significant role in the tribes' occupation and manners. Some tribes were pastoral and others were agricultural.

The first groups of travellers sharply divided up the Kurdish tribes, and this division allowed them to apply many of their ideas. Rich was the first British traveller who differentiated between tribal and non-tribal Kurds, arguing that the peasantry was different from the tribes. He aimed to show that the two sects were racially different. In terms of physiognomy, Rich stated that the non-tribal Kurds had some Grecian characters, were quite flexible, and had regular faces, whilst the tribal men had harsh features: 'a thick prominent forehead, abrupt lines, and eyes sunk in his head, which are usually fixed in a kind of stare'. It was common, Rich noted, for the tribal people to have light grey or even blue eyes. They were also recognised by a 'firm step' and frank and decisive manner, and exuded an air of being masters of the region. Even the dialogue of the tribal and non-tribal Kurds differed.²⁷ He intended to show that tribal Kurds due to their racial difference were related to Europeans and far superior to the non-tribal Kurds. Rich said the tribal Kurds considered that the Raya Kurds existed to be their servants, and he observed that the situation of these peasants was quite similar to that of 'the negro slaves in the West Indies'.²⁸ He reported that the tribes called themselves *Sipah* (army) and the non-tribal Kurds were known as *Raya* (literally the subjected people), used as a synonym for peasants, or were called Kelowspee (white cap) in eastern Kurdistan, or *Guran*. According to Rich, it was very rare to see the tribal Kurds working in farms, while the non-tribal Kurds were farmers.²⁹

Similarly, William Spottiswoode, who visited Kurdistan in 1863, believed in this binary division and divided the Kurds into two very different classes, the tribal Kurds and Gurans or peasants, and considered that they were racially different. The tribal Kurds were

²⁷ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 320; TNA: FO 78/3132, Henry Major Trotter Consul of Kurdistan, Memorandum on the different races inhabiting the consular districts of Kurdistan, considered chiefly with reference to the question of reform, no. 1, Constantinople, 30 October 1880.

²⁸ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, pp. 81, 88-89.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89, 152.

bellicose and had a pastoral life, and unlike the peasants, they considered themselves the owners of the land,³⁰ and regarded non-tribal Kurds as servants. Harris, at the latter end of the century also believed in the division, and argued that the peasants considered themselves lower in status than the tribal Kurds, and their manners, features, and clothing generally differed.³¹ He indirectly showed that the discrimination against non-tribal Kurds led them to feel inferior to the tribal Kurds. As Rich said in Sulaymaniah, the non-tribal peasants were not permitted to become soldiers.³²

Rich believed that kinship relations tied tribes together, and these did not exist among non-tribal Kurds. He believed that the tribal Kurds had blood ties with their chiefs, and therefore they were loyal, whereas the non-tribal Kurds lacked this kinship. He reported a conversation between Amanullah Khan, the Vali of Sina, and Abdurrahman Pasha of Baban. Khan wanted to know why his followers were not as loyal as those of the Pasha, to which the Pasha replied that Khan's followers were not tribesmen, 'they are not your cousins; they are but servants!' and therefore they were not willing to put themselves in danger for him. In contrast, the tribal Kurds were fiercely loyal to their chiefs, and even accompanied their leaders to exile in Baghdad without any complaint. Rich argues that when one tribal Kurd heard that his chief (Brother of Abdurrahman Pasha) had passed away, he proclaimed that he would not live another moment and promptly jumped off a roof to his death.³³ However, he did not mention whether he saw the chief die or merely heard about it later. The suicide probably happened while Rich was in Baghdad, or a few years earlier, because Abdurrahman Pasha passed away in 1814.

During Bird's visit to Kurdistan the situation between Kurds and Armenians was tense, and this clearly had an impact on the travellers' view of the Kurds. Therefore, the distinction between tribal and non-tribal Kurds highlighted the way in which they treated Christians generally and Armenians especially.³⁴ Bird identified the tribal Kurds and their nomadic lifestyle, stating that there was no law among the tribes and the strongest one had

³⁰ W. Spottiswoode, 'Sketch of the Tribes of Northern Kurdistan', *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London*, 2 (1863), p. 244.

³¹ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, pp. 179-80.

³² Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, pp. 88.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-7.

³⁴ R. Kevorkian, *Armenian Genocide, A Complete History* (London, 2011); Klein, *The Margins of Empire*.

the greatest rights.³⁵ In contrast, she described the non-tribal Kurds as settled and also as generally peaceful, orderly, and fair, but not towards Christians.³⁶ Bird was keen to show the differences between the tribal and non-tribal in term of lawlessness and obedience to the government.

Mark Sykes, who visited Kurdistan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, had another perspective: he did not believe in the binary division between tribal and non-tribal Kurds. He divided all the Kurdish tribes in the Ottoman Empire into six zones, each of which was categorised into several classes, although for reasons of space detailed, discussion of these zones is not possible here. He claimed that Kurdish tribes descended from several different races, and at the same time asserted that geography and climate played a role in the development of the Kurds. He claimed that his paper was scientifically written. However, an ethnocentric perspective can obviously be seen in his writing, as Edward Said argued that Europeans sought to learn about the Orient ‘then re-create it by soldier, judges and scholars who investigated the forgotten races, histories, cultures and languages, to posit them-beyond the modern Oriental’s ken-as the true classical that could be used to judge and rule the modern orient.’³⁷ Sykes, through his discussion wanted to show that Kurdish tribes did not belong to the same ethnic group but consisted of several different ethnicities. Furthermore, he depicted them as barbaric and primitive people. Sykes’ beliefs may have influenced his role in the famous Sykes-Picot agreement, because according to the agreement Kurds had no nation state.

According to Sykes, Zone A included most of southern Kurdistan, and he categorised the tribes into three classes. Class 1 was the pastoral Kurds, who also engaged in supplementary agriculture and were described by Sykes as mentally superior to most of the other Kurds due to their capacity for learning. They were known as Baba or Baban Kurds; they were expert equestrians renowned for their bravery, chivalry, and thieving tendency.³⁸ Sykes believed that the third class wore similar clothes to the other two groups, and consisted of semi-nomadic people, working in agriculture, horse breeding, and

³⁵ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 372.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 91-2.

³⁸ Sykes, ‘The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire’, pp. 454, 455, 457.

shepherding. They were described as having a thievish tendency and tended to be cruel and cowardly. They did not have good weapons. This group included the Ezdinan, who Sykes reported to be Yazidis, and the Mirizigi, who settled near Bashkala and were preoccupied with cultivation.³⁹ Sykes aimed to show their racial differences through their customs.

Regarding the Kurds in Zone C, Sykes concentrated on racial differences, but in reality he wanted to show his racial superiority and depicted Kurds as barbaric people. The people of Zone C were settled in northern Jazireh and were divided into four classes. Class 1 extended from near Dersim to northern Jazireh, and as its members intermarried with Armenians, Arabs and other Kurds they lost their characteristics. Class 2 was separated from them by the Euphrates River, and their religion was different because they were Shia and Pagan like the Kurds of Dersim.⁴⁰ According to Sykes, it was difficult to ascertain the origin of Class 2, and he even questioned whether or not they were actually Kurds, positing that they might be a mixture of other races, including Kurds, Mongols, Turks, Persians, and ancient Armenians, and perhaps even Romans. Some tribes of that class were Muslims while others were devil worshippers or Jacobite Christians. They were good stonemasons and wonderful vine growers, and were an industrious and capable people. They were reported to be revengeful, bloodthirsty, vindictive, treacherous, and fierce. The Mizizakh tribe belonged to that class.⁴¹ As Edward Said argues: ‘Orientals or Arabs are thereafter shown to be gullible, ‘devoid of energy and initiative’, much given to ‘fulsome flattery’, intrigue, cunning and unkindness to animals.’⁴² Sykes interpreted this class as more primitive because primitive were people supposed to be more cruel and mendacious, and commit rape, murder, and theft.⁴³ According to Sykes, tribes of Zone D were very complicated. He divided them into four classes; class 1 is distinguished by physical appearance. They were ugly, strong and tall. They were quarrelsome, treacherous, rapacious and disloyal people. Originally, they came from Diyarbakir, and a typical tribe was the Jibranli.⁴⁴

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 455, 462.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 468-9.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 469.

⁴² Said, *Orientalism*, p. 38.

⁴³ M. Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in Europe and American Thought 1860-1945* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 126.

⁴⁴ Sykes, ‘The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire’, p. 476.

The various accounts by these British travellers do contain some similarities, and their differences may have been derived from each other. For example, the travellers generally agreed that the Kurds had a clan system, but they provide different names for this: Rich used a specific name for the tribal Kurds, as discussed above, while Spottiswoode and Bird did not offer a specific name. Regarding Kurdish intelligence, Rich reported that a tribesman told him that the peasants were believed to be stupid, whereas the tribal Kurds were considered to be intelligent.⁴⁵ He suggested that the peasants might be the aboriginal inhabitants of the area, whereas the tribal Kurds were the subsequent occupiers: 'May not these be the aboriginal inhabitants of these country who had been conquered by the fierce tribes of the mountains?'⁴⁶ Spottiswoode offered the same idea about the peasants or Guran, suggesting that they were originally different from the Kurds. He believed that the peasants could be the descendants of the indigenous people of Kurdistan, who were living on the land before the tribal Kurds invaded and suppressed them. However, Sykes had the opposite idea and suggested that the Baban tribal Kurds from zone A were the indigenous people, being descended from the Carduchis.⁴⁷ In another point, Rich considered that the style of speaking between tribal Kurds and non-tribal people clearly distinguished them from one another, while Spottiswoode claimed that there was no significant difference in terms of language. It is possible that over time the style of speaking had become more uniform, between 1820 when Rich visited the Kurds to the time of Spotswood's visit in 1860s, so as to mask any previous difference. In addition, because Spottiswoode visited northern Kurdistan and Rich went to the southern part of the country, both confirmed that in the north and south Kurdish society consisted of tribal and non-tribal groups, and that the two regions differed.

The second class which included Bell and Maunsell believed that the differences between Kurdish tribal and non-tribal was due to topography and climate. It is possible that some of this variation may be attributed to different ideas of the late eighteenth century regarding the role of the environment in developing humanity. For example, Ronald L. Meek discussed the perspective of Scottish historian William Robertson (1721-1793), who

⁴⁵ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 89.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 153.

⁴⁷ Sykes, 'The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire', p. 453.

argued that the climate had a significant role in shaping human behaviour and progress. For example, if two different tribes settled in two very remote places in the world with no contact with each other but a similar climate, then they would be expected to be at the same stage of development, with similar thinking. As an example, he argued that the tribes in the plains near the Mississippi were very similar to those living on the shore of the Danube.⁴⁸ However, James Beattie, in *Elements of Moral Science* (1793), believed that the climate and soil had an impact on the people in the early stages of society, but in the stage of agriculture, other factors (e.g., instruments of tilling) played a role in development.⁴⁹ The Scottish historian William Russell, in his *History of Ancient Europe* (1793), believed that both soil and climate had a role in the development of societies. For example, he argued that in the northern hemisphere the land was rugged and there was a severe environment, and so development was slow and the hunting stage was quite long, while in the southern part of the globe the soil was better suited for tillage and therefore the hunting stage was very short and people soon started cultivation.⁵⁰ There are two travellers who believed that the climate and topography of the land played a significant role in the division of the Kurdish tribes, and affected their normal life and occupations. Bell argued that it was likely that all the tribal and non-tribal Kurds were descended from the same race, but that lifestyle and geographic situation affected division and occupation.⁵¹ Maunsell agreed with Bell's hypothesis, arguing that the basic organisation of the Kurds was tribal, consisting of pastoral and nomadic people, but that the climate and nature of the country had played a role in changing them and making them appear distinct. For example, in the deep valleys and impracticable slopes of Dersim, the Kurds were compelled to work in agriculture because of the severe climate. These Kurds were obliged to settle in villages, whilst in southern and central Kurdistan, the tribes had easy access to the plains and the banks of the Tigris River, and therefore they became nomads for most of the year and lived in tents.⁵²

Finally, British travellers did not agree about the origin and characteristics of Kurdish tribal and non-tribal. The majority of scholars, like the twentieth-century

⁴⁸ R. L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (London, 1976), p. 141

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 199.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 201.

⁵¹ Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 236.

⁵² Maunsell, 'Kurdistan', p. 82; Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 236.

anthropologist Martin van Bruinessen, have confirmed the common observation of the first group of travellers, concerning the differences between tribal and non-tribal Kurds and their relations, but he said that travellers tended to exaggerate in showing sharp differences between them.⁵³ He and other scholars in Kurdish historiography have not commented on the second group of travellers. In this thesis I argue that the idea of the second group which included Maunsell and Bell was more correct, because the climate and the topography of Kurdistan were very different and had a significant impact on Kurdish tribes' occupation and manners.

Christian Denominations

When travellers discussed any ethnic or religious group, including Christians, they were under the influence of their ideological backgrounds and guided by their previous knowledge. Contemporary discussions of race had a significant influence on the Europeans. The impact is obviously seen in the British travellers' accounts, as travellers focused on highlighting the origin and features of the Christian sects in Kurdistan. Besides, as the travellers were Christians themselves, they were keen to understand the beliefs of these various Christian doctrines, and also aimed to portray their Church as primitive and corrupted in order to pave the way for the dispatch of missionaries to work among them. Travellers did not see Christians as a single entity. They drew a portrait of each of the sects.

Armenians comprised the main Christian sect discussed by travellers, who alongside Kurds were living in the same geographical location in Eastern Anatolia. According to Millingen, historically northern Kurdistan was the eastern part of the Armenian Kingdom.⁵⁴ However, he did not specify which Armenian Kingdom. For a long time Armenians and Kurds were neighbors in six vilayets in the Ottoman Empire: Bitlis, Erzurum, Kharput (Mamurtul Aziz), Diyarbakir, Sivas and Van.⁵⁵ Bell believed that the

⁵³ Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p. 105

⁵⁴ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 144.

⁵⁵ R. Douglas, 'Britain and the Armenian Question 1894-7', *The Historical Journal*, 19, no.1 (1976), p. 114.

majority of Armenians were urban dwellers, but not all.⁵⁶ Under the influence of racial theory, the British travellers tried to show them as a superior and advanced race, partly by placing them within the Indo-European family: thus Millingen believed that Armenians were originally descended from the Arian race, a branch of the Indo-Europeans.⁵⁷ As their language constituted a branch of the Indo-European language family, travellers regarded it as expressive and rich.⁵⁸ In addition, travellers aimed to prove the Armenians' superiority both on account of their characteristics and their positive role in the region, Bird believed that the Armenians were the most active, energetic, enterprising and capable ethnicity in Western Asia. They were intellectually, and physically superior to the other ethnicities surrounding them.⁵⁹ Because of their ability, science and art, the country had benefitted from their culture and civilisation.⁶⁰ Because of their racial superiority, there was a possibility of developing them towards the European standard. The Armenians' customs, religion, colour, and even their undeveloped intellectual state could not make a barrier between the Armenians and the European people.⁶¹ However, British travellers exaggerated the positive characteristics of Armenians, because they based their argument on the city-dwelling Armenians, and overlooked the rural dwellers: for example, Trotter in his consular reports noted that there were no differences between the Armenian peasants and Kurdish peasants and both groups were equally ignorant.⁶² Travellers were not accurate in their presentation of Armenians and tried to hide negative characteristics, but they were probably guided by sympathy, except when they criticised their religion.

In terms of religion, Trotter said Armenians were divided into three different doctrines. Most of them belonged to the Gregorian doctrine which separated them from the Eastern Orthodox Church. They were under the jurisdiction of three rulers who were called Catholicos. Furthermore, there were two minor groups: the first was composed of Catholic Armenians. According to a memorandum prepared by Major Trotter in 1880 these numbered about 12000, and the second group was composed of Protestant Armenians,

⁵⁶ Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 125.

⁵⁷ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 259.

⁵⁸ C. Wilson, *Handbook for Travellers in Asia Minor, Transcaucasia and Persia etc* (London, 1895), p. 77.

⁵⁹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 336.

⁶⁰ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 259-60.

⁶¹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 336.

⁶² TNA: FO 78/3132, 1880 the Memorandum by Major Trotter on the different races inhabiting the Consular District of Kurdistan, considered chiefly with reference to the question of reform, 30 October.

which numbered around 9000.⁶³ The British generally had a negative perspective on Eastern Christianity.⁶⁴ When Anglican Christians discussed the Armenian Church, they normally criticised Eastern Orthodoxy, considered unreformed by protestants. For example, Wilson and Trotter had concerns about the Armenian Church, and believed that most of the Priests in villages were illiterate, and ignorant.⁶⁵ Furthermore, Bird as an Anglican Christian and as a religious woman believed that the ancient church brainwashed many Armenians, by instilling childish ideas and superstitions.⁶⁶ She regarded the Armenian Church as corrupt and primitive, badly adapted to nineteenth-century standards of life. Therefore, she advocated ‘force reform’ for the Armenian Church.⁶⁷ It is clear that she had ulterior motives, as she wanted Anglican missionaries to convert Armenians to Protestantism, or at least exercise some influence over them. It is worth mentioning that apart from Bird, Wilson and Trotter other travellers were silent about the primitive nature of the Church, but highlighted the important role of missionaries, which was also indirectly a reflection on the primitiveness of the Armenian Church. According to Maunsell American missionaries since 1819 had made a significant impact on them.⁶⁸ Bird believed that these missionaries worked on developing education, raising the standards of morals among the Armenians, in particular by educating the younger generations.⁶⁹ Millingen praised their endeavours by noting that because of the efforts of these missionaries, the Armenians in the second half of the century had obtained a good level of education, and were well-informed about various subjects like history and mathematics. Millingen was aiming to show that, as a result of these intellectual activities, and publishing some literature in their language, national feeling flourished among them.⁷⁰

The second largest Christian sect discussed by travellers to Kurdistan was comprised of Nestorians (Assyrians). According to Maunsell these Nestorians were known by different names. He noted that the ordinary Nestorians called themselves Syrians or

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ H. J. R. Odams, ‘British Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire 1876-1908’ PhD thesis, University of Oxford (1995), p. 252.

⁶⁵ Wilson, *Handbook for Travellers in Asia Minor*, p.77; TNA: FO 78/3132

⁶⁶ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 164.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 336.

⁶⁸ Maunsell, ‘Eastern Turkey in Asia and Armenia’, p. 229.

⁶⁹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 164.

⁷⁰ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 266.

‘Assyrians’, and that name was considered as their national name but that outsiders (Europeans) called them Nestorians, a name which derived from Nestorius the Patriarch of Constantinople, who in around 431 A. D. separated from the Eastern Church because of his heretical beliefs. His followers created a new Christian sect, and escaped from the Roman empire into Persia.⁷¹ Nestorians rarely used the name to refer to themselves, except those who were under the influence of the Europeans. Muslims called them Nasara,⁷² which means Christians.⁷³ Regarding their origin, Millingen and Bell believe that Nestorians were the descendants of the Chaldeans that twenty-four centuries earlier had settled in the Hakkari mountains.⁷⁴ Nestorians coexisted with Kurds in the region for a long time, and their settlements were among the mountains of Kurdistan which extended from Urmia to Mosul.⁷⁵ In the nineteenth century, Nestorians numbered around 200000, 60000 of whom were in the Hakkari. Most of them worked in agriculture and kept flocks; normally they were poor people.⁷⁶ Travellers focused on this sect of Christianity, believing that it was more primitive and could be easily made to come under the influence of Anglicans.

Travellers attempted to identify the Nestorians’ characteristics; Maunsell believed that if the Nestorians’ features were judged according to the European standards, the result would be disappointing.⁷⁷ While he meant that they were still in a primitive stage of civilisation, he may have wanted to imply that while they shared a religion with Europeans their origin was different, which led them to develop differently from Europeans. As Nestorians settled in almost the same geographical locations that Kurds inhabited, travellers regarded them in the same light as Kurds and divided them into two different groups: Tribal (Ashirat) and non-tribal.⁷⁸ The travellers’ aim in making such a sharp division was to apply their ideological viewpoint to them. For example, Maunsell purposely described ‘tribal Nestorians’ as savage, wild, and quarrelsome. He claimed that their priests were illiterate, and they were ignorant about the basic Christian principles. According to him, the priests

⁷¹ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 146; Curzon, *Persia and Persian Question*, p. 537.

⁷² Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 137.

⁷³ Regarding the name of Nasara Millingen was not entirely correct, because Muslims call all Christians Nasara, as in the Quran the Christians were identified as Nasara. Quran, 5, 82.

⁷⁴ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 269; Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 250.

⁷⁵ Fraser, *Mesopotamia and Assyria*, pp. 281-2.

⁷⁶ Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 251.

⁷⁷ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 144.

⁷⁸ TNA: FO 78/3132; Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 137.

largely neglected preaching and he considered their ancient rituals to be meaningless. Their only virtue was that they were happy to establish schools in their communities.⁷⁹ At the same time, he considered that Non-tribal Nestorians were in a pitiable situation; they were the Kurdish chiefs' Raya (peasants) and their condition was little better than that of slaves. As a result of high taxation, they lived on the breadline. He believed that their houses were not suitable for settlement and they had no proper clothes to protect them from the cold winter.⁸⁰ It is worth mentioning that, like the Kurds, both groups of Nestorians probably shared a common origin but their occupations led them to adopt different lifestyles, while travellers categorised them for their own purposes.

Observers such as Lord Curzon identified a hierarchy within the Syriac church: he noted that Mar Shimun was at the head of their religious hierarchy and that for nearly four centuries the hereditary Patriarch had belonged to Shimun's family, and governed the (Nestorians) Assyrians, both temporally and religiously.⁸¹ Travellers had a negative perspective on the Nestorian Church. Harris claimed that the Syriac church was sunk in superstition and ignorance.⁸² As a woman traveller, Bird noted that it totally neglected women and believed that attending church was inappropriate for young women.⁸³ Maunsell, in addition to his criticism of the church, said 'in the midst of all their poverty and ignorance it is astonishing to find services so impressive and so devoutly rendered. This is clearly their brightest jewel, and its preservation leads us to the hope that this Church has indeed a great future before it'.⁸⁴ He wanted to show that beside their primitiveness, there was a hope of reviving the Church, and he indirectly encouraged missionary work among the Nestorians.

Missionary work among the Nestorians was seen by the British as a key element in strengthening British interests in the region. Since the end of the eighteenth century during Napoleon's era the British were interested in improving relations with the Nestorians, in order to have a significant role in the region and to protect their interests from the French in

⁷⁹ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 137, 145.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁸¹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 289.

⁸² Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 149.

⁸³ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 228.

⁸⁴ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 140

India. The British interest in the region continued throughout the nineteenth century. In order to strengthen British strategy in the region, the British Foreign Office in 1840 sent Rassam and Ainsworth to build relations between the Church of England and the Nestorian Church.⁸⁵ Furthermore, Ainsworth considered that there was some common ground between the Church of England and the Nestorian Church: for example both Churches had criticised the mistakes of the Catholic Pope and Papists.⁸⁶ Besides these factors, what encouraged the British to work among them was their belief that Nestorians were primitive and their ancient religion could be revived easily. British missionaries successfully built relationships with Nestorians. The works of the missionaries played a significant role in the travellers' accounts, even in the later nineteenth century. Therefore, Bird considered the fact that the Archbishop of Canterbury sent missionaries to work among them was very important. She believed that they played a significant role in improving the Nestorians' situation. She highlighted the importance of building schools, and in 1885, based on the request of Mar Shimun, the British missionary established schools for both sexes.⁸⁷ Furthermore, she praised their work in creating and training literate priests and preparing the younger generation in both religious and secular matters. They also printed some service books and liturgies which were highly valued by Bird. These tasks mentioned by travellers had been undertaken by missionaries in order to achieve their main goal which was to render the Assyrian church Anglican.⁸⁸ The many missionary endeavours noted by Bird reflect her support for the Anglican Missionary project among primitive people in a strategic region.

The Chaldeans who lived around Diyarbakir and the plain of Mosul, comprised another Christian sect, but as they were fewer in number than the previous groups they were not discussed in great detail by travellers. Furthermore, as they subscribed to Roman Catholic doctrine, travellers may have considered that an Anglican missionary had little chance of influencing them, and therefore, they did not discuss them in great detail. According to Maunsell they were originally Nestorians, and their language was the modern

⁸⁵ H. Aboona, *Assyrians, Kurds, and Ottomans Intercommunal Relations on the Periphery of the Ottoman Empire* (New York, 2008), pp. 215-16.

⁸⁶ Ainsworth, *Travel and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, vol. 2, p. 220

⁸⁷ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 229.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 229-30.

Syriac (the Nestorian language). In the seventeenth century they had converted to the Roman Catholic church.⁸⁹ However, the reasons for their conversion were not mentioned. According to Maunsell they were under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholics of Mosul, and their patriarch was Mar Elia, who was in competition with Mar Shimun as to the balance of power between the Nestorians and Chaldeans, each of whom considered himself as the real representative of the old Syrian Church.⁹⁰ However, they were described in slightly more positive terms than the people around them. Maunsell believed that their villages were thriving, and in particular, he presented them as better cultivators and more skilful house builders than the Yazidis and Shabak Kurds.⁹¹ Meanwhile, the travellers highlighted the primitiveness of their Church, and hoped to convert them or have some influence over them. Ainsworth believed that they were an ignorant and superstitious people.⁹² In another passage he claimed that their priest was annoyed about the Roman Catholic teaching given to their children.⁹³ From this comment it is clear that Ainsworth had his own agenda, and wanted to encourage the Anglican missionaries to work among them.

The smallest group of Christians was composed of Jacobites. Wilson believed that they were originally a branch of Nestorians,⁹⁴ and their name came from Jacobus Baradeus.⁹⁵ According to Maunsell, Jacob was the bishop of Urfa who in around 541 A.D led many Christians holding heretical beliefs. They had been convicted of heresy by the Council of Chalcedon, and the majority of them settled in the Tor Baddin and Jabal Tor between Jazira and Mardin, and their Patriarch settled in Der Zaffran nearly 9 km away from Diarbekr.⁹⁶ They were described by Trotter as a handsome, manly and fine race; they spoke Turanni among themselves, which was a branch of the new Syriac, and most of them

⁸⁹ Maunsell, 'Eastern Turkey in Asia and Armenia', p. 235; TNA: FO 78/3132.

⁹⁰ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 145-6.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 146.

⁹² Ainsworth, 'An Account of a Visit to the Chaldeans', p.53

⁹³ Ainsworth, *Travel and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, vol. 2, p. 199.

⁹⁴ Wilson, *Handbook for Travellers in Asia Minor*, p.82.

⁹⁵ Fraser, *Mesopotamia and Assyria*, p. 280.

⁹⁶ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 147.

knew the Kurdish language.⁹⁷ As they were a very small group therefore, they did not attract much attention from the travellers.

When the British travellers visited the regions, and discussed these different Christian sects, the features they chose to highlight reflect their own preconceptions, or ulterior motives. Travellers often applied the theories they already held regarding Kurds to the Christians, as can be seen in their division of them into two different groups, because Kurds and Christians were living in the same regions. Generally, the British travellers had fewer criticisms to make about these Christians than about other ethnic groups in the east, because the Christians belonged to the same religion as the travellers. However, they did harshly criticise the churches, considering them to be corrupt and in need of reform, and their aim in so doing was to encourage missionaries to work among them. Nearly all travellers discussed the different Christian denominations to some extent, but travellers in the later part of the century focused more on these Christians sects, perhaps as a result of the Armenian issue. Some travellers at the end of the century, like Bird, and Maunsell, were more interested in the missionary work. Bird was a religious woman, and Maunsell as Vice-Council probably considered that the British would have more influence in the region through maintaining good relations with these Christians, and the missionary activities were key elements in strengthening British leverage there.

Geography of Kurdistan

British travellers did not in general try to represent Kurdistan geographically. Only two travellers proved to be the exception to this rule: the anthropologist Frederick Millingen in 1869 tried to draw a map of Kurdistan according to where Kurdish tribes lived. While F. R. Maunsell was a British Vice-Consul and cartographer he made several journeys through Kurdistan, and in the 1890s he sketched a map of Kurdistan and concentrated on the geographical features of the country. Other travellers contented themselves with naming Kurdistan without depicting a proper boundary for it. As Bird noted in 1890 Kurdistan is a

⁹⁷ TNA: FO 78/3132.

‘geographical expression’ used to refer to the country in the western part of Asia inhabited by Kurds.⁹⁸ However, Bird did not attempt to define the boundaries of the country. Besides her, many others who visited Kurdistan chose to discuss specific areas they had visited, rather than discussing the country as a whole. Millingen’s depiction combined the boundaries of both Kurdistan and Armenia.⁹⁹ Millingen noted that in ancient times (e.g., the era of Xenophon’s journey (401-399 BC)) the country was not known by the name of Kurdistan except (Mountain of Hakkary) Anti-Taurus where the Kardhchis (Kurds) were recorded to have lived for a long time.¹⁰⁰ Millingen observed that other parts of the country which now form part of Kurdistan include the northern Kurdistan province of Van, which in the second century BC formed the eastern side of the Armenian kingdom (190 BC to 387). During the period of the Armenian Kingdom, the southern and central parts of Kurdistan were called ‘Assyria and Mesopotamia’.¹⁰¹ Although Armenia was not considered to be part of Kurdistan at this time, this perception altered during the nineteenth century. Millingen said it was difficult to sketch where the boundary of Armenia was, but it reached the mountain of Lizistan in the north, the mountains of Taurus in the south and to Media in the east and Cappadocia in the west. According to him, unlike Armenia, Kurdistan became more clearly defined as a geographical region in the nineteenth century by the Ottomans, in part because the Ottomans tried to suppress the name of Armenia and did not recognise any region by that name. Therefore, Millingen said ‘I will omit any further mention of Armenia as a geographical expression, and will adopt the generic of Koordistan for the whole of the country’.¹⁰²

Both Millingen and Maunsell understood the difficulties of sketching a proper boundary of Kurdistan, and suggested that the best way to solve the issue was to include the region in which the overwhelming majority of the population were Kurds.¹⁰³ However, this was not straightforward as there were some areas disputed by Kurds and other ethnicities: for example both Kurds and Armenians claimed that some parts in the north were their lands. Even travellers had different ideas about which areas belonged to Kurdistan, with

⁹⁸ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 373; Maunsell, ‘Central Kurdistan’, p. 121.

⁹⁹ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 144.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 144-6.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 147; Maunsell, ‘Kurdistan’, p. 81.

Bird considering Van and Erzurum to be part of Kurdistan,¹⁰⁴ perhaps basing her argument on the composition of the population, because it was thought that the majority of people there were Kurds. In contrast, Bell considered these cities to be part of Armenia,¹⁰⁵ relying on historical evidence that suggested these places belonged to the Armenian Kingdom.¹⁰⁶ In reality, both Kurds and Armenians had lived in these areas for a long time, and so it was particularly difficult to decide whether certain parts of the land belonged to a specific ethnic group. Beside this, Kurds were not the only ethnic group who settled in Kurdistan. Other ethnics and religious groups also lived with Kurds, for example, in the north of Mosul there was a significant number of Christians, such as Jacobites, Nestorians, Armenians, and Chaldeans.¹⁰⁷ In northern Kurdistan, Christians lived in almost all cities and towns, including Van and Bitlis. In such places, Armenians or other Christian people lived (and still live) alongside Kurds, although in the rural areas they sometimes had separate villages.

There is another point related to the complexity of defining Kurdistan as a geographical region. Besides the presence of some ethnicities inside Kurdistan, other Kurdish tribes had lived and continued to do so outside Kurdistan. For example, the Khurarsani Kurds lived in northern Khorasan (northeast of Iran).¹⁰⁸ In the Ottoman Empire, some Kurdish tribes also lived near Angora, including the Zikhnali, which comprised around 5,000 families.¹⁰⁹

Millingen believed that the boundary of Kurdistan started in the north from the mountains of Ararat and the territory of Georgia to the frontier of Baghdad in the south. The boundary in the east started from the Persian boundary and ended at Lizistan in the west.¹¹⁰ The proposed northern boundary of Ararat and Georgia belonged to the Kurds and stretched eastward to Kars ‘up to 43° 20’ east longitude’¹¹¹; some of the Kurds reached Georgia and in Bayazid and the Kars, Kurds and the Georgians lived together. From there some Kurdish tribes such as the Haidaranly, Mamanlis and Yazidis extended into Russian

¹⁰⁴ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 334-396.

¹⁰⁵ Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 217.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Maunsell, ‘Kurdistan’, p. 81.

¹⁰⁸ M. Dehqan, ‘the Record Heritage of Khurasani Kurdish Tribes’ *Journal of Society of Archivists*, 30, no. 1(2005).

¹⁰⁹ Sykes, ‘The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire’, p. 481

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 146.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 147.

territory. Besides that, some Kurdish tribes settled in Erivan in Georgia.¹¹² Maunsell confirmed this overview to some extent, although he began his sketch from the south and moved north.¹¹³

The border of Kurdistan as described by Millingen continued from Kars to Erzurum, and then on to Dersim Mountain to a part of the Taurus Mountain range located between Erzinjan and Kharput. Then the boundary continued towards Diyarbakir and alongside the Tigris River. After that, the borderline continued to Jabal Hamrin Mountain and then stretched towards western Kurdistan.¹¹⁴ Maunsell believed that the boundary of Kurdistan started from the mountain of Dersim on the northern-west side then continued towards the southern side of the country, eventually reaching the two sides of the upper Euphrates.¹¹⁵ According to Millingen, in that part of Kurdistan Kurds mixed with Turks and Arabs, but in the west and north-west Kurds reached the Armenian peasants and Turks, while in the south-west Kurds and Arab tribes settled on the opposite banks of the Tigris.¹¹⁶ Millingen said there was some doubt about whether the northwest region was part of Kurdistan, yet he did not specify who it was that doubted this. However, he also argued that the area should be considered as part of Kurdistan because the Kurds owned the lands from Erzurum eastwards to the frontier of Persia. In Erzurum in particular, Millingen noted the presence of a vast number of Kurds.¹¹⁷

The border of Kurdistan in the south was depicted from Jebel Hamrin, which is the boundary between 'Baghdad plain, and basin of Tigris' and includes the province of Sulaymaniah and Kuy-Sanajq. It continued alongside the Tigris River until it reached areas inhabited by Arab tribes. The mountain chain which extends from the north to the south differentiates the boundary between Persia and the Ottoman Empire, which was the eastern part of Kurdistan.¹¹⁸ Beside this, many Kurds lived beyond the mountain range which demarcated the boundary of the eastern part of Kurdistan. These Kurds were spread throughout places such as Sina, Urmia, Maku and Soujbulack, and there were several tribes

¹¹² Ibid., p. 147.

¹¹³ Maunsell, 'Kurdistan', p. 81.

¹¹⁴ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 147-8.

¹¹⁵ Maunsell, 'Kurdistan', p. 81.

¹¹⁶ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 148.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 148-9.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 151.

living in Persian or (eastern) Kurdistan, such as Rozheky, Shemsklis, Moghours, Bilbas, Rozhaki and Yazidis.¹¹⁹ Millingen and Maunsell discussed the boundary of Kurdistan but failed to mention one of the largest Kurdish tribes near Soujbulack, which was the Mukri.¹²⁰

Although Maunsell agreed with many of Millingen's considerations, he had different ideas about several areas. In the south, in Maunsell's account, the line of the boundary curves and crosses the Kifri, from the mountain of Manisht to the Kermanshah. In Eastern Kurdistan Maunsell included Kermanshah as part of Kurdistan, stating that the boundary stretched from the city of Kermanshah northwards to Sinna and continued along the mountains to western Urmia and then to Mount Ararat.¹²¹ Millingen had not mentioned Kermanshah in the area he demarcated as Kurdistan. In addition, Millingen in the northern part of Kurdistan included some lands near Erivan which extended to the boundary of Georgia, while, Maunsell did not include those lands. Millingen considered Mosul as a part of Kurdistan while Maunsell did not. Although Maunsell was a cartographer, he was more preoccupied with the physical geography of Kurdistan, and in his book provided a map of the nation. Millingen was interested in anthropology, and so he focused on the ratio of the Kurdish population when defining the boundary of Kurdistan, and he did not include a map.

Interestingly the work of British travel writers during the first half of the nineteenth century did not include discussions of the boundary of Kurdistan. The earlier travellers identified Kurdistan according to the existence of the Kurdish population or Kurdish tribes; wherever they saw a Kurdish tribe settled, they considered it as a part of Kurdistan. In contrast, travellers in the second half of the century depicted the boundary. It is probable that the travellers during this time had read the accounts of those of the first half,¹²² and thus had an understanding of Kurdistan's boundaries. This shows that British travellers

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 151-2; Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 165.

¹²⁰ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Persian Kurdistan', pp. 11-15.

¹²¹ Maunsell, 'Kurdistan', p. 81.

¹²² For example Maunsell used Rich's information when he searched for oil in Kurdistan, Maunsell, 'The Mesopotamian Petroleum Fields', p. 530, in addition, he cited information from Ainsworth about the lands between Rwanduz and Ushnu, Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 97. In addition, Bird and Curzon utilised information from Rawlinson about the Takhti Bestun, Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 1, p. 122; Curzon, *Persia and Persian question*, vol. 1, p. 560.

gradually became more familiar with Kurdistan as a country. In addition, the development of cartography, and the importance of mapping for the sake of the imperial agenda is relevant, and travellers in the second half of the century began to make maps of Kurdistan.

Recent publications on the current borders of Kurdistan highlight the accuracy of nineteenth-century travellers in depicting the boundary of Kurdistan. However, some other travellers such as James Fraser¹²³ disagree, and recent studies include the Lurs and Bakhtyaris as Kurds and their land as part of Kurdistan,¹²⁴ which is in contrast to the British travellers' assumption that they were not a part of Kurdistan. Another important point is that after the First World War, Kurdistan was divided and incorporated into four other countries. In some places, such as Kirkuk in southern Kurdistan, the former Arab governments tried to change the demography of the area. For example, between 1968 and 2003 the Kurds were forcibly removed from their homes, which were then given to Arab settlers. These areas thus became disputed regions between the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government.¹²⁵

¹²³ Fraser, *Historical and Descriptive Account of Persia*, p. 262.

¹²⁴ Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement*, p. 9; G. Asatrian, 'Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds', *Iran and the Caucasus*, 13, no. 1 (2009), pp. 3, 5.

¹²⁵ P. Bartu, 'Wrestling with the Integrity of a Nation: the Disputed Internal Boundaries in Iraq', *International Affair*, 86, no. 6 (2010), p. 1330.



Figure 2.2: The Kurdistan which was discussed by Millingen in *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 144-53.

Conclusion

British travellers were significantly influenced by the literature of antiquity during their travels, particularly the works of the Ancient Greek historian Xenophon. Therefore, in many cases they relied on Greek perspectives, especially when attempting to document the origin of the Kurds. The travellers of the second half of the century, as they visited other countries, had more experience, and read the accounts of the travellers of the first half of the century. Therefore, they were more familiar with Kurds and Kurdistan and wrote more about them. As to the origin of the Kurds Millingen, who wrote in the second half of the century, provided more information about the people who were supposed to be the ancestors of the Kurds. Regarding the ideas of travellers about the tribal and non-tribal, this thesis argues that the ideas of those travellers who considered that the division of Kurdish tribes was due to climate and topographic differences were the most accurate. When the British travellers discussed Christian sects, however, they showed the differences between them but could not hide their desire to send missionaries amongst them.

British travellers in the nineteenth century wrote at length about the geography of Kurdistan and the culture and ethnicity of the Kurds. Accurate sketches were made of the boundary of Kurdistan, in particular by the travellers who came in the second half of the century. The travellers of the first half of the century tended to discuss only the places that they visited, and as such did not discuss Kurdistan as a region. In contrast, travellers of the latter years of the century depicted Kurdistan as a region, including both Millingen and Maunsell who made sketches of the boundary of Kurdistan, because they read accounts of other travellers who had come to Kurdistan before them. Travellers who had experience in visiting other countries include Isabella Bird, Walter Harris and Mark Sykes. While early travellers only visited small areas in Kurdistan the later travellers were more adventurous. Since the travellers' accounts suggested that the Kurds had a different ethnicity from other people in Asia Minor, it is important to investigate to what extent the travellers discussed Kurdish nationalism, which in the nineteenth century was a new concept, and one that has subsequently influenced many ethnicities.

Chapter 3 Kurdish Nationalism in the View of the British Travellers

Introduction

This chapter addresses Kurdish nationalism from the perspective of British travellers in the nineteenth century, and discusses to what extent their comments about Kurdish nationalism were well-founded. Any discussion of Kurdish nationalism and/or proto-nationalism in the nineteenth century requires a consideration of British travellers' accounts. To ignore them would be difficult, largely due to the fact that, at the time, these travellers were the closest observers in the region. They recorded many details of life in Kurdistan, including uprisings, self-governing, and army building.

Widespread Kurdish illiteracy during this period led to a lack of insider narratives, especially since educated and thus literate Kurds were religious men who were not concerned with (and therefore did not record) what went on in Kurdistan during the nineteenth century, apart from some poets in the late nineteenth century who expressed their feeling in poetry. Furthermore, the Turko-Persian literature strove to demonstrate that the various rebellions by the Kurdish emirates were simply troublesome activities organised by vandals, a biased approach aimed at challenging such movements because they were a threat to the Ottoman Empire, and Persia. The British narratives offer an important corrective, and show an awareness of nascent Kurdish nationalism, a movement which had come from Europe and which the British aimed to identify in the places they visited.

Most previous studies of this subject have relied on the British travellers' accounts, including Sabah Abdullah Ghalib's thesis on the emergence of Kurdism.¹ In his study, Ghalib aimed to prove that the emergence of Kurdism in the first half of the nineteenth century was a step before nationalism, known as proto-nationalism. He claimed that due to

¹ Ghalib, 'The Emergence of Kurdism with Special Reference to the Three Kurdish Emirates within the Ottoman Empire', 1800-1850', pp. 18-19.

the self-government of three Kurdish Emirates (Soran, Baban, and Bohtan) and their uprisings against the Ottomans, Kurdistan or a sense of ethnic awareness emerged amongst the Kurds, who saw themselves as different from other ethnicities. Ghalib depended on various sources from Kurdish poets who praised the Princes, as well as Arabic and English literature, including the texts of British travellers. Despite the importance of the travellers' texts, the accounts should not be treated as straightforward or objective reporting. Rather, the texts reflect the authors' own agendas, preoccupations and interests. For example, they were at times inclined to apply some of the common ideas of nationalism to the Kurds, imparting a European perspective to a non-European context. In this regard, Ghalib focused on what happened during Mir Muhammad's era in the Soran Emirate, along with his attempts to reinforce his principedom, as well as the attempts of Badir Khan in the Bohtan Emirate and other Baban princes' attempts to strengthen their regions. The Kurdish princes tried for two decades to unify the tribes under the banner of the emirates, taking some steps to do so but without success. This research aims to shed light on the result following the downfall of the Emirates by the hands of the Ottomans, and how tribes revived after demise of Emirates and fought against each other. Tribal structure had deep roots in Kurdish society, and when the principedoms were destroyed these tribes returned to the pre-unification situation. These tribes had many political and social functions, and their role will be discussed in the next chapter. Their existence effectively hindered the cause of nationalism. During the movement of Sheikh Ubaidullah he could unify most of the tribes under his banner but after the end of the movement they obtained power again. Even in the twentieth century tribes have played a negative role.

The chapter is divided into three main sections, the first of which will discuss the theoretical historiography of nationalism, particularly the role of ethnicity in emerging nationalism, with particular reference to Smith's arguments. His view fits the nineteenth-century concept of nationalism. Although there were arguments about the nationalist agenda of the movements in the first half of the century, the movement of Sheikh Ubaidullah in the second half of the century has been confirmed as a nationalist movement by historians such as Wadie Jwaideh and Robert Olson.² Further, it will establish the

² Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement*, pp. 75-101; R. Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism, and the Sheikh Said Rebellion 1880-1925* (Austin, 1989), pp. 1-25.

criteria supporting the travellers' accounts which will be read for evidence of nationalism amongst the Kurds in the second half of the century, in particular during the pre-eminence of Sheikh Ubaidullah. The second and third sections critically analyse the travellers' accounts as witnesses to the early development of Kurdish nationalism. The second section discusses travellers' comments on the Kurdish princes' attempts to obtain more independence and strengthen their power in the first half of the nineteenth century, analysing the Soran, Baban and Bohtan Emirates, which successively tried to obtain their independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1836, 1843, and 1847 respectively. After the demise of the Kurdish emirates, it will be argued that according to the travellers, Kurds were gathered under the leadership of religious men, a phenomenon which was considered as nationalism. It is apparent that nationalism was not a phenomenon that appeared in Kurdistan overnight, but emerged over a long period of time. By the late nineteenth century, it is clear that the travellers' comments were much more preoccupied with Kurdish nationalism. Therefore, the third section concentrates on Kurdish nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, with particular reference to Sheikh Ubaidullah's movement in the 1880s.

The Role of Ethnicity in Emerging Nationalism

Nationalism emerged as a widespread political movement during the nineteenth century, and the majority of European nations were influenced by it. The ideology of political self-determination spread globally in the nineteenth century, leading Eric Hobsbawm to categorize the period until 1848 as the 'Age of Revolutions'.³ It was not, of course, solely a phenomenon of the nineteenth century, and still today there are many conflicts that are related to ethnic fragmentation and identities: for example, in the Caucasus, India, the Balkans, and southern Africa, bloody and deeply divisive conflicts have broken out. These crises affect not just developing countries but even affluent and stable countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, and Belgium, where small

³ E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848* (New York, 1962), pp. 163-177.

nationalist and ethnic movements can be seen.⁴ Similarly, the Kurds have been fighting to achieve their nation state and political rights through uprisings since the 1830s, and they are still struggling against four dominant ethnic groups: Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Kurds are the largest ethnic group in the world without their own nation-state.

The analytical framework that is most applicable to Kurdish nationalism and national feeling is the theory espoused by Anthony D. Smith. Whilst his *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* was useful for an exploration of Kurdish nationalism, the book also relied to a certain extent on the ideas of other scholars such as Benedict Anderson,⁵ Eric Hobsbawm,⁶ and Ernest Gellner,⁷ who contend that nationalism appeared and crystallized in the modern era, in particular in Europe. They analyse the economic resources, growth of the population, bureaucratic centralisation of governments, improvement in communications systems, and the role of the printing press, and their perspectives are less compatible with Kurdish nationalism when compared with Smith's argument. Smith discusses the distinction between ethnicity and nationalism, and the influence of ethnicity on building nations and nationalism. His standpoint is particularly appropriate when attempting to understand the Kurdish nationalist feeling, or nationalist movement, which has struggled against the ethnic groups that suppressed them (Turks and Persians) from the nineteenth century to the present day. Particularly, in the late nineteenth century one of Sheikh Ubaidullah's aims in his movement was to establish an independent Kurdish state in response to his frank claim that Kurds were a different nation from the Persians and Turks.

Smith, however, suggests that these were not the primary drivers of nationalism, arguing instead that it emerges from the root of ethnicity and 'ethnic revival', which existed during the pre-modern epoch.⁸ In other words, he argues that we should critically discuss nationalism in the contemporary era with reference to the way the concepts emerged in the modern period and even in the pre-modern era. For example, there are multi-ethnic states, such as India and Nigeria, arising from the differences between people's religion, ethnicity,

⁴ A. D. Smith, *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (Oxford, 2nd ed., 1998), p. 2.

⁵ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 3rd ed., 2006).

⁶ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Program, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 2000).

⁷ E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 2nd ed., 2006).

⁸ Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, pp. 1-3.

and language. On the other hand, some ethnicities within the western nations, such as the Flemings (in Belgium), Scots (in the United Kingdom), Québécois (in Canada), and Basques (in Spain), have internal nationalist movements because some people within these ethnic groups seek independence.⁹ Hence, Smith concludes that the nation took shape before the modern era and has deeper roots throughout history.

Smith uses some examples of ancient nations to support his argument about the role of ethnicity. He believes that national identity has been used as a criterion to distinguish between several ethnic groups, in particular in ancient history, and those ethnic differences clearly appeared between people. For example, Greeks and Romans treated people who did not share their culture differently and considered them a different nation. Accordingly, Smith suggests that there is some resemblance between movements against foreigners in the ancient era and nationalist struggles in the modern era. For instance, in the late sixth century BCE, Ionia strived against the expansion of the Persian Empire, and the Gallic tribes similarly fought against Caesar's attack during 55-54 BCE.¹⁰

One of the elements that ties ethnicities together, as Smith mentioned is a shared name for people of the same ethnic background, as this creates a shared sense of belonging to one community. Smith also discusses how names and naming helped ethnic groups resist being assimilated into other dominant ethnic groups. According to him, names are significant emblems that were used by ethnic groups and communities to survive and distinguish themselves from others. For example, the Bosnians chose to refer to themselves as 'Muslim' in order to distinguish themselves from others in Yugoslavia, even though many Bosnians had stopped practising Islam.¹¹ For that reason, the name 'Kurd' had a similar power in the nineteenth century, enabling Kurdish identity to survive and remain distinct from Persian and Turkish identity. Normally, ethnicities sharing a name also share some cultural elements by living in similar areas.

Smith also argues that the sentiments and ethnic ties could be revived, and tracing the origin of people often became popular amongst elites. Culture is a key element in

⁹ Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 8.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 23.

nationalism, and religion, language, costume, poetry, architecture, and other cultural productions can tie people together. Sometimes, nationalists revive a pre-existing culture or even invent one on which to build the nation.¹² Seen from this perspective, the Kurds have the same language, they inhabit one geographical area. The Kurds share a common understanding of a history of suffering and subjugation under Ottoman and Persian misrule, which has served and continues to serve to consolidate their national identity in their territories. In addition, their shared geographical territory has had a role in creating a sense of belonging within the ethnic group.

Hence, Smith concentrated on the role of geographical territory which he named homeland. He said it has a significant role to play in enriching nationalism, and almost every nationalist movement has struggled to possess specific territory considered to be the 'homeland'. The role of homeland can be clearly seen in the struggle of some ethnic groups, such as the Kurds, Armenians, and Somalians.¹³ Kurds strongly assert their right to their land even in places where the demography has changed, such as in some areas near Kirkuk, which the Kurds consider to be part of Kurdistan. However, in the country named Kurdistan it was not only Kurds who settled there but other ethnicities, or minor religious groups like Armenians, Assyrians, and even Turkomans, who claimed that they were the original inhabitants of these places. Besides geographical territory, there are other elements such as sacred places that can have a significant role in unifying ethnicities, and the Kurds were no exception in having such places.

Sacred places and religious shrines played an important role in establishing a connection between people. Each religion contains its own sacred places that people can visit, even feeling privileged to belong to these holy places, such as Kaaba in Mecca, Qum and Mashad in Iran, and the ancient city in Urartu (Jebel Judi).¹⁴ In northern Kurdistan, according to Muslims, the Prophet Noah's ark rested on its peak and its remains are there still.¹⁵ According to the British traveller and officer John Macdonald Kinneir (1782–1830),

¹² Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 10; Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 26.

¹³ Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 163.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁵ F. Forbes, 'A visit to the Sinjar Hills in 1838, with some Account of the Sect of Yezidis and of Various Places in the Mesopotamian Desert, between the Rivers Tigres and Khabur', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 9 (1839), p. 421.

some Kurds proudly claimed descent from Noah,¹⁶ believing his ark settled in Kurdistan. That feeling has played an important role in uniting the Kurds. Religions themselves have characteristics that enable them to unify people, in particular influential religions such as Christianity or Islam that have created a sense of belonging among followers.

Benedict Anderson's theory of nationalism was of the *imagined community*. According to this, the feeling of belonging to the same community is a significant element of emerging nationalism.¹⁷ One of the elements that ties people together is religion, and Anderson argues that that faith has the power to create imagined communities. When they belong to a specific religion, people consider themselves to be members of a larger community. Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims all share the feeling of belonging to the religious community, and within each faith-based group, individuals share a sacred language. For example, when two Muslims who do not share the same first language meet each other in Mecca, they nevertheless share Arabic as their common sacred language.¹⁸ Like other sacred languages such as Latin, Arabic plays a crucial role in emerging communities. In regard to the Kurds' national feeling, their religious doctrine Shafihi, which is different from Persians' and Turks' doctrine, unified them and caused them to feel that they were a specific community. According to Anderson, in Europe the role of religious elements gradually decreased, and sacred factors were replaced by modern reasons for emerging nationalism.

Anderson went on to say that as the role of sacred languages gradually decreased, the new style of the printing press played a crucial role in emerging national consciousness, since from the sixteenth century the spread of the printing press has led to the gradual decline of Latin, with vernacular languages becoming more prevalent,¹⁹ particularly in Europe. According to him, the printing press had a crucial impact on emerging nationalism, as it paved the way for books and newspapers published in a wide range of local languages. Anderson argued that all nation-states and self-conceived nations have their own printing language, which leads to the emergence of self-consciousness and unifies them as an

¹⁶ J. M. Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire Accompanied by a Map* (London, 1813), p. 142.

¹⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 54.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

imagined community.²⁰ After the reform of the Ottoman Empire, it was transformed into a federal and commonwealth structure based on geographical intermixing and cultural affinities, with each ethnic group publishing poems, maps, and revolutionary manifestos in their own language.²¹ Even before those reforms, a Kurdish scholar Ahmiadi Xnai a seventeenth-century Kurdish scholar, preferred to write in Kurdish rather than in the common languages such as Arabic, and Persian.²² By the closing years of the nineteenth century, however there was a Kurdish intellectual and poet named Haji Qadiri Koey who lived in many places in Kurdistan before he settled in Constantinople. In keeping with Anderson's thesis, Koey argued that Kurds need learning and literacy; to write books and translate them which he supported with reference to the speech of the Prophet of Islam who had encouraged Muslims to go to far-away places like China for the sake of learning. Most significantly, in terms of the argument for emergent nationalism, he encouraged Kurds to unite and arm themselves so that they could liberate their country like the Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, and Sudanese.²³ By this time Kurds were also publishing a newspaper in their own language, although it was circulated among only a limited number of educated individuals in major cities such as Constantinople and Cairo. However, it was nevertheless an important step for the Kurds at that stage. These factors mentioned above had a role in nationalism gradually emerging through processes stemming from proto-nationalism.

Eric Hobsbawm defines proto-nationalism as the transformation of ethnic groups towards nationalism, and suggests that proto-nations consist of several ethnic groups that settle in large provinces and that do not have a common political entity. The Kurds are an example of this, along with other ethnicities such as Jews, Somalis, and Basques.²⁴ However, the Kurds were made up of several tribes, not different ethnic groups, and moved under the banner of one leader to obtain independence. To this extent, Kurdish self-consciousness fits with the theories of Hobsbawm. Sometimes, proto-nationalism or

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 44-6.

²¹ U. Ozkirmil, and S. A. Sofos, *Tormented by History: Nationalism in Greece and Turkey* (London, 2008), p. 18.

²² M.V. Bruinessen, 'Ehmedi' Xani's Mem u Zin and Its Role in the Emergence of Kurdish National Awareness' in A. Vali (ed.), *Essays on the Origin of Kurdish Nationalism*, (Costa Mesa, 2003), pp. 40-1.

²³ A. Hassanpour, 'The Making Kurdish Identity: Pre-20th Century Historical and Literary Sources', in Vali (ed.), *Essays on the Origin of Kurdish Nationalism*, pp. 134-5.

²⁴ Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationhood since 1789*, p. 64.

nationalism emerges as a result of the struggle to obtain rights under the dominant ethnicities.

The conflict between the dominant nation and subjected people led to the emergence of nationalism among the suppressed ethnic groups. Smith argues that when the controlling nation imposes its culture on an oppressed country or people, it encourages a struggle for separation.²⁵ He applied this standpoint to the Kurds in the twentieth century, but it was also true for the Kurds' situation in the nineteenth century, because they were politically and culturally oppressed, and made some attempts to obtain their independence, but their reaction and awakening were quite different from those of other ethnicities.

According to Hastings, nationalism in each nation has its specific social and historical stages of development. Therefore, it cannot appear in two different nations in the same style.²⁶ This means that the reasons behind its emergence in one country are not necessarily factors behind the rise of nationalism in another country. It is evident that Kurdish nationalism was quite different from other versions in the Ottoman Empire and Europe. For example, Albanians and Arabs were secular nationalists, but the feeling of national identity was not as strong among the Circassians and Kurds because they were hugely affected by Islam.²⁷ For example, while it is debatable whether Sheikh Ubaidullah's movement was a proper nationalist movement or not, he was the religious man who led the Kurdish national movement in 1880-1882.²⁸ Kurdish nationalism had another feature, inasmuch as Kurds could not obtain their goal.

Therefore, Kurdish nationalism was stateless, and for a long time the Kurds attempted to establish initially their autonomy and latterly a nation state, often fighting against the dominant powers. However, they have been unable to achieve their goal, and remain without an independent state. Here, the Kurds' case can be viewed in the light of Ernest Gellner's perspective, which sees nationalism as unrelated to the state as nationalist sentiments often emerge amongst stateless ethnicities: 'nations and states are not the same

²⁵ Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 223.

²⁶ A. Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 25.

²⁷ M. Ş. Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Oxford, 2010), p. 142.

²⁸ TNA: FO 881/4387, Sheikh Ubaidullah Dr. Cochran, Urmia 5, October 1880, Enclosure 3, no. 265.

contingency'. States are often established without the assistance of a nation, and similarly, nations often emerge without having an independent state.²⁹

British observations on Kurdish Emirates movements and self-rule

The early decades of the nineteenth century form a significant stage in Kurdish history because it was during this time that the Soran, Baban, and Bohtan emirates were at the peak of their political power due to the increasing weakness of the Ottoman Empire. According to Ernest Gellner, when the central government is not strong, in particular during times of crisis, non-dominant nations become the deputy of the central government in governing, or sometimes they compete with it.³⁰ When the Ottoman Empire was weak, the Kurdish Emirates deputized for it in governing their territories. There are several reasons why they were so powerful during this era. Justin McCarthy states that the Ottoman Empire faced several problems in the early eighteenth century, including rising poverty and undeveloped communication between the capital and other provinces. This led to the rise of local authorities in those provinces and emirates ruled by local chiefs. As McCarthy has shown, the Kurds refused to be loyal to the Ottoman government, and they did not obey any authority except that of their chieftains and princes.³¹

The British travellers tried to apply some elements of nationalism that were common in Europe to the Kurdish Emirates. In Eastern Europe, movements against the Ottomans occurred, particular in Greece in the 1820s.³² In the second half of the century Bulgaria rose up against the Ottoman Empire in 1878.³³ The unification of Germany occurred in 1871 as a result of several provinces which shared cultural and linguistic aspects being unified in one nation state.³⁴ Then in the 1870s the unification of Italy happened as a result of the socio-political revolution which occurred in the nineteenth

²⁹ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 6.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 49.

³¹ J. McCarthy, *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire* (London, 2001), pp. 9, 63, 77.

³² Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution*, p. 172.

³³ K. Sharova, 'The Idea of State Tradition and the Restoration of the Bulgarian State during the National Revival Until 1870' *Southeastern Europe*, 8, no.1 (1981), pp. 117, 136.

³⁴ D. Showalter, *The Wars of German Unification* (London, 2nd ed., 2015).

century in Italy, when several states in the peninsula of Italy demanded unification in one nation state in 1871.³⁵ Both these political events had an impact on the travellers who came to Kurdistan in the last decades of the century. British travellers to Kurdistan were aware of these movements in Europe, and tried to apply the elements of nationalism with which they were familiar to the Kurds. Upon arrival in Kurdistan, British travellers observed some uprisings of the Kurdish Emirates against the Ottoman Empire, and considered these actions as a nationalist movement. Since the British travellers discussed the sense of nationalism of these three Kurdish principedoms together, they will be considered here in one section.

The British travellers who came to Kurdistan and spoke about Principedoms can be divided into two groups. The first group which came in the 1820-30s indirectly tried to show that Kurdish movements were separatist or nationalist without mentioning nationalism directly, such as Rich, Rawlinson, Ainsworth. Other travellers who came in the second half of the century like Frederick Millingen and M. S. Bell strongly believed that the uprising of the Kurdish Emirates was nationalistic as they were probably under the influence of the political situation in Europe. This diagnosis was quite different from that of the other travellers who came to the country in the 1830s who were influenced by Greece having recently gained independence, and indirectly tried to show the Emirates' nationalistic elements. Millingen acknowledged the Kurdish uprisings of the 1830s and 1840s as nationalist movements, writing that

In this epoch of the revival of old nationalities, when races and nations unknown up to the present day are germinating like mushrooms in a field, many will be surprised to hear that, beside the new born Czechs, Roumains, Bulgarians, or Austro-Hungarians, there is still another nation claiming recognition under the name of Koords.³⁶

William Ainsworth in 1840 said that Kurdish chieftains and tribes frequently tried to 'throw off the yoke' of Persian and Ottoman oppression.³⁷ However, although throwing off

³⁵ J. Gooch, *Unification of Italy* (London, 1986).

³⁶ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 203-4.

³⁷ Ainsworth, 'An account of a visit to Chaldeans', p. 21.

the yoke is not the same as nationalism, he indirectly suggested that these movements were nationalistic ones, because the Kurds' disagreement with the Ottomans led them to think about self-ruling. Millingen more specifically said that these movements could be considered national movements, believing that the Kurds were endeavouring to obtain independence from the Ottomans. Bell in the middle of the 1880s cited some different sections from Millingen's book directly and used them in his book without commentary, and thus corroborated Millingen's argument.

Three times during the course of this century, the national aspirations of the Koords have impelled them to throw off the authority of the Sultan and conquer their independence. The first movement was the rising of Mehemet Pasha of Revanduz in 1834 [...], the second instance in which the Koords attempted to assert their national independence was the movement organized by Ahmed Pasha hereditary Prince of Sulaimaniah.[...] This event happened about the year 1843. The third and most important rebellion took place in 1847.³⁸

Millingen was quite correct about what happened in Kurdistan during the time of charismatic and powerful princes, but he came to the country nearly thirty years after the movements, and thus his report would have been strengthened by a clear discussion of what had happened after the princes were defeated. He was fully aware of the nature of tribal Kurdish society, because he took an anthropological approach to his narratives. In his book he discussed the role of the tribal chiefs, the intertribal wars, and feuds in detail, but neglected to comment on the relationship between nationalism and tribalism. Furthermore, the title of his book, *Wild Life among the Koords*, indicates an assumption that the Kurds were tribal and primitive, and in some parts of his work he claims that the Kurds were unchanged. Yet on the topic of nationalism he stated that Kurds were fully aware of their ethnicity and rights, and therefore they attempted to rescue themselves from the yoke of Ottoman oppression. However, he did not discuss the link between these different aspects of Kurdish life, and did not show any negative aspect of tribalism on nationalism.

³⁸ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 211-12; Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 244.

In addition, the British travellers tried to impose other elements of nationalism upon the Kurdish movements. British travellers viewed the Kurdish Emirates as having a simple system of self-governing and a different system of army, but the most important element was their movements against the Ottoman Empire, which they also regarded as a characteristic of nationalism.³⁹ However, as the Kurds themselves have left little archival trace, historians need to read these sources critically in order to evaluate whether, as Ghalib and Eppel have argued, these movements were in fact a form of proto-nationalism, or Kurdism.⁴⁰

British travellers' observations on the Soran Emirate

The Soran Emirate was a Kurdish Emirate that ruled Rawanduz and the environs, and was established between the 1330s and 1430s by a chief of the Rewandi tribe. Rawlinson established this fact by referring to the Kurdish historical book *Sharaf Nama*.⁴¹ The Emirate was destroyed in 1836, and little information about it was recorded by historians. The last and strongest prince in the Soran Emirates was Mir Muhammad (1814-1836) who took some significant steps towards independence, such as building his capital in a strategic position, expanding the emirate's territory, organising a strong army, and providing security for the emirate. Ultimately, he moved against the Ottomans.

This is also why Mir Muhammad is the most famous prince. The Kurdish scholar Sabah A. Ghalib (2012) noted that Mir Muhammad became a prince in 1813 when his father, Mustafa Beg, peacefully handed the principedom to him,⁴² in order to strengthen his Emirate. Justin McCarthy has suggested that the Ottoman Empire's wars with Russia (1806-1812 and 1828-1829) left the former weakened,⁴³ thus giving the Soran Emirate the chance to expand its territory. British travellers considered the expansion that occurred

³⁹ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 211-12.

⁴⁰ Ghalib, 'The Emergence of Kurdism with Special Reference to the Three Kurdish Emirates'; M. Eppel, 'Historical Setting: the Roots of Modern Kurdish Nationalism', in O. Bengio (ed.), *Kurdish Awakening Nation Building in a Fragmented Homeland* (Austin, 2014), pp. 46-62.

⁴¹ The text had been written by the Kurdish historian Prince Sharaf Khan Bitlisi in the sixteenth century, Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, through Persian Kurdistan', p. 24.

⁴² Ghalib, 'The Emergence of Kurdism with Special Reference to the Three Kurdish Emirates', p. 103.

⁴³ McCarthy, *The Ottoman People*, p. 43.

during the era of Mir Muhammad as indicative of national awakening, as they believed that Mir Muhammad desired control over a large territory in Kurdistan. However, it was a difficult task for him because most of the territories were ruled by different tribes who each commanded the loyalty of their people.⁴⁴ Jwaideh has observed that some tribes, in particular the Zebari tribe, initially resisted Mir Muhammad's expansion, but finally submitted in order to unite with him.⁴⁵ According to a British officer Richard Wood (1806-1900),⁴⁶ Mir Muhammad directed his expansion towards the north and the west, occupying Harir north of Erbil in 1822, and Koy Sanjaq (north-east of Erbil), Altun Corpre, and Erbil in 1823. Then he controlled Akre and Ranyah in 1824. The Zab River became a boundary between the Soran and Baban Emirates.⁴⁷ According to Rawlinson, his territory included the area of land from Ushne (now in Iran) to the Tigris River, and ran the length of the Lesser Zab River.⁴⁸ When discussing Mir Muhammad's expansion, the British travellers highlighted two points: first, Mir Muhammad wanted to recruit an army, and second, he wanted to strengthen his emirate's economy by collecting taxes from people and obtaining resources. He succeeded in unifying the majority of southern Kurdistan, but the alliance did not last long, ending with the cessation of his era.

According to Millingen, after these preparations, Mir Muhammad aimed to obtain independence. He strongly believed that Mir Muhammad's uprising against the Ottomans was the first of the nationalist movements as he observed that 'three times during the course of this century the national aspiration of the koords have impelled them to throw of the authority of the Sultan and conquer their independence'.⁴⁹ However, if Mir Muhammad's attempt was nationalist, it only happened in southern Kurdistan and thus did not include all of Kurdistan, because during his time there were two other Kurdish princedoms that did not join his coalition. Furthermore, his agenda was not clear, because there were no documents that recorded his speech (e.g., interviews or conversations) and thoughts on his nationalist

⁴⁴ The role of the tribal chiefs in their society and the tribal boundaries will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁴⁵ Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement*, pp. 58-9.

⁴⁶ He was a British officer worked with the Ottoman Army during 1835-6 as advisor, Who's Who, online ed., (2014).

⁴⁷ 'Richard Wood to Lord Ponsonby Mosul 28 Jun 1836', p. 93.

⁴⁸ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, through Persian Kurdistan', p. 25.

⁴⁹ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 211-12.

agenda. Millingen's argument is a reminder of why British travellers' accounts cannot be considered as straightforward fact.

One element of the Soran Emirate that the travellers highlighted was the existence of a strong army, based on Benedict Anderson's argument that establishing a large and strong army was one of the characteristics of nationalism.⁵⁰ It is possible that the British travellers saw the large army of the Soran Emirate as a characteristic of nationalism. Sir Justin Shiel, the Secretary of the British delegation in Persia, suggested that Muhammad Pasha planned to strengthen his principedom by recruiting a man from every family as a soldier.⁵¹ Whether or not Shiel's comment is true is unimportant, but he perhaps aimed to show that Mir Muhammad's policy was to build an army, and nearly all Kurds in his emirate were to participate in it with the goal of establishing a strong army. Another traveller, Fraser, argued that Mir Muhammad had a large army. He said that the Soran Emirate's army was estimated as being between thirty and fifty thousand 'hardy musketeers' who were regularly paid.⁵² Although the army consisted of tribal people, it had the appearance of a national army, and the travellers aimed to show that Mir Muhammad attempted to unify it. Ainsworth claimed that the Prince of Rawanduz could unify all tribes in the mountain area under his rule.⁵³ Mir Muhammad ate his meal each evening with between one and two hundred soldiers who came from different tribes.⁵⁴ This point is quite important, because it indicated to Fraser that Mir Muhammad aimed to reduce tribal differences and unite his people. According to Rawlinson, army recruitment had a significant effect on the tribes' loyalty to him, because some tribes, which participated in his army, such as the Baliki, Rewendek, Sidek, Shirwani, and Rusuri from around Amadia, were then annexed to the Soran Emirate. Other tribes around Rawanduz such as the Malibas, Sheikhab, Nurik, Kheilani, Hnearai, Sheikh Mahmudi, Kassin, Derijiki, Bamami, Sekw, Shikuli, Mendik, Baimar, and Piraji joined Mir Muhammad's tribe.⁵⁵ However, although the unification of the tribes was important for Mir Muhammad's agenda, it was

⁵⁰ In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson comments several times that recruiting a big army is one of the elements of nationalism.

⁵¹ Shiel 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz Through Kurdistan', p. 98; Rawlinson had a similar idea, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, through Persian Kurdistan', p. 26.

⁵² Fraser, *Mesopotamia and Syria*, p. 219.

⁵³ Ainsworth, 'The Assyrian origin of the Izedis or Yezidis - the so-called Devil Worshippers', p. 14

⁵⁴ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 78.

⁵⁵ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, through Persian Kurdistan', p. 25.

only temporary. After the Ottomans succeeded in controlling the Emirate, the Kurdish army was fragmented and tribes returned to their old structure. This aftermath was largely ignored by the travellers, who may not have understood the nature of tribal society in Kurdistan, especially since it was so different from European society in the nineteenth century, where tribes had ceased to exist since the seventeenth century or earlier. For example, Fraser wrote in the 1830s that the Scottish tribal structure had disintegrated 200 years before.⁵⁶ In Kurdistan the tribal structure was strong, and all travellers noted the active role of the tribes.

It is obvious that the tribes' relationship with nationalism had two sides. On the one hand, tribes could serve the nationalist agendas to varying extents, because leaders such as Mir Muhammad could build an army from the tribes, utilising their existing troops and cavalries.⁵⁷ Under the influence of a powerful leader, the tribes were capable of being supportive of nationalist movements, and throughout the history of Kurdish nationalism the tribes contributed towards an army. On the other hand, however, the tribes could have a negative effect on nationalism; after the disappearance of the powerful prince or charismatic leader, tribes became more active and their intertribal rivalries and conflicts made unification difficult. Such tensions could also limit the lifespan of alliances, since former rivalries have the ability to break coalitions and spoil nationalist projects. It was easy for the Ottoman Empire to dominate Kurdistan after defeating powerful princes such as Mir Muhammad, as the Turks could do so by enflaming the rivalries among the Kurdish tribes.

As a consequence, it has been argued that tribalism was the main barrier to Kurdish nationalism. According to Eli Amariyo, who has cited information from Kendal Nazan and Hussein Tahiri, tribes divided and fragmented Kurdish society and became the main reason for the failure of most Kurdish nationalist movements. Tribes thus impeded Kurdish unification and prevented the building of a nation state. Central governments could easily cause rivalries to break out among the tribes.⁵⁸ According to Jwaideh, after the destruction

⁵⁶ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 192.

⁵⁷ The tribes as martial and military groups will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁵⁸ E. Amariyo, 'The Dual Relation between Kurdish Tribalism and Nationalism', in Bengo (ed.), *Kurdish Awakening Nation Building in a Fragmented Homeland*, p. 64.

of the Kurdish emirates the chiefs became more powerful, and intertribal bloodshed and rivalries increased. The tribes who submitted to the orders of their chiefs now regained their power, including the Zebrary and the Hamawand, which both became more powerful.⁵⁹ The tribes in the east, albeit not in the nineteenth century, became the barrier to the unification of societies; for example, in Kurdistan in the 1890s the Ottomans recruited Kurds from Sunni tribes which excluded some small Sunni tribes, and Alavi Shite tribes.⁶⁰ After, the First World War when the Kurdish representative Sharif Pasha was in Paris claiming Kurdish rights in the Peace Conference in 1920, some tribal Kurdish in Erznjan telegraphed to the French High Commissioner that Sharif Pasha was not their representative, and Pasha was obliged to resign.⁶¹ The situation can be compared to that of twenty-first century Libya, where after the disappearance of a charismatic leader, who enabled the people to unite under his banner, society fragmented.⁶²

Ultimately, however, Mir Muhammad was unable to achieve his aim, and his Princedom was invaded by the Ottomans.⁶³ After surrounding the Emirate, the Ottomans promised to allow Mir Muhammad to remain as the ruler of his territory,⁶⁴ yet reneged on this promise and killed him in Amasya after his return from Constantinople,⁶⁵ probably because they were troubled by his strength and position and were concerned that he might lead a second revolt against them.

British observations on the Baban Emirate

Regarding the establishment of the Baban Emirate, Rawlinson depended on Sharaf Nama's claim that a Kurdish chief, Pir Bodagh, had founded the Emirate in the fifteenth century. At

⁵⁹ Jwaideh, *The Kurdish National Movement*, p. 75.

⁶⁰ H. Tahiri, *The Structure of Kurdish Society and Struggle for Kurdish State* (Costa Mesa, 2006), p. 40.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶² Tribes were becoming a problem in relation to national unification after the uprising and fall of Qaddafi, and the country faced internal war, because each tribe ruled its region. The situation remains unstable. For more information see J. Benkato, 'Tribes of Libya as the Third Front: Myth and Realities of Non-State Actors in the Long Battle for Misrata,' in B. Haddad (ed.), *The Down of Arab Uprisings end of an Old Order?* (London, 2012), pp. 143-149.

⁶³ Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, pp. 244-245.

⁶⁴ 'Richard Wood to Lord Ponsonby Mosul 28 Jun 1836', p. 94.

⁶⁵ Ainsworth, *Travel and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, vol. 2, p. 323.

that time, the territory included Sulaymaniah and its boundaries, reaching the banks of the Lake of Urmia to Kirkuk and Baghdad Vilayet.⁶⁶ It included large areas of Kurdistan and transcended the boundaries between the Persian and Ottoman Empires.

British travellers represented the Baban Emirate as having a history of self-governing and independence. Claudius James Rich, who visited Kurdistan in 1820, and was more familiar with the region than any other British traveller, discussed the situation of the Baban Emirate because he stayed in its capital Sulaymaniah and developed a strong relationship with the Prince of Baban, Mahmood Pasha, and his officials. In addition, Rich had an unfriendly relationship with the Vali of Baghdad. Nonetheless he endeavoured to show that the Baban Emirate was independent and was not subordinate to the Baghdad government. Rich believed that the Emirate had a history of self-governing, and that it had its own government in 1820, but the Baban Emirate was stronger during the rule of Abdulrahman Pasha (1789- 1814). According to Rich, the territory of the Baban Emirate contained large areas in southern Kurdistan, including Badra, Jassan Zangabad, Mandali, Altun Kupri, Erbile, and even Sina in the Persian region. However, Sulaiman Pasha Vali of Baghdad restricted the Emirate's power, and the Baban prince was defeated by Suleiman Pasha, the Vali of Baghdad, and all the fortifications were destroyed.⁶⁷ In describing the extensive territory, Rich implied that the Baban Emirate wanted these regions to be part of their own principedom and not the possession of foreigners.⁶⁸

Most of the British travellers praised Ahmad Pasha's role in restoring his emirate. Ahmad Pasha was a prince of Baban between 1838 and 1844. However, the situation had been unstable even before his reign began due to internal conflict over the throne. Once he came to the throne, the situation gradually improved, however, and under his rule the Emirate enjoyed greater freedom from both the Persians and Ottomans. When writing about his visit to Sulaymaniah the British officer Captain Robert Mignan of the Bombay Army, observed that 'the government of Sulaymaniah is governed by a pasha, who was by birth a

⁶⁶ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz, through Persian Kurdistan', p. 17.

⁶⁷ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence of Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 159.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 279-80.

Kurd, subject to neither Turk nor Persian'.⁶⁹ According to Mignan's comment, Ahmad Pasha of Sulaymaniah was in reality independent from both the Ottoman and Persian Empires. In addition, Mignan focused on the origin of Ahmad Pasha perhaps in order to show that the Kurds were a different ethnic group that did not want to live under the rule of two dominant empires.

A British Officer named James Felix Jones frequently visited Kurdistan in the 1830s and 1840s. In his book published in 1857, he asserted that Ahmad Pasha revived his emirate in order to make it as strong as it had been in that of his forefather, Suleiman Bey.⁷⁰ Jones noted that Ahmad Pasha had received a liberal education, and therefore believed that the modern army could serve his ambition of restoring his principedom. Jones recorded that he began to establish a regular and disciplined force similar to a European army including several battalions of artillery, infantry, and some cavalry.⁷¹ He successfully managed to persuade the Kurdish tribes to wear the clothes of the regular troops for his emirate, which he had organised according to the European system.⁷² These steps can be considered as nationalist actions as he symbolically differentiated his emirate and established the army as he wanted. Jones was one of the earlier British travellers who indirectly aimed to show that these Kurdish movements were nationalistic, whilst there were travellers like Millingen and Bell, who openly believed these movements were a sign of nationalism. Most British travellers did not explicitly mention the purpose of having a uniform army, and it is possible that they were implying that creating an army in a different style from the Ottomans could be seen as an important indication of Ahmad Pasha's goal of independence.

Millingen highlighted Ahmad Pasha's uprising against the Ottomans, as after establishing an organized army, Ahmad Pasha started to move against the Turks. According to Millingen, Ahmad Pasha's first attempt occurred in 1843 in Sulaymaniah against the Ottomans, and was intended to achieve independence. However, his attempt was not

⁶⁹ C. R. Mignan, *Winter Journey Through Russia The Caucasian Alps and Georgia*, vol. 1 (London, 1839), p. 285.

⁷⁰ J. F. Jones, *Memoirs of Baghdad, Kurdistan and Turkish Arabia, 1857* (Oxford, 1998), p. 208.

⁷¹ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 211-12.

⁷² Ibid.

successful,⁷³ and thus was akin to the uprising of Mir Muhammad of Rawanduz. The important point in Ahmad Pasha's case is that he openly attempted to obtain independence from the Ottomans, but failed due to an imbalance of power, because the Ottomans had a larger army and more developed weapons. Similarly, after the destruction of the Emirate the army was fragmented and the tribes became more active again. For example, the Jaf and Hamawand were two important tribes around Sulaymaniah, both of which returned to their former tribal situation.

British Travellers' observations on the Bohtan Emirate

Badir Khan Pasha's plan for expansion was similarly highlighted as a nationalist attempt. Robert Olson has noted that Badir Khan, who became prince of the Bohtan Emirate in 1820, had controlled territories in the north and south areas of Kurdistan.⁷⁴ Gradually he expanded his border and controlled nearly all the areas between Diyarbakir and Mosul. The border of his Emirate even extended to the Persian territory.⁷⁵ The Bohtan Emirate reached the peak of its power during his reign, and Badir Khan Pasha became the most powerful leader in Kurdistan⁷⁶ after the overthrow of the Soran Prince.

Paying tax, even a small amount, was a symbol of submission to the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, Badir Khan's refusal to pay tax was one of the points highlighted by the British travellers. According to Shiel, writing in 1836, Badir Khan refused to pay tax or tribute to the Ottomans for many years. The Turks did not accept this disobedience, and invaded the Bohtan capital of Jazireh. Badir Khan sought refuge in the mountains and raised an army from the Kurds to fight back against the Ottomans.⁷⁷ Ghalib has described

⁷³ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 211-12; Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, pp. 244-245.

⁷⁴ Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, p. 1.

⁷⁵ A. H. Wright and E. Breath, 'A report on their Visit to Badir Khan as Representatives of the American Mission in Persia', *Missionary Herald*, 42, no. 11 (Boston, 1846), p. 381.

⁷⁶ T. Laurie and A. Smith, 'Cause of the Late Invasion', *The Missionary Herald*, 41, no. 4, April (Boston, 1845), p. 122.

⁷⁷ Shiel, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz', p. 87.

how the Ottomans finally forced Badir Khan to return to the capital, and submit to their rule.⁷⁸ However, Badir Khan's attempt did not end there.

Millingen noted that Badir Khan's rebellion in 1847 was the Kurds' third attempt to repel the Turks and obtain independence.⁷⁹ However, the Ottoman Empire presented these uprisings as simply a series of turbulent events, despite the fact that these movements were considered as demonstrations of an emerging nationalism by British travellers. Millingen certainly recognised them as such, saying that they were not random events occurring within fifteen years in three different places in Kurdistan, but rather that 'revolutionary fever had inflamed the brains of the whole mass of the Koordish nation'.⁸⁰ However, it is possible that Millingen was biased in his perceptions of the Kurdish movements and considered them as full nationalist movements according to European standards, and whilst they had a sense of national awakening they should not be considered full nationalist movements due to their regional nature. Instead, they were proto-nationalist.

As in the Baban Emirate, Badir Khan Pasha aimed to have an army which wore uniform clothes.⁸¹ For example, when the British Consul in Mosul visited him he described the guards in the following manner:

On one side of Badir Khan Bey's tent were drawn up about 300 men, all dressed alike in dark jackets, and red trousers and long hanging shirt sleeves of the same colour. On the other side an equal number but in blue trousers and sleeves. They were all standing with their hands resting on their daggers from the handles.⁸²

The British diplomat's point was that, as in the Soran Emirate, Badir Khan Pasha aimed to keep his army unique, and different from the Ottomans troops.

⁷⁸ Ghalib, 'The Emergence of Kurdism with Special Reference to the Three Kurdish Emirates', p. 151.

⁷⁹ Millingen, *Wild Life Among the Koords*, p. 212. The American Missionary nearly had the same idea, T. Laurie, *Dr. Grant and the Mountain Nestorians* (Boston, 1953), p. 105.

⁸⁰ Millingen, *Wild Life Among the Koords*, pp. 212-13.

⁸¹ Ghalib, 'The Emergence of Kurdism with Special Reference to the Three Kurdish Emirates', p. 162.

⁸² TNA: FO 195/228, The Consul of Mosul's report of a visit to Bedr Khan Mossul, 10th July 1844, Enclosed in Stratford Canning's dispatch, no. 169, 1844.

The British consular report stressed that Badir Khan Pasha aimed to avoid a possible Ottoman plot against him via religious men in his emirate by nominating a Qadthi (supreme judge) in his capital. Qadthis commanded the highest religious authority; Badir Khan Pasha was aware of their crucial role and so wanted to separate his principedom's judicial system from that of the Ottomans. But in the Ottoman Empire Qadthis were nominated to cities or towns by permission of the Sheikhul Islam, the highest Qadthis in the Empire. However, in Jazireh Badir Khan Pasha nominated the Qadthis without permission of the Sheikhul Islam in Constantinople.⁸³ There were several reasons for this decision (fatwa); firstly Badir Khan Pasha wanted to avoid the possibility of the Qadthi issuing a 'fatwa', or Islamic order, which everyone had to obey even if it went against the authority of the secular rule. If the Qadthi was chosen by Istanbul and if the Sheikhul Islam who had the highest religious authority⁸⁴ issued an order against Badir Khan, then the local Qadthi would have to confirm it, and in this way the Ottomans could depose Badir Khan via a coup. Secondly, Badir Khan's appointment of the Qadthis was intended to symbolise the Emirate's independence.⁸⁵

However, Badir Khan made a mistake when he fought against Nestorians⁸⁶ who had been settled for a long time in Kurdistan, alongside Kurds in these areas.⁸⁷ When he reached the peak of his authority, Badir Khan instigated a serious uprising in 1847, which was the first time the Kurds had fought against the neighbouring Nestorians. However, the uprising was quelled by Omar Pasha, the leader of the Turkish army, that same year.⁸⁸ Badir Khan had made a political mistake in deciding to revolt, because it led the European countries to encourage the Ottomans to act against him in defence of the Nestorian Christians. Also, it went against a verse in the Quran that says 'there is no compulsion in religion'.⁸⁹ It is clear that the coalition hastened the Ottomans' campaign against Badir

⁸³ TNA: FO 195/228, Rassam C. the Vice Consul at Mosul to Sir Stratford Canning British Ambassador at Constantinople, no. 1, Mossul, 13th January, 1844.

⁸⁴ Bruinssen, *Agha, Shaikh and State*, p. 209.

⁸⁵ Coins were minted in his name, with "Badir Khan, the Emir of Bohtan" written on them. Jwaideh, *Kurdish National Movement*, p. 73.

⁸⁶ C. H. Wheeler, *Ten Years on the Euphrates or Primitive Missionary Policy Illustrated* (Boston, 1868), p. 26.

⁸⁷ Maunsell, 'Kurdistan', p. 81.

⁸⁸ Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, p. 175; Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, pp. 244-245.

⁸⁹ *The Holy Quran*, Chapter 2, Verse 256.

Khan's principality, as after the massacre in 1847 the Ottoman army directly attacked him and destroyed the Bohtan Emirate. His mistake was his devotion to independence and nationalism, because if he had had a friendly relationship with the Nestorians then he might have been able to obtain their support against the Ottomans, and the European countries would not have become his enemy and would not have encouraged the Ottomans against him. According to the anthropologist Bruinessen, whilst Badir Khan Pasha unified the Kurdish tribes in his region, the Ottomans eventually regained control and the Bohtan territory returned to its former tribal structure, with rivalries re-emerging.⁹⁰

Despite the fact that all the movements ended in failure and the death of the leader, there are differences between Badir Khan and the other Kurdish leaders before him in the nineteenth-century. The Kurds in the Soran and Baban Emirates did not continue in their struggle with the dominant nation, meaning that they simply followed their charismatic Pashas. After the death of the prince and the failure of the movement, there was no strategic agenda. As such, travellers such as Millingen were not entirely correct about the emirates' movements.

The British travellers not only noted the Kurdish Emirates' rejection of Ottoman rule, but also observed that Kurdish tribes moved against the Ottomans in the first half of the nineteenth century, attempting to achieve independence several times. According to their limited military capacity, these tribes fought against the Ottoman army when it passed through their lands. They did not allow the Ottoman troops to approach their territories, as they did not want to lose their independence. Finally, they offered assistance and support to the enemies of the Ottomans. According to Ainsworth, in the same year that the Ottomans controlled the Soran Emirate (1836), the Kurds of the Turus Mountain rebelled against the Ottomans,⁹¹ as did the Kurds between Malatya and Sivas.⁹² This proves that the Kurds reacted against Ottoman expeditions to control the Soran Emirate.

Finally, the comments of British travellers suggest that Kurdish national aspiration, or what Ghalib called Kurdism, was very strong among Kurds, and the tribal sense declined

⁹⁰ Bruinessen, *Agha Shaikh and State*, p. 181.

⁹¹ Ainsworth, *Travel and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, vol. 2, p. 2.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

during the time of these princedoms. After their failure the situation changed again. Yet whilst these uprisings and movements failed, they nevertheless paved the way for the emergence of Kurdish nationalist or separatist movements in the second half of the century onwards.

Kurdish Nationalism in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century and Sheikh Ubaidullah's Movement

This section investigates the British travel accounts and diplomatic reports regarding Sheikh Ubaidullah's movement of 1880-1882. British diplomats and travellers highlighted certain nationalistic features of the movement. They suggested that Sheikh Ubaidullah saw the Kurds as a distinct nation, different from the Persians and Turks because of their different culture, language, and religion. Religion was very important for Sheikh Ubaidullah's nationalist movement, because due to the power of religion he could gather nearly all the rival Kurdish tribes and unify them under his authority, due to the strength of religious feeling among Kurds. In addition, they claimed that Ubaidullah's movement was a form of nationalism because he frankly demanded Kurdish independence, whereas the aim of the previous movements, as we have seen, had been obscure. Finally, they argued that the movement was under the influence of other European countries, as at that time there were several European ethnicities that fought for their rights.

According to the British texts, the driving force of Kurdish movements towards separation from the Ottoman and Persian Empires continued, but under new religious leadership, as the sheikhs took over from the Kurdish princes in the second half of the century. Before discussing Sheikh Ubaidullah's movement, it is important to discuss religion's role in the emerging nationalism. The British noted that religion played a crucial role in politics in the East among both the Christians and Muslims. This was in contrast to the situation in Western countries, where religion no longer seriously influenced political affairs. The importance of religion is obvious for Kurds who rebelled under the leadership

of religious men.⁹³ Religion was the most important element that distinguished the Greeks from other Ottoman nations such as Arabs, Turks, and Jewish and Christian Armenians, since the majority of the Greeks belonged to the Orthodox Church. In this respect, they perceived themselves to be a different community from the other Ottoman nations which followed Islam.⁹⁴ Thus, a strong sense of religious autonomy became the backbone of their nationalism. Kurdish nationalism also took a distinctly religious turn in the second half of the century.

Kurdish religious doctrine was different from that of the Turks and Persians. They significantly differed from Persians because the Kurds were Sunnis whereas the Persians were Shiite. There has been a lengthy conflict between these two major doctrines, similar to that between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Furthermore, the Kurds differed from the Turks despite both being Sunni, since the former followed the Sunni Shafi'i doctrine and thus were distinguished from the Turks, who followed the Sunni Hanafi doctrine. Rivalry between the followers of these two Sunni doctrines exists, but not to the same extent as between the Sunni and Shiite. However, these differences became important factors in the emerging sense of Kurdish nationalism, and religious men used the differences for political purposes. In particular, the Sheikhs (Sayyids) who believed that they were descended from the Prophet Muhammad, were widely respected.⁹⁵ The Sheikhs had spread throughout Kurdistan and over time they became assimilated with the Kurds. Even during the Princedoms, religious men played an important role in society but supported the power of princes. Maunsell noted how, after the semi-independent (begs) emirates who had ruled Sulaymaniah, Rawanduz, and Amadia the Sheikhs acquired a significant role among the Kurds.⁹⁶ Most of the influential Sheikhs belonged to a Sufi doctrine called Naqshbandi, which in turn belonged to the larger Shafihi doctrine. Naqshbandi is an Islamic Sufi doctrine that was spread throughout Kurdistan from the early nineteenth century onwards. As Rich pointed out, there was an influential Kurdish Muslim holy man in Sulaymaniah called Maulana Khalid, who had an estimated 12,000 followers in the Ottoman Empire and

⁹³ A. Riley, 'Christians and Kurds in the Eastern Turkey', *Contemporary Review* (1889), pp. 453-4.

⁹⁴ W. St Clair, *That Greece Might Still be Free the Philhellenes in the War of Independence* (London, 1972), p. 8.

⁹⁵ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 1, p. 32.

⁹⁶ Maunsell, 'Eastern Turkey in Asia and Armenia', p. 233.

Persia, and ‘almost all the principal Koords [*sic*] are his follower *murids*’.⁹⁷ This Sufi Naqshbandi doctrine would have an impact on the emerging Kurdish national aspiration later in the century. Sheikh Ubaidullah was a descendant of the Sheikhs of Shamdinan.

Thanks to his personal characteristics and his style of ruling, Sheikh Ubaidullah was able to persuade Kurds that he would become their leader. Curzon said that Sheikh Ubaidullah, the son of Sheikh Tahir from the small Kurdish tribe of Ormar in southern Van, gradually became powerful due to his administrative capability and personal sanctity.⁹⁸ Therefore, he was considered by Curzon ‘as the leader of Kurdish nationality’. Curzon showed the Sheikh developing a royal style, and every day between 500 and 1,000 people visited his guest house.⁹⁹ Chiefs from the various regions of Kurdistan came to support his movement and obey him.¹⁰⁰ According to the British travellers, the Sheikh was the proper governor of Kurdistan because he was an equitable judge and ruler, and he and his officials refused to accept bribes. Unlike the Turkish and Persian officials, he was easily accessible as anyone could meet him or his sons, even if only for minor matters of business. He was clever and anxious to obtain information in order to civilise the life of his people, and he worked to transform his people into citizens and to stop plundering and robbery. In order to do so, he bought land at Gavar, Bashkalah, Mergever, and Tergever for agricultural purposes,¹⁰¹ which indicates that he attempted to employ people in agriculture in order to reduce crime. The travellers showed that due to his method of ruling, he could obtain the support of the Kurds and gather them under his banner.

According to a British diplomatic report described in one of the Sheikh’s letters on 5 October, 1880, to the American Missionary in Urmia, Dr Cochran, he complained of this misrule and oppression, offering an example of the Persian-ordered execution of 50 men

⁹⁷ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence of Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 141.

⁹⁸ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 553; Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 166.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ TNA: FO 881/4550, Consul General Abbot to Mr. Thomson, 7 October, 1880.

¹⁰¹ B.P.P., HC: 1881 [C. 2851] *Turkey, Correspondence of Kurdish Invasion of Persia*, anonymous to Consul-General Abbot, 8 October 1880 enclosure 4 in no. 8.

without trial or any clear reason.¹⁰² In the same letter the Sheikh attributed the corruption that occurred in Kurdistan to the misgovernment of Persian and Ottoman governors.¹⁰³

In the view of the British, Sheikh Ubaidullah's movement was a nationalist uprising, because they applied the standards of the nationalist movements of the European ethnicities to the Kurdish movement at the time, which was openly proclaiming the movement's goal of independence, and they drew comparisons between the Kurdish movement and that of Europeans. According to a report, which had been sent by Consul-General Abbot to Thomson, Sheikh Ubaidullah's aim was to establish an independent state of Kurdistan, separate from both the Persian and the Ottoman Empires.¹⁰⁴ When Curzon looked back upon events in 1889 He observed that 'there is no doubt that [the Sheikh] dreamed for an independent Kurdistan'.¹⁰⁵ A long article in the *Saturday Review* in 1880 confirmed that the Kurds had all the features of nationhood according to the standards of the time:

[Even] there is such a thing as a Kurdish nation in the modern sense is a sufficiently certain ethnological fact. The country of the celebrated SAMUEL of Bulgaria has not much more historic claims to individuality than the country of XENOPHON's Carduchians, except that it is considerably less venerable.¹⁰⁶

It showed that under the influence of the Bulgarian movement the Sheikh aimed to unify all Kurds under his authority.¹⁰⁷ During the 1870s the Bulgarian issue attracted British attention, as the Bulgarian movement was brutally suppressed by the Ottomans, and the British media focused on this. The British politician William Ewart Gladstone led a major campaign against the Turks and published a pamphlet entitled *The Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of East* (1876). This had a significant impact on British public opinion, shaping anti-Ottoman sentiments in the United Kingdom.¹⁰⁸ By comparing Sheikh

¹⁰² TNA: FO 881/4387, Consul-General Abbot to Mr. Thomson, Sheikh Ubaidullah to Dr. Cochran, Urmia, 25 September, 1880.

¹⁰³ TNA: FO 881/4387, Sheikh Ubaidullah to Dr. Cochran, 5 October, 1880.

¹⁰⁴ TNA: FO 881/4387, Consul-General Abbot to Mr. Thomson, enclosure Urmia, 7 October, 1880.

¹⁰⁵ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 553.

¹⁰⁶ *The Saturday Review*, Nov. 13, 1880; American Missionary had similar ideas, S. G. Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs with the Scene and Incidents of Residence and Travel in the Land of the Lion and the Sun* (Chicago, 1895), p. 110.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ W. Miller, *The Ottoman Empire and its successors, 1801-1927* (London, 3rd ed., 1966), p. 366; McCarthy, *The Ottoman Peoples and the End of Empire*, p. 46.

Ubaidullah's movement with the Bulgarian one, the British aimed to show that the factors which encouraged Bulgarians against the Ottomans were similar to those which led the Kurds to revolt against both Persians and Turks.

In his letter to Cochran, dated 5 October 1880, Sheikh Ubaidullah mentioned for the first time that he identified the Kurds as a nation in a way which corroborates Smith's focus on ethnicity. He expressed his plans for Kurdish independence and the reasons behind this. He noted that the Kurdish population was comprised of over 500,000 families. Kurds formed a nation distinct from the Persians and Ottomans in terms of culture, laws, and religion.¹⁰⁹ Then he focused on the cultural and religious differences between the Kurds and the Persians and Turks. 'We want our affairs to be in our hands' and Kurds should 'have privilege like other nations'. He claimed that the Kurds were ready to rule themselves, expressing the hope that they would not have to harm other nations.¹¹⁰ It is clear that he was aware that gaining European support would make the founding of the Kurdish state much easier, and therefore he emphasised that the proposed state would not pose a threat to the Christians in the region.

British travellers may have been influenced by the unification of Germany and of Italy in the 1870s, and therefore highlighted the unification of the Kurds under the banner of Sheikh Ubaidullah. The British travellers' correspondence illustrates that the unification of the Kurds was one of the significant features of the Kurdish movement, as Kurds from all over Kurdistan participated, according to a report from Consul-General Abbot to Mr Thomson.¹¹¹ They were identified as the 'Kurdish League', which was united under the aim of achieving one goal, which was independence.¹¹² Curzon believed that Sheikh Ubaidullah's movement was significant, because it led to the overcoming of family and tribal rivalries for the sake of a 'united Kurdish organisation', which would be very difficult to repeat.¹¹³ For the first time Kurds were gathered under the banner of one of their leaders, and the movement was able to transcend locality and tribalism. That unification was very

¹⁰⁹ TNA: FO 881/4387, Sheikh Ubaidullah to Dr. Cochran, 5 October, 1880.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ TNA: FO 881/4387, Consul-General Abbot to Mr Thomson, enclosure 1, no. 265, Urmia, 7 October, 1880; M. G. C. B., Gerard, *Notes of a Journey through Kurdistan in the Winter of 1881-82* (Calcutta, 1883), p. 21.

¹¹² B.P.P., HC: 1880, Major Trotter to Mr. Goschen, *Therapia*, 20 October, 1880.

¹¹³ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 554.

different from what happened under the rule of the Kurdish Emirates because the latter transcended regional boundaries and Kurds from most parts of Kurdistan participated in it.

As there was rivalry between Britain and Russia, Sheikh Ubaidullah probably wanted to seize the chance to obtain support from Britain, particularly as the Russians were supporting the Armenians at the time. The Sheikh aimed to establish friendly relationships with representatives of great powers such as Britain and America. He preferred to attract the attention of powerful countries such as Britain in order to encourage them to support his movement, as he was probably aware that the previous movements had failed due to the lack of international support. Sheikh Ubaidullah tried to establish relationships with powerful countries, and developed a friendly relationship with the American Missionary in Urmia. He also endeavoured to have a strong relationship with the British Consul, General Abbot, in Urmia. However, the British Consul refused, as Britain at the time wanted to secure the area between the Persian and Ottoman empires, which is where the movement was happening.¹¹⁴ Britain did not want to support a movement that would have created problems for the Persians and Ottomans, because this would have increased the leverage of Russia in the region.

During Sheikh Ubaidullah's movement, the British focused on the Armenian situation. The British worried that the Ottoman oppression of Bulgaria would be repeated, with the Armenians suffering at the hands of the Kurds and Circassians. Therefore, the British closely watched the Armenians for their safety.¹¹⁵ British travellers and diplomats carefully observed the condition of Armenia during Sheikh Ubaidullah's movement and his attitude towards Christians such as the Armenians. The Sheikh understood that the Armenian issue was sensitive to the British, and therefore he dealt with them carefully. Abbot highlighted that the Sheikh promised that no harm would come to Christians, and vowed not to distinguish between Muslims and Christians in ruling, as both religions should have 'civil liberty' in practising their religious rituals, and Christians should be allowed to build their schools and churches. Even during the fighting he promised that

¹¹⁴ TNA: FO 881/4387, Consul-General Abbot to Mr. Thomson, enclosure 1, no. 265, Urmia, 7 October, 1880.

¹¹⁵ *The Times*, 9 April 1880.

Christians would not be harmed.¹¹⁶ At the time, the Armenian issue was gradually unfolding, but the British travellers showed that the Kurdish movement would not harm Armenians.

After collecting his army, Sheikh Ubaidullah focussed his attention on fighting Persia, believing it to be weaker than the Ottoman Empire, and so in 1880 his army, which was estimated to consist of 30,000 soldiers armed with rifles,¹¹⁷ crossed the Persian border and invaded towns such as Soujbulack, Mianduab (where they killed many people), and Maragha. They surrounded Urmia but were eventually defeated by the Persian army.¹¹⁸ The cooperation between the Ottoman and Persian Empires led to the cessation of the Sheikh's movement, and he was imprisoned in Constantinople in July 1881. However, he escaped in 1882 and restarted his movement, but after only a few months was captured and exiled to Mecca, where he died in October 1883.¹¹⁹ One of the factors that contributed to the movement's failure was the cooperation between the Persian and the Ottoman Empires,¹²⁰ and the involvement of Russia in this alliance.¹²¹

After the expansion of the movement, Curzon said Sheikh Ubaidullah could have invaded Tabriz without difficulty, but no such steps were taken, and his followers did not have a clear idea about their destination and separation from the Ottoman Empire.¹²² Harris, however, thought that Sheikh Ubaidullah could not invade Tabriz and the whole Azerbaijan province in Persia because of the intertribal rivalry and jealousy of some Kurdish tribal leaders.¹²³

The British traveller Maunsell also confirmed that the movement of Sheikh Ubaidullah was nationalist in character because the Sheikh successfully collected Kurdish

¹¹⁶ TNA: FO 881/4387, Consul-General Abbot to Earl Granville, Extracts from Consul-General Abbot's Diary, kept at Urmia during Kurdish Invasion, enclosure 1, no. 245. Tabreez, 15 November, 1880; Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs*, p. 110.

¹¹⁷ TNA: FO 881/4550, Consul-General Abbott to Mr. Thomson, enclosure 3, no.25, Tabreez, 22 September, 1880.

¹¹⁸ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 553; Wilson, *Persian Life and Customs*, pp. 115-116.

¹¹⁹ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 554.

¹²⁰ TNA: FO 881/ 4550, Mr Thomson to Earl Granville, Tehran, 12 November, 1880.

¹²¹ TNA: FO 881/4550, Earl Granville to the Earl of Dufferin Foreign Office, 28 February, 1881.

¹²² Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 554.

¹²³ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 166.

tribes under his banner, for the sake of establishing an independent Kurdistan.¹²⁴ Other travellers like Harris and Bird did not discuss the issue. Harris focused on the conflict and casualties which happened as a result of the movement.¹²⁵ Bird discussed how Sheikh Ubaidullah negotiated peacefully with the Armenians.¹²⁶ The comments of the British travellers suggest that Sheikh Ubaidullah had a nationalistic agenda, because he clearly expressed his desire for independence, discussed the elements of nationalism, and confirmed that Kurdish culture, language and religion were different from those of the two dominant nations, and for the first time used the word nation with regard to the Kurds. He could also rely on the majority of Kurds for support. However, his movement suffered a similar fate to that of the Kurdish principdoms, because after the end of the movement, tribes divided again, and national feeling was replaced by tribal feeling. The Ottomans seized the opportunity presented by tribal division. They recruited Kurdish tribes as light cavalry under the name of Hamidiye regiments, in which tribes were organised in one regime under the leadership of their own chief, a process that occurred between 1878-1914 and was used against the Armenians.¹²⁷ These tribes were used in this way to serve the Ottoman Empire rather than the Kurdish cause. These Hamidiye cavalries also harmed Kurdish nationalism, because according to Mark Sykes they oppressed non-Hamidiye Kurds.¹²⁸ As a result Kurdish society was divided into Hamidiye and non-Hamidiye, which hated each other. Furthermore, sometimes the Hamidiye tribes fought against each other, which renewed inter-tribal rivalries. For example, Maunsell in a consular report identified the intertribal fighting among the Hamidiye regiments in a district near Van, and as a result the insecurity spread in the region.¹²⁹ Finally, throughout the nineteenth century Kurdish national feeling existed during the time of strong and charismatic leaders, but, after the death of such a leader tribes became more active and tribal sense destroyed the unification of Kurds. For that reason the tribal system was the main barrier to emerging Kurdish nationalism.

¹²⁴ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 207-8.

¹²⁵ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 166.

¹²⁶ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 225.

¹²⁷ F. Dundar, [review], 'Janet Keliin, the margine of empire: Kurdish militias in the Ottoman Tribal zone', *Nationalities Papers*, 40, 4 (2012), p. 652.

¹²⁸ M. Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage: a short history of the Turkish Empire* (London, 1915), p. 406; *idem*, *Dar-ul-Islam*, p. 134.

¹²⁹ TNA: FO 881/7655, Major Maunsell to Sir N. O'Connor, Inclosure No. 69, Van, 19 June, 1900.

It remains unclear why the Kurds decided not to move against the Ottomans in the last decade, but there were probably two underlying reasons. The first one was that the Ottomans recruited some Kurdish tribes under the name of Hamyidian cavalry, which were deployed to fight against the Armenians. The second point is that the nature of Kurdish nationalism had changed at that time, and the educated Kurds who settled in the big cities such as Constantinople focused on reviving their culture and writing in their own language.

Conclusion

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the Kurdish Emirates played a significant role in awakening Kurdish nationalism, the seeds of which began to take root thanks to relative political stability and improvements in the economy. However, Kurdish national awakening or proto-nationalism at the time was regional and did not transcend the princedoms' boundaries, because the Emirates' borders served to differentiate Kurds from each other. Yet this first stage was a vital one and we can see that there was a wish to obtain greater autonomy or separation from the dominant nations, and that the princedoms became the backbones for Kurdish nationalism in the later stages. Some travellers suggested that these movements were nationalist attempts, but in reality they were proto-nationalist.

In the second stage which started in the 1880s Sheikh Ubaidullah's movement became a turning point, because Persians and Turks did not have a religious pretext to oppress the movement. Sheikh Ubaidullah was able to assemble many Kurds from diverse regions, as their nationalist feeling was influenced by religion, and in his demands he mentioned many nationalist elements. The British were not all alike; some tried to show his movement as nationalist while others did not. The Sheikh's movement had some features of nationalism, but by the end of it, the national sense was replaced by a tribal sense. Tribes grew in power and were recruited by the Ottomans, as Hamidiye cavalry.

In the nineteenth century, British travellers identified internal conflict and tribal feuds as chronic impediments that prevented the Kurds from strengthening their princedoms and succeeding in their rebellions against the Ottomans and Persians. These conflicts plagued the dynastic rulers with intertribal rivalries. For example, Rich quoted a

citizen of the Baban dynasty who frankly expressed his sadness about the situation of the emirate, saying that if the princes could be united, no Persian or Turk could harm the Kurds.¹³⁰ Rich noted that it was unfortunate that the dynasty's internal tensions ultimately destroyed it. Nearly fifty years after Rich, Millingen confirmed that internal conflicts and feuds amongst the Kurds were a major problem that ultimately served the aims of the strong neighbouring empires, who always rejected Kurdish unification.¹³¹ However, the Kurds faced other barriers such as unequal internal power distribution and the threat of dominant regional powers such as the Ottomans and Persians. After the destruction of the Kurdish Princedoms, the travellers observed corruption in many parts of the country, and the tribes became more active as the weakened government provided them with the chance to rule their areas. The misgoverning of Kurdistan and the political role of tribes will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century until the end of the Sheikh's movement, the Kurds failed to obtain international support. However, powerful countries supporting the Persians and Ottomans helped to varying extents to overcome the Kurdish movement. Kurds could not persuade these countries to help them, because these movements were seen as a reason for destroying stability in the region.

Outside the tribal zone, even in the diaspora there was hope for Kurdish nationalism. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the role of the educated Kurds in awakening their fellow people gradually developed. These educated Kurds were probably disappointed by the failure of the military movement and tried instead to enlighten people by emphasising the importance of language, education, and culture, thus aiming to inspire the Kurds with their own history. At the very end of the century, the first Kurdish newspaper was published. For that purpose, in 1898 the Kurds who resided in Cairo, the Islamic centre of opposition to the Ottomans, published the first Kurdish newspaper entitled *Kurdistan*. According to Martin Strohmeier, the newspaper had been sent to Kurdistan and was freely circulated there, but as most of the Kurds were illiterate they could not obtain

¹³⁰ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence of Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 90.

¹³¹ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 210.

information from it, but it was read in the village cafes.¹³² The publication of this newspaper was a reaction against the central government's methods in spreading ideas about Turkism. As Anderson suggested, the Turks highlighted their national awareness instead of Islamic identity.¹³³ Therefore, Kurds, alongside other non-Turkish ethnicities inside the Empire, concentrated on reviving their culture and language. In the newspaper, they focused on educating and encouraging Kurds to become educated in order to develop themselves.¹³⁴ The idea was promoted in *Kurdistan* that the Kurds have a glorious history but that they had been forcefully annexed by the Ottomans.¹³⁵ In the newspaper they demanded the use of their own language. In *Kurdistan* they worked to help Kurds become literate and free them from the long period of suffering under the domination of the Ottomans.¹³⁶ They hoped to get independence like Bulgaria.¹³⁷ Moreover, in 1900 the Kurds established a political organisation entitled *Strong Perseverance Group*. There is little information about it but there is evidence it was banned in 1904.¹³⁸ With the Ottomans and Persia in the ascendancy it is now time to discuss the policy of these two governments in Kurdistan and the role of Kurdish tribes.

¹³² M. Strohmeier, *The Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish National Identity* (Leiden, 2003), p. 21.

¹³³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 45.

¹³⁴ 'Kurdistan 22 April 1898' in K. Fouad (ed.), *Kurdistan the first Kurdish newspaper (1898-1902)*, [Kurdish language newspaper] (Cairo, 2005), pp. 1-4; Strohmeier, *The Crucial Images in the Presentation of a Kurdish National Identity*, p. 21.

¹³⁵ Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 143.

¹³⁶ 'Kurdistan' no. 5, 16 June, 1898, in Fouad (ed.), *Kurdistan, the first Kurdish newspaper (1898-1902)*, p. 23.

¹³⁷ 'Kurdistan', no. 13, 1 April, 1899 in Fouad (ed.), *Kurdistan, the first Kurdish newspaper (1898-1902)*, p. 56.

¹³⁸ A. Aliwae, *Kurdistan lasardame Dawlaty Usmany*, [Kurdish text Kurdistan in the era of the Ottomans] (Sulaymaniah, 2004), 196.

Chapter 4 British Travelers' Observations of the Ottoman Empire, Persian Rule in Kurdistan, and Kurdish Tribal Society

Introduction

Due to its geographical location between the Ottoman and Persian empires, Kurdistan was often the site of conflict between the two political entities. After the battle of Chaldiran in 1514, Kurdistan was geographically divided between the Ottoman and the Persian Empires, and from then until the nineteenth century, the Kurdish emirates nominally belonged to one or other of these empires, depending on which of the two territories they resided within. After the demise of these princedoms, Kurdistan was practically ruled by the two governments. Because of the political significance of Kurdistan, the British travellers often discussed the rule of these two regimes over Kurdistan.

This chapter analyses the travellers' observations on the methods that the Turko-Persian governments used to govern Kurdistan. For example, when the travellers discussed the discontent in Persia and the Ottoman Empire, it is important to consider why travellers highlighted the corruption of officials and how they interpreted it. This chapter also evaluates the way in which the tyrannical and corrupt policies of the two governments were reported.

As a result of the lack of government by the two dominant countries, and lack of communication, Kurdish tribes were active and ruled their own society. Attention is also given to the observations made by the travellers in relation to the Kurdish tribes, particularly the presence of democratic rule and the power and responsibility of the various tribal chiefs. What is of interest here is that despite the travellers' opportunities to observe many aspects of Kurdish tribal life, they nevertheless ignored some points and highlighted or even exaggerated others. The current chapter contains an analysis of the British

travellers' observations and recordings of the political situation in Kurdistan, along with a detailed discussion of Kurdish tribal life.

Regarding the sources of the research, the Persian scholar Mustafa Dehqan noted that most literature on the Kurdish tribes in Khurasan in the north-west of Persia was written by semi-educated Persians and Kurds. As such, these works lack a more academic perspective and so there is a need for more research on the Kurdish tribes of Khurasan.¹ In the twentieth century, the Kurds became the focus of some anthropological research, although this was restricted to Kurdish society in the twentieth century, rather than incorporating a historical approach. Those that did look backwards often used the British travellers' accounts in order to do so, yet their academic merit of their work was limited because they did not apply a critical analysis to these travel narratives. Rather than simply accepting the observations of the British travellers as fact, it is important to understand and analyse the authors' mind-set when discussing their comments on the political function of Kurdish tribes. This is because the British travellers came from a very different social and cultural background, and tended to project their own biases and ideas (including political, social, and racial perceptions) onto the Kurds. As Edward Said argues, from the end of the eighteenth century onwards, Europeans believed that they as Westerners were far superior to non-European cultures and people. From the late Renaissance onwards, the Orient became the focus of academic investigation and discussion. The biological, racial, anthropological, and linguistic theories were applied to them. These investigations of the Orient came from European ethnocentrism,² a perspective that saw Persia and the Ottoman Empire as inferior to European countries.

The chapter will analyse how the Ottomans and Persians considered themselves to be authoritative over semi-independent tribes.³ However, in those areas in which the government had a weak role or was absent, the tribes tended to have an active role, and vice versa. The Turkish officials who replaced the Kurdish princes were weak, and could not rule the Kurdish territories properly. Therefore, these chieftains ruled on the officials'

¹ Dehqan, 'The Record Heritage of Khurasani Kurdish Tribes', p. 81.

² Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 7-8.

³ Klein, *The Margins of Empire*, p. 63.

behalf and enjoyed semi-autonomous authority.⁴ In particular, the Ottoman government was unable to rule the Kurds effectively in the remote and mountainous areas of Kurdistan, and so simply imposed a nominal tax over them. This chapter seeks to understand how the British travellers interpreted the political situation under the rule of the two governments and the tribal chiefs.

The remainder of the chapter is divided into two main sections. The first investigates the travellers' comments on and observations about the nature of the Ottoman Empire and Persia's rule over Kurdistan, in an attempt to highlight the authors' views on whether the officials were corrupt and tyrannical. Within this first section, the travellers' views on the lack of a judicial system and the isolation of the Kurds will also be explored. The second section looks at the smaller political unit of Kurdish tribes and analyses the travellers' comments regarding them. In order to understand how British travellers saw and described these complex socio-political organisations to their readers, the analysis focuses more on the political function of the tribes rather than their social structure, as well as discussing their so-called primitive policies and democracy. Then, it investigates the travellers' descriptions of the growth and development of the Kurdish tribal system and the dominant characteristics identified by the British.

British travellers' views on the Ottoman Empire and Persian Rule in Kurdistan

The British travellers saw the nineteenth-century Persian and Ottoman rule in Kurdistan as flawed, viewing it as misgovernment due to the heavy revenues exacted and the culture of bribery. They showed that the system of legislation was not appropriate, and presented the two governments as deliberately striving to weaken the Kurds. The travellers' texts suggest that both the Persian and Ottoman empires did not have a good policy towards the region.

Perceptions of Misgovernment and corruption

⁴ M. V. Bruinessen, 'Kurds, States and Tribes', in F. A. Jabar and H. Dawod (ed.), *Tribes and Power: Nationalism and Ethnicity in the Middle East* (London, 2002), p. 170.

The British view of misgovernment was related to two main factors. First, it is likely that the British travellers were influenced by the ideas of European enlightenment philosophers of the eighteenth century, who considered Islamic countries as backward. For example, the philosopher Montesquieu believed that the backwardness of Islamic countries was related to the belief that a king was the owner of the whole lands, yet played no part in their cultivation. Under such rule, lands remained untilled, and thus there were no industries and the lands were ruined. Certain officials sometimes resorted to confiscating gold and silver from people.⁵ Furthermore, the Scottish historian and philosopher David Hume also believed that the rulers of the Ottoman Empire were not interested in developing the country: ‘the government of the TURKS be not very favourable to industry and propagation; yet it preserves at least peace and order among the inhabitants; and is preferable to that barbarous, unsettled condition, in which they anciently lived’.⁶

The British travellers were to some extent, influenced by the ideas of these philosophers, because such beliefs were widespread throughout Europe. For example, Mark Sykes’ work reveals the existence of pre-conceived notions, as he believed that Eastern countries showed no intention or desire for development and improvement, either by people or by government, and English people did not respect such a form of government.⁷ Although there is some truth in Sykes’ ideas about the problems of the Ottoman Empire, generally his opinions were based on ethnocentrism because he came to the region during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and thus he was influenced by anthropological theories of European racial superiority.

The second reason for the travellers’ perception of misgovernment was that travellers throughout the nineteenth century saw European countries as more socially, politically, and economically developed than Asian states and empires. This is the Orientalist discourse which Said argued was exemplified by Lord Cromer, who believed that Europeans were more intelligent than other people, the European’s ‘statements of fact are devoid of any ambiguity’, and European people think logically. The mind of Oriental

⁵ Montesquieu, Baron D., *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Thomas Nugent (New York, 1949), pp. 76-7.

⁶ D. Hume, *Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations*, Part II, Essay, XI.
(<http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Hume/hmMPL34.html>)

⁷ Sykes, *Dar-ul-Islam*, p. 104.

individuals was not believed to be logical.⁸ The Europeans considered that the people of Eastern countries were limited in their ability to think, and that this in turn led to problems in governing.

In reality, the two countries had domestic political and economic issues, in large part because of corruption and political instability. For example, from the sixteenth century onwards the Ottoman Empire gradually started to decline, with economic crises, a weak army, administrative chaos, and a poor transportation system all contributing to the deterioration.⁹ Persia had similar problems, and corruption was a significant factor in many aspects of life.¹⁰ The British travellers who visited Kurdistan during the nineteenth century obviously wrote about the misgovernment of the two empires. For example, in a conversation in Erzurum in the 1830s, British Vice-Consul James Brant and Sherif Beg discussed the oppression of people under the Ottoman government. Beg argued that the people had to be kept suppressed and in a state of poverty, in order to make them submit to the authority of the government, which Brant viewed as a deliberate Turkish policy to restrict freedom.¹¹ During the same conversation, Beg asked Brant to compare England and the Ottoman Empire, to which Brant replied that the people in the Ottoman Empire were listless and never tried to improve things, while people in England were intelligent, industrious, and always attempted to improve their careers. However, he argued that the supposed indolence of the Ottoman people was not related to their stupidity but rather to the policy of the government. For example, when someone obtained money in the Ottoman Empire, his wealth was seized by rapacious rulers, resulting in the diminution of both the wealth of the ordinary people and the desire to acquire it.¹² Further, Brant stated that the progress of the English people was related to the government's policy rather than the people themselves, and thus the emphasis was placed on corruption rather than a belief in European racial superiority. Brant's belief in the equality of people was in contrast to the travellers of the late nineteenth century, such as Harris, who believed that the Kurdish

⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 38.

⁹ B. Jelvavich, *The Ottoman Empire, the Great Powers, and the Straits Question 1870-1887* (London, 1973), p. 1.

¹⁰ D. Blow, *Persia through Writers' Eyes* (London, 2007), p. 280.

¹¹ Brant, James and A. G. Glascott, 'Notes of a Journey through a Part of Kurdistan, in the Summer of 1838', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 10 (1840), p. 362.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 362-3.

farmers were ignorant and stupid.¹³ It is likely that Brant was under the influence of the philosophers of the eighteenth century, who believed in a ‘universal human nature’.¹⁴ The travellers of the late nineteenth century came under the influence of evolutionary anthropology, which suggested that primitive people were ethnically different from civilised societies, and that so-called ‘savage’ people lacked the ability to improve.¹⁵

The travellers directly criticised the high officials for their misgovernment. According to Millingen, in the late 1860s all the officials in Van¹⁶ including the Pasha, the Mohassebji (accountant), the Mufti (senior religious figure), and the council perceived their primary duty to be the acquisition of personal wealth.¹⁷ Millingen observed that ‘instead of administrators the country finds on its back a swarm of birds of prey who tear away its bowels, leaving nothing behind but the dry bones’,¹⁸ presenting authority as rapaciously corrupt. In 1882, M. G. Gerard visited Kirkuk (a city in southern Kurdistan), and made a similar comment about the corruption of officials there.¹⁹ According to Maunsell, by the end of the nineteenth century the situation remained the same. Rather than improving the situation of the country and its people, the main aim of administrators was to acquire money from ‘crushed and miserable villagers’. Every time they managed to do so, they either bought for themselves a higher rank or spent the money on luxuries.²⁰ These comments show that corruption in the Ottoman Empire was mostly perpetrated by officials according to Maunsell, as political responsibility was commodified and thus not commensurate with deserving and responsible individuals.

Similarly, the British travellers highlighted corruption in the Persian region of Kurdistan as well, believing that the Empire had the same policy as that of the Ottomans mentioned above. Isabella Bird wrote about unfair economic policy, claiming that the Persian officials forced people to give them money. She stated that the Persian officials followed a proverb that said: ‘let the sheep’s wool grow’, meaning to let ordinary people do

¹³ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 181.

¹⁴ Weber, ‘Science and Society in Nineteenth-Century Anthropology’, p. 266.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The majority of people there were Kurds.

¹⁷ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 156.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Gerard, *Notes a Journey through Kurdistan*, p. 14.

²⁰ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 166.

the hard work and then to reap the benefits by taking it from them. As soon as an individual was prosperous, the officials would force them to part with their wealth, and gave some money to officials saying 'He is ripe, he must be squeezed'. Thus, the Persian officials confiscated the wealth of the Kurds.²¹

In the 1890s, Harris visited the Persian region of Kurdistan and observed first-hand the corruption, oppression, and cruelty of the Empire's misgovernment.²² As a result, he and other British travellers maintained that this misgovernment was not simply an impediment to the improvement of the Ottoman and Persian governments, but that the officials deliberately oppressed and impoverished the people, who were forced to comply with this subordination and abuse because there was no authority tasked with looking after them or punishing the corrupt officials.

The British travellers considered both Persia and the Ottoman Empire to be corrupt, and thought that both were deliberately working to suppress the Kurds. Mignan believed that the despotism of the Persians and the oppressive behaviour of the Turks had a significant negative impact on Kurds, causing them to remain undeveloped.²³ From that comment, it became apparent that both powers' oppression of the Kurds led the Kurds to remain undeveloped and ensured that they did not benefit from the Persian and Ottoman civilisation. Furthermore, Harris believed that the Ottoman and Persian Empires both oppressed the Kurds inside their territories and refused them the right to have contact with the outside world. As Harris observed, the Kurds were isolated in their lands, as they were surrounded by 'the two worst governments'. As a result, the Kurds had no contact with the rest of the world.²⁴ They could not, therefore, observe and thus benefit from the development of other nations.

Concerns surrounding depopulation were raised by travellers in Kurdistan, who, following eighteenth-century political economy, assumed that depopulation was the result of bad government. Montesquieu had argued that when a country faced famine, war, or pestilence, if the remaining people were industrious then they could combat the threat of

²¹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 1, pp. 100-101.

²² Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 104.

²³ Mignan, *A Winter Journey through SSIA*, pp. 226-7

²⁴ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, pp. 181-182.

depopulation. In contrast, if depopulation occurred as a result of bad government, interior problems, and weak administration, it was incurable.²⁵ For similar reasons Hume believed that, the people of Asia Minor had suffered depopulation since the time of the Roman Empire.²⁶ Under the impact of these ideas, the British travellers were keen to discuss depopulation in the context of Kurdistan. One of the earliest travellers was Rich, who observed that due to the negative policy of the Persian Vali, the country near Sinna was depopulated and the villages were ramshackle.²⁷ Similarly, Isabella Bird described the way in which the rapacity of the local governors had caused famine in various places on her route between Hamadan and Urmia, resulting in a reduced population, particularly amongst the non-Persians.²⁸ In addition, when Harris visited Kermanshah in 1895, he said that the population of the town had decreased from what it had been ten years previously, which he attributed to 'the bad government' that forced people to leave their town and migrate to other places,²⁹ although he neglected to mention which places. The travellers endeavoured to indirectly show that as a result of the misgovernment of the two countries in Kurdistan the population was reduced and people driven out of their lands. According to the travellers' observations, misgovernment in Persia had reached such a level that even the Persian Shah could not deny it.

The Persian Shah understood that when the Europeans visited his state, they saw it as an undeveloped and corrupt country. Bird recorded her visit with the Shah, noting that he complained about the Europeans' comments and criticised some former European travellers who had written harshly about Persia. He hoped that she would write kindly about his country, unlike other travellers.³⁰ In her writings about the Persian Shah, it is possible that Bird was trying to give more weight to her narrative by indicating her potential influence over him. However, the misgovernment in Persia was obvious and had been confirmed by other writers. Lord Curzon, who visited the Persian Empire in 1889, saw that infrastructure, education, and public work were underdeveloped, and there was no indication for the

²⁵ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, p. 458.

²⁶ Hume, 'Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations', Part II, Essay XI.

²⁷ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence of Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 232.

²⁸ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 188.

²⁹ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 251.

³⁰ Bird, *Journey in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 1, p. 203

potential for development.³¹ This was an Orientalist perspective, as it is assumed that the people could not think properly or improve their situation.³² Nonetheless, in reality the comments were true to some extent; Persia faced some internal problems, which the Shah was aware of, yet he expressed no inclination or plan to remedy the situation. Instead, his primary concern was to conceal the Persian Empire's problems from Western society, by requesting that travellers such as Bird present it in a favourable light.

The travellers frequently expressed the opinion that the rule of the Persian and Ottoman Empires over the Kurdish people was unjust, and that the oppression of the people led to a rising number of destitute citizens. The two governments had no plan to improve the life of the Kurdish people, yet the Ottomans claimed that they introduced 'reform' by having direct control over the remote regions such as Kurdistan. However, according to the British travellers of the nineteenth century, the situation in Kurdistan remained unimproved. The British travellers would have compared this situation with their own experience at home, which although not free from corruption, had various freedoms and rights, including an independent judiciary, fair judges, and taxes that were fairly introduced. The freedom of the press was only limited by law,³³ and the middle class could genuinely participate in politics.³⁴ Further, there was a sharp distinction between the judicial, executive, and legislative branches of the government.³⁵ The travellers took an ethnocentric angle in their writings on people in the East, largely because they were influenced by linguistic and racial theories on the origin of so-called primitive people and the development of civilisations, a 'peculiar amalgam of science, politics and culture', in an attempt to prove the superiority of the European race over other ethnicities.³⁶

³¹ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 406.

³² Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 38-9.

³³ D. Harris, 'European Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century', *The American Historical Review*, 60, no. 3 (1955), p. 502.

³⁴ Harris, 'European Liberalism in the Nineteenth Century', p. 505.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 507.

³⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 232.

Judicial System

As well as corruption, law and the judiciary were important indications of oppression, and were mentioned by British travellers. However, the British travellers had different ideas about the judicial system in Persia and the Kurdish Emirates. Bird believed that the judicial system was weak in Persia, whereas Fraser, who visited during the time of the Kurdish emirates considered that the Kurdish Emirates had a strong judicial authority in the first half of the century, evidenced by the fact that they governed their territory in a different way from the Persians and Turks. Bird noted that the Persians lacked an independent judiciary, with bribery maintaining a significant role in altering decisions and outcomes. Law throughout the Persian Empire was unwritten, as the legal system was based on 'Urf,³⁷ or unwritten laws, whereby the majority of precedents were orally decided by judges.³⁸ Bird continued in her criticism of the Persian judiciary, saying that whenever a rich man was arrested, he could ensure his own release by bribery, and it was only poor people who were put into prison. This is because, as Bird highlights, law in Persia at the time was like a commodity, which could be bought and sold, but only by those rich enough to do so.³⁹ Bird believed that the judicial system under Persian rule was inappropriate. In contrast, earlier travellers had praised the judicial system under the Kurdish Emirate's rule. For example, Fraser more than half a century before Bird had visited Kurdistan, and praised the judiciary of the Kurdish emirates for its organisation. Fraser observed that whoever broke the law in the Soran Emirate was severely punished, regardless of social rank: 'whoever is caught possessing himself of the goods of others is punished on the spot, or put to death without mercy'.⁴⁰ This kind of evidence suggests that the judicial system during the princedoms was strong, and people felt secure. However, Bird illustrated that the Turko-Persian judicial system was not fair, and that the Kurds would have felt particularly insecure under the rule of Persia, and therefore they kept their tribal structure so as to protect their rights. As Bird mentioned, the law favoured the strong and privileged. Therefore, the ordinary and poor people were obliged to protect themselves under the rule of their chieftain. However,

³⁷ Urf were the unwritten laws and customs that were inherited from earlier generations and handed down from generation to generation.

³⁸ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 254.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, pp. 65-66.

according to Fraser's comment, no one had privileges under the government of Mir Muhammad.

British travellers throughout the nineteenth century observed the corruption and misgovernment of Persia and the Ottoman Empire in Kurdistan, but the travellers of the latter decades focused more on corruption for two reasons. Firstly, based on the influence of Social Darwinism, Oriental countries came to be seen as corrupt and subject to misgovernment in relation to putative racial limitations such as the inability to develop. The second point was that towards the end of the nineteenth century the British Empire became more powerful, which gave the travellers more confidence to see and speak about what they believed to be the backwardness of the Ottomans and Persians.

The socio-political function of the tribes

This section presents a discussion of the Kurdish tribes, as represented by the British, by taking them as a socio-political entity. It discusses the travellers' interest in primitive democracy among the Kurdish tribes, looking particularly at how they chose their leaders, and how the chief and the tribal council ruled. In addition, it investigates the power of the chief over his people and the relations between the chiefs and the Persian and Ottoman governments. After this, a section is devoted to how the Kurdish tribes emerged and later expanded, before attempts are made to understand how Kurds were depicted as a bellicose race, using travel narratives that depict violence and feuds among the Kurdish tribes.

Primitive democracy among tribes

As discussed in Chapter Two, the fabric of Kurdish society was tribal. This section will look at the British travellers' views on the socio-political characteristics of the Kurdish tribes. They discussed the hierarchy that they observed within the tribes, and revealed an inherent level of democracy. The chief was the ruler, but was assisted by the tribal council. Fraser noted the division of Kurds into various clans or tribes.⁴¹ Tribes consisted of the

⁴¹ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 90

main family (chief's family) and a number of other families, with each single family in possession of its own tent or, in sedentary settlements, a house in the village.⁴² The British travellers recorded how the title used by the leader of each tribe varied according to the regions in which they dwelled, and demonstrated that whilst the tasks of these tribal leaders were similar, they often had different names as a probable result of dialect differences. Rich observed that the chief of the Bilbas tribe was called *Muzzin*, which means 'a great man'.⁴³ In northern Kurdistan, chiefs were called Beg or Bey, which means great man, and in most places in southern Kurdistan, they were called Agha, which means a chief or leader.⁴⁴ Gerard added that in eastern Kurdistan, the Kurdish chief was named Peshawa, simply meaning 'leader'.⁴⁵ Among the Yazidis, the supreme chief was called the Emir, or prince, while the lesser chiefs were named Sheikhs, meaning great religious men.⁴⁶ The tribal chief was responsible for dealing with the various issues faced by the tribe. As single entities and in the face of a weak government, each tribe had internal and external political functions and subsequently became strong.

The British travellers were significantly influenced by the ideas of eighteenth-century thinkers and philosophers, who believed that people could degenerate as a result of climate and context. For example, the Scottish historian William Russell (1741-1792) believed that societies could degenerate particularly during migration, arguing that 'the great body of human species degenerated during their migration, into a state of savage barbarity'.⁴⁷ He probably also considered that climate had a role in the degeneration of people. The theory of degeneration was applied to the Native Americans, who were believed to have come to America via inter-continental migration, which was thought to have had a negative effect on their mental and physical abilities.⁴⁸ In the nineteenth century, the concept of degeneration was still given credence, but it was also believed that

⁴² Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 283.

⁴³ C. J. Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan and on the Site of Ancient Nineveh*, vol. 2 (London, 1836), p. 152.

⁴⁴ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 69; G. E. Hubbard, *From the Gulf to Ararat* (New York, 1917), p. 227.

⁴⁵ Gerard, *Notes A Journey Through Kurdistan*, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 278.

⁴⁷ W. Russell, *The History of Ancient Europe with a view of revolutions in Asia and Africa*, vol.1 (Philadelphia, 1801), p. 5.

⁴⁸ Meek, *Social science and the ignoble savage*, pp. 40-7.

technological development and civilisation caused moral corruption in society and spoiled the 'ideal state' that many enlightenment scholars believed had existed at a remote time in human history. British travellers considered that the moral functions and political characteristics of primitive people were positive but had been spoiled by modernity, and that biblical ideals had been lost as a result of development. There was significant interest in and investigations of the culture and norms of primitive people, and British travellers hoped to use these people and their societies in order to understand stages of societal degeneration, with the aim of trying to restore what they believed had been lost.⁴⁹

Some travellers, particularly in the first half of the century, were influenced by that ideology, which in turn was reflected in their writings on the political function of tribes, the role of the chiefs, and primitive democracy. For example, they discussed how tribal leaders were chosen by primitive tradition. British travellers were detailed in their discussion when it related to their ideas about primitive democracy and allowed them to understand the political institutions of the so-called primitive people. Through reading the travellers' accounts, it becomes obvious that some of those who journeyed in the first half of the nineteenth century (e.g., Rich and Brant) highlighted primitive democracy among several tribes, including the Bilbas and Jaf in southern Kurdistan (see Rich), and the Haideranli in northern Kurdistan (see Brant). They described how when the tribal leader passed away, the tribe chose his successor. The best and the bravest male in his family succeeded him, with the formal agreement of the tribesmen. Rich aimed to show that a primitive democracy could be identified among the Kurdish tribes. When a chief was chosen among the Bilbas tribe, Rich said that if the eldest son did not have charismatic characteristics, the best and most courageous of his brothers would take his place, because the tribesmen did not want to give the leadership to a weak and uncharismatic person. However, Rich said when someone was formally nominated, the council of the tribe did not have the right to depose him.⁵⁰ This shows that when an individual became chief, tribesmen had great respect for him and deferred to his authority. Regarding the Jaf tribe, Rich said that if the chief died leaving a very young son, the council would not allow him to succeed his father, but would

⁴⁹ E. v. d. Steen, *Near East Tribal Societies during the Nineteenth Century, Economy, Society and Politics between Tent and Town* (Sheffield, 2013), pp. 23-4.

⁵⁰ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 152.

instead fill the chieftainship with either the chief's brother or uncle.⁵¹ With both the Bilbas and Jaf tribes, Rich aimed to show that the elder tribesmen would choose charismatic leaders for their tribes. However, small differences could be seen between the two tribes. Among Jafs age was important, while among the Bilbas tribe the charisma of the leader was the priority, not age. Among the Haideranli tribe in northern Kurdistan, James Brant and Glascott noted that when the chief died the council of elders would elect the next chief from among the same family, either a brother, an uncle, a cousin, or another close relative of the chieftain's family, who was known to be brave and equitable.⁵² They added that it was important that the new chief should come from the old chief's family, but besides that, he should be elected by the permission and agreement of the council of elders.⁵³ The travellers noted that the council of elders played an important role in choosing the tribal chief, which indicated that the Kurdish tribes performed a kind of democracy.

The tribe as a political entity was based on political cooperation. Rich argued that in addition to the chief, every man had a voice in the tribe's affairs, noting that among the Bilbases even the ordinary individuals had a voice in political issues. A common person could, he observed, spoil the whole political decision just by saying 'I do not agree with it!'⁵⁴ The travel writers identified a primitive form of democracy among the Kurds, which gave every member a voice in order to help them make important decisions. Rich continued by discussing the role of the tribesmen of Bilbas, saying that they had to have a role in and vote on any issue. For example, in one instance, they needed to send a hostage to another tribe, and the vote and consent of every member was required before the decision was made. By the vote and agreement of all the tribesmen, they sent the brother of the Chief, named Kako Hassan, to Sulaymaniah as a hostage, in order that the Baban delegation could be sure of their own safety when they visited the Bilbas tribe to negotiate an end to their hostility.⁵⁵ However, Millingen modified this model of primitive democracy by arguing that it was not the whole tribe but rather only a council of elders that had a voice and power in

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 112.

⁵² Brant and Glascott, 'Notes of a Journey Through a Part of Kurdistan, in the Summer of 1838', p. 413.

⁵³ Only three travellers (Rich, Brant and Glascott, and Millingen) mentioned the presence of a democratic process among three Kurdish tribes: the Bilbas, Jaf, and Haidaranli. While that democratic process was not mentioned among the other Kurdish tribes, it remains unclear whether other tribes also practised primitive democracy and it was simply not recognised and/or mentioned by the travellers.

⁵⁴ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 150

⁵⁵ Ibid.

making decisions, in addition to the chief.⁵⁶ In his view, normal members lacked the right to weigh in on the tribe's issues. The chief's role was vital, but without the agreement of the council, he could not introduce any new policy. For example, a chief could expel anybody who had committed a crime from the tribe, without permission of the elder council. Millingen said that the council of elders was a 'white-bearded' group of men who held meetings nearly every night in the chief's guesthouse to discuss their common interests. He suggested that the guesthouse was their equivalent of the British House of Commons and House of Lords,⁵⁷ because in that house laws and rules were introduced, revised, and checked. Most of the tribe's issues were discussed in the guesthouse.⁵⁸ Based on that point, Millingen argued that the Kurdish tribes were unchanged and continued to rule their tribe in a primitive way, yet with a level of democracy. For example, a tax collector visited the guesthouse in a village named Bukrah, near Til A'far, in order to collect tax after a long dispute when the people had refused to pay the tribute.⁵⁹

The travellers of the last decade of the century, however, did not discuss primitive democracy among the Kurdish tribes. They ignored the process of choosing a chief, and they did not discuss the guesthouse's role in the political culture of the tribe. For example, when Bird visited the Kurdish chief's house in Marwan, she did not report on the role of his guesthouse or the role of the tribal elders.⁶⁰ It is possible that this primitive style of democracy disappeared among Kurds during this period.

The authority of the chief

British travellers presented the Kurdish tribes as primitive entities that were directly ruled by their chiefs. Even the government did not interfere in local tribal issues. Tribal leaders received revenue from their tribesmen, and the British travel writers observed that in some regions Kurdish chiefs represented the Ottoman or Persian government, even working on

⁵⁶ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 284-5.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 285.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 286.

⁵⁹ Forbes, 'A Visit to the Sinjar Hills in 1838', p. 412.

⁶⁰ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 265-6.

its behalf. The travellers imposed an anthropological framework onto their analyses of the Kurds, seeing them as primitive people who were blindly obedient to their chiefs and tribal leaders.⁶¹ The British travellers identified similarities between the Kurdish tribes and other patriarchal and pastoral people, notably their loyalty to the hereditary chieftain, strong tribal loyalty, and a sense of kinship and unity.⁶² Fraser said that the Kurds were similar to the Scottish people and Swiss tribes in terms of their loyalty to their leaders and their unwavering obedience to their chief,⁶³ using the Hakkary Kurds as an example, as they solely obeyed the orders of their chiefs.⁶⁴

A Kurdish chief had the authority to govern his tribe, and this power was more obvious in villages and camps. When discussing the Milan tribe, Millingen noted that the chief had absolute power, and could confiscate the property of the tribal members or even kill them. If he chose to expel people from the tribal community, even the Ottoman government lacked the power to offer shelter to anyone who had been driven out by their chief, because the Ottomans had a policy that permitted chiefs to do anything they wanted with their tribesmen, in exchange for financial tributes.⁶⁵ However, when he discussed the Haideranli tribe, he noted that the power of the chief was limited by the council of elders.⁶⁶ First, from that comment it appears that the authority of the chief among the Milan tribe was potentially different from that of the other tribes with a primitive democracy, such as the Bilbas, Jaf, and Haideranli. From that point he aimed to show the difference between Kurdish tribes, through discussing their ruling system. Second, it is possible that Millingen exaggerated the power of the chief of the Milan tribe and neglected the role of the tribal council in the tribe's decision-making processes. Sykes had a different idea about the power of Kurdish chiefs from Millingen and discussed the role of Ibrahim Agha, the chief of the Digzaie tribe, who lived to the south of Erbil. According to Sykes' account, the Agha's power was reduced in comparison with the chief mentioned by Millingen, because Ibrahim Agha could only solve the civil issues of his tribe, such as probates and divorce, whereas all criminal and religious matters had to be settled by an Ottoman government

⁶¹ Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in Europe and American Thought*, p. 69.

⁶² Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 192.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 90.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

⁶⁵ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 284.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 286.

officer.⁶⁷ Sykes' comment shows that some chiefs only possessed civil power, and thus their authority was limited and restricted by the Ottoman government. The issue may have been related to the Ottomans' control over the region, in a place where, far from officials, the chief maintained a strong hold in the region, among Bilbases and Jafs or Milans. When Kurds were near to the centres of towns and cities the government played a greater role; near Erbil, for example, the role of chief was limited.

According to the travellers, some Kurdish chiefs had a strong relationship with the Ottoman and Persian governments and had effectively become their deputies in their respective areas. As such, chiefs could interfere in the government's issues. According to Fraser, in the area around Soujbulack in Persia, the chief had a role in nominating the officials in their local towns: for example, 'Abdoollah Khan, governor of the town, lately appointed by the Prince Royal, and chief of the Mookree tribe of Koords, of whom this town is the head quarters'.⁶⁸ Thus, according to Fraser the chief's relationship with the government was very important because it gave the latter credibility when attempting to introduce laws and gain control over the town. In the late nineteenth century, the travellers commented on the relationship.⁶⁹ In the Ottoman area of Kurdistan, the travellers also noted that the tribal chiefs were representatives of the government. For example, Sykes discussed a Kurdish chief in Zakho, named Yussuf Agha, who was a deputy of the Ottoman government, and who led the council and provided an army for the government when necessary.⁷⁰ Perhaps by giving power to these tribal leaders the government was trying to gain the tribal leaders' loyalty, as they did when they recruited them as the Hamidiye cavalry.

Finally, the British travellers showed that the role of the Kurdish tribal chiefs was obvious: they ruled their tribes and solved their tribal issues. Furthermore, they highlighted that at some point the tribal leaders were representatives of the Persian and the Ottoman Empires, acting in their place, which means that the two governments lacked a strong control over the remote places in Kurdistan. As will be discussed in the next chapter, some

⁶⁷ Sykes, *Dar-ul-Islam*, p. 180.

⁶⁸ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 108.

⁶⁹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 264-5.

⁷⁰ Sykes, *Dar-ul-Islam*, p. 161.

Kurdish tribes abandoned the nomadic lifestyle and had settled by the end of the century, and with these settlements the power of the Kurdish chiefs declined.

Growing Kurdish Tribes

The British travellers considered the central characteristics of a Kurdish tribe to be lineage and kinship.⁷¹ Millingen believed that a tribe, as a socio-political entity, was affected by its surrounding circumstances, and thus when led by a charismatic chief it increased, but decreased when governed by a weak one. According to Millingen, a Kurdish tribe normally emerged from one family and then expanded and transcended the limits of the consanguinity, embracing other relatives, after which it gradually became a tribe. Millingen drew on the similarity between the Jewish tribes and Kurdish tribes, noting that the latter were very similar to the Jewish tribes depicted in the Old Testament. He observed that the head of a Kurdish family, like the biblical Jews, tended to be a white-bearded chief (akin to Abraham and Jacob) who sat in his tent, with his relatives, children, and attendants surrounding him. These Jewish families of the Old Testament had grown and developed into large tribes, and likewise the Kurdish tribes started from one big family, called a *Hampa*,⁷² with family affection eventually being replaced by shared interests, traditions, and worship.

European travellers noted that merging tribes was a common custom amongst most of the tribes in Asia Minor, and as such some shrank while others grew. The late-eighteenth-century Danish traveller, M. Niebuhr, had observed that among the Bedouin Arabs it was common for small or weakened tribes, those unable to protect themselves from attacks by stronger tribes, to be incorporated within a stronger tribe, creating a union.⁷³ Similarly Rich discussed the development and expansion of the Jaf tribe, which consisted of twelve sub-tribes that when combined amounted to several thousand families. Rich was thinking of the ten lost tribes of Israel, and he mentioned that the Jaf consisted of

⁷¹ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p.5; Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 282.

⁷² Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 282-3.

⁷³ M. Niebuhr, *Travel through Arabia and other Countries in the East*, translated into English by R. Heron (London, 1792), p. 167.

twelve subtribes. In reality, the Jaf would only have been approximately six hundred families, as the others would have been incorporated groups from fragmented tribes in Persian Kurdistan or Luristan, and thus were not Jaf but instead sought membership and protection under the Jaf's authority.⁷⁴ Similarly, Millingen said that Kurdish tribal culture fell into two separate categories: 'one permanent, the other fluctuating'. The 'permanent' Kurds were related to the chief and belonged to the same lineage, whereas the fluctuating members, in contrast, consisted of deserters and adventurers, who might belong to one tribe and then become a member of another tribe.⁷⁵ The travellers clearly understood that the Kurdish tribes were directly influenced by the political situation. When one tribe became powerful in Kurdistan, it could only expand by annexing other tribes. For instance, Rawlinson observed that during the era of the Soran Emirate, the Rewendis tribe increased by annexing other tribes because the Prince of Soran belonged to the Rewendis.⁷⁶ After the destruction of the Soran Emirate, the Rewendis lost their power and shrank in size. Sykes mentioned that the same situation happened to the Milan tribe of northern Kurdistan, which had a powerful chief and charismatic leader, Ibrahim Pasha Mili.⁷⁷ According to Sykes, this chief was able to expand his tribe to include more than two thousand families. However, after his death the tribe divided into two separate tribes: the Zilan and Millan. The Millan tribe had an estimated population of 1,200 families, but they were spread over many areas in varying directions, and thus many of them disappeared.⁷⁸ This suggests that power normally came from the charismatic leader or bravery of the tribe, and was more important than origin, because a powerful tribe could easily provide pastures and improve its economy, and other smaller tribes would try to become members of it.

Tribal Boundaries

The British writers claimed to be able to document the existence of clear tribal boundaries among the Kurdish tribes, as each had its own territory within Kurdistan, regardless of

⁷⁴ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 280.

⁷⁵ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 284.

⁷⁶ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Persian Kurdistan', p. 25.

⁷⁷ Sykes, 'The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire', p. 470.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

whether they were settled or nomadic. Furthermore, each tribe had its own political power over the territory, and used it for cultivation, pasturage, and other economic purposes. The writers were aiming to highlight two points: firstly, that there were obvious boundaries that existed among Kurdish tribes, and secondly, that the tribal chiefs were the real rulers of their considered boundaries, with the Ottoman/Persian governments retaining only nominal power over them. However, Said argued that the Orientalists (including the travellers) imposed their own concept of territorial boundaries on these so-called barbarians,⁷⁹ whereas in reality the boundaries between the tribes already existed. In this regard Said's argument does not apply to the tribal boundaries in Kurdistan, because the travellers acknowledged the pre-existing borders in their writings rather than creating them. In the tribal areas in Kurdistan, the chief's permission to pass through his territory can be considered to have been a kind of passport. Rawlinson said that when a European traveller intended to visit a place in the tribal areas, only the chief of the tribe could grant them permission to do so. Even the Persian and Ottoman governments had to gain the consent of the tribal leaders before allowing travellers into their territories. If the travellers also wanted to visit another tribe, then they would have to repeat the process of gaining consent, as they would require the permission of the new leader also.⁸⁰ Ainsworth observed that when foreigners entered a tribe's territory without prior permission, the Kurdish chief would become angry. Ainsworth experienced this first-hand, when he and his companions entered the territory of Leihun tribe near Julamerk. Enraged, the chief is quoted as having asked:

What do you do here; are you not aware that Franks (French)⁸¹ are not allowed in this country? No dissimulation. I must know who you are and what is your business. Who brought these people here? [...] you are the fore-runner of those who come to take this country.⁸²

Thus the tribal leader was the real ruler of his territory, and those who entered it needed to have his permission. In the 1830s, Ainsworth noted that in northern Kurdistan the

⁷⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 56.

⁸⁰ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Persian Kurdistan', p. 27.

⁸¹ He probably could not differentiate between the Europeans, and therefore considered all Europeans as French.

⁸² Ainsworth, *Travel and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, p. 242.

Kurds were worried about the activities of the European travellers and Christian missionaries, viewing them in particular as spies.

Thus, tribal land could be seen as the economic colony of the tribal chief. Maunsell noted that each Kurdish tribe had its own pasture.⁸³ According to Millingen, Kurdish chiefs used the territories of their tribes as a source of income, demanding money from commercial travellers and merchants who sought permission to pass through their lands. Thus, the tribal leaders endeavoured to secure their territory in order to attract merchants to come and purchase their products in safety.⁸⁴

This shows that the tribal boundaries were thus described by the travellers as stronger than the boundaries between the Persian and Ottoman Empires. In other words, the Kurdish tribes did not submit to the existing boundary that had been sketched and divided their lands, a situation that continued until after World War I. Based on the travellers' comments, the Kurdish tribes in most cases ignored the boundaries between the two empires. According to Brant, the Haidarnly tribe lived near the lake of Urmia and its land fell across the Ottoman-Persian border, and thus was divided between the two countries. The tribe was ruled by two brothers, with Sultan Agha in charge of the Ottoman side, and Qasim Agha in power on the Persian side.⁸⁵ Brant showed that the tribal boundary was stronger than the government's boundaries, but in reality both the Persians and the Ottomans exercised weak power over the remote territories, particularly the mountainous areas, which allowed the tribes to remain strong.

In general, according to the British the Kurds placed greater emphasis on their own boundaries than those of the Ottoman and Persian empires. Harris observed that it was difficult for both the empires to prevent the Kurds from entering and exiting their territories. For example, the Jaf tribe had a settlement in Ottoman Kurdistan, but during the summer would travel to their pastures in the mountains near Sina, crossing hundreds of miles inside the Persian territory.⁸⁶ The British travellers saw such mobility as a sign that

⁸³ Maunsell, 'Central Kurdistan', p. 124.

⁸⁴ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 243.

⁸⁵ Brant and Glascott, 'Notes of a Journey through a Part of Kurdistan', pp. 412-3.

⁸⁶ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 184.

the Kurds' power within their regions was stronger than that of the government, which either could not or did not want to interfere in tribal issues.

From the first half of the nineteenth century the British mapped the Ottoman Empire.⁸⁷ Mapping the boundary was continued for military or other purposes throughout the century. Most of the travellers discussed the tribal boundaries in Kurdistan, yet due to advancing interest in cartography and the imperial necessity of mapping regions like Kurdistan, the travellers towards the end of the century were more preoccupied with tribal territories. When Maunsell discussed Kurdish tribes, he always depicted and located their geographical territory. For example, he noted that the Hamawand tribe resided in the low hills of the north-western side of Sulaymaniah, yet sometimes crossed into Persian territory.⁸⁸ He also recorded the territories of other tribes through which the Hamawand passed, including the Bilbas who were settled in the valleys to the south of Kandil Dagh.⁸⁹ The travellers correctly depicted the boundary of the Kurdish tribes since these were already in existence.

The martial characteristics of the tribal Kurds

The British travellers considered the Kurds to be an aggressive race, and described them in their narratives as a martial people, with brave cavalries, arms, and troops. In the nineteenth century, the British considered some ethnic groups to be culturally or biologically bellicose, and predisposed to violence. One of the most important scholarly works on the subject is Heather Street's *Martial Races: The Military, Race, and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914*. In this text, Streets shows that the Victorian British considered three different ethnicities in particular to be martial races, and subsequently recruited them into the British army: the Scottish Highlanders, the Sikhs, and the Nepalese Gurkhas.⁹⁰ For example, the British had long considered the Scottish Highlanders to be a primitive and

⁸⁷ Y. Jones, 'British Military Surveys of Palestine and Syria 1840-1841', *Cartographic Journal*, 10, no.1 (1973), p. 29.

⁸⁸ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 82-3.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁹⁰ H. Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race, and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester, 2004), p. 1.

martial race, particularly when they proved their bravery in 1757 during the Seven Years' War.⁹¹

Travellers to Kurdistan were inclined to depict the Kurds as a martial race, partly because they believed them to be primitive. Furthermore, they noted some similarities between the Kurds and the Scottish Highlanders, particularly with regard to their reported warlike characteristics. The second point was that the British travellers were under the influence of earlier travellers to the region, most notably Greek historians such as Arrian and Xenophon, who had described the Kurds as a warrior people. Travellers such as Mignan, who depended on both Xenophon and Arrian, also described the Kurds as a warlike people.⁹²

At the outset of his narrative on the Kurds, Mignan introduced them as 'military tribes', focusing on their martial aspects.⁹³ Other travellers also highlighted their warrior qualities, emphasising their desire to learn fighting skills. Rawlinson noted that they trained their children to fight from an early age, observing that in the village of Legwin near Soujbulack, the Mukri children were prepared for war from the cradle.⁹⁴ Fraser cited information from Dr Ross, a British doctor resident in Baghdad that the Kurds trained their children to fight, and that they enjoyed battles and skirmishes.⁹⁵ Thus both Rawlinson and Fraser argued that the Kurds' martial characteristics were part of their culture, yet it is likely that they exaggerated their depictions, including by presenting them as primitive and quarrelsome people, even in childhood. The writers were trying to prove that tribal people still had the characteristics of their ancestors the Carduchi, or that they were primitives who wanted to expand their land by fighting.

When travellers discussed the Kurds as a martial race, they spoke about their weapons. British travellers believed that Kurds were 'heavily armed, and constantly carried weapons' 'even in their own home, wore a pistol, 'a dagger, and a well tempered

⁹¹ Streets, *Martial Races*, p. 8.

⁹² Mignan, *Winter Journey through Russia*, pp. 225, 229; Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 208.

⁹³ Mignan, *Winter Journey through Russia*, p. 220.

⁹⁴ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Persian Kurdistan', p. 34.

⁹⁵ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, pp. 67, 73-74.

falchion'.⁹⁶ Rawlinson discussed the Bilbas tribe, where nearly every member had their own horse, and some had more than one. They used firearms in warfare, and were said to be dashing horsemen.⁹⁷ Millingen reported that Kurdish weapons were very simple, and included shields made from buffalo, rhinoceros, and elephant skin. They had Persian daggers, short carbines, 'old flint-pistols', and scimitars that were produced in Persia, but their best arms were lances produced from India.⁹⁸ Over the course of the nineteenth century, the travellers noted a change in the Kurds' weapons, with Gerard, Bird, and Sykes observing a preference for rifles.⁹⁹

Besides their writing, the sketches produced by nearly all of the travellers throughout the period showed the Kurdish tribesmen as habitually armed people. Before the advent of photography, British travellers such as Rich sketched the Kurds with their weapons, although later travellers such as Maunsell and Bird benefited from the invention of the camera, and were able to take photographs of the armed Kurds.

⁹⁶ G. Flower, *Three Years in Persia with Traveling Adventures in Koordistan* vol. 2 (London, 1841), p. 16; W. Heude, *A Voyage up to the Persian Gulf and a Journey Overland from India to England in 1817* (London, 1819), p. 209.

⁹⁷ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Persian Kurdistan', p. 33.

⁹⁸ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 248-9.

⁹⁹ Gerard, *Notes A Journey Through Kurdistan*, p. 10; Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 265; Sykes, 'The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire', p. 456.



Figure 4.1: A tribal Jaf, sketched by Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 112.

Rich sketched a Jaf tribal man, presenting him as an armed warrior who is holding a rifle and wearing a dagger in his belt. The other items on his person were perhaps related to the rifle. In the background, another man walks with his wife and child, who is riding an ox, and the man can clearly be seen to be carrying a gun on his shoulder. Thus, Rich's picture seems designed to show that Kurdish tribal men were routinely armed and were

thus a martial race. Yet the possession of arms was the result of a cultural tradition rather than a violent disposition.



Figure 4.2: A Kurd in Soujbulack holding a weapon, sketched by Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 208.



Figure 4.3: Ibrahim Bey Chief of Takuri Kurds, Maunsell, 'Central Kurdistan', p. 127.

Figures 4.2 and 4.3 were produced in the 1890s, and both depict the Kurds as martial people. Both the men are wearing pistols and cartridge belts, and have long guns. Whilst their attire is generally quite similar, their trousers are not. The chief in Figure 4.2 wears the loose trousers and long stockings typical of Persian Kurds, whereas Ibrahim Bey in Figure 4.3 is dressed in a more European style. Even their shoes are different, with the

shoes of the Persian Kurd appearing more suitable for rural areas, whereas the footwear of the Ottoman Kurd Ibrahim Bey resembles that of the Europeans. Both of them are wearing turbans, which was a significant part of Kurdish attire during the nineteenth century. When the chief depicted in Figure 4.1 is compared with the individuals in Figures 4.2 and 4.3, certain differences can be noted, indicating a change across time. For example, the rifle in Figure 4.1 is very simple, whereas those of the two later Kurds are more advanced in design.

The travellers and British diplomats presented the Kurdish tribes as having cavalries, and in doing so may have been intending to present them as viable recruits for a light tribal cavalry. It is arguable that the British planned to use them to protect future British projects in the region. Shiel noted that the Haideranli, Shulu, and Hamzeh-begi tribes near Van were known as excellent cavalry men.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Rawlinson described the Kurdish tribes of Ushni, which stretched from Bilbas and Mukris to Zerza, as active, fine, and athletic people, as well as the most warlike of the tribes found throughout Persia.¹⁰¹ Later, Rawlinson quoted a Mukri elder, who said ‘match this little band of brothers against any party of horsemen in the world, equal to them in numbers’.¹⁰² Rawlinson did not add any comments on this speech, which likely means that he agreed with it. He reported that the Mukri Kurds defeated the Russian cavalry in the 1830s,¹⁰³ which suggests that he intended to show that the Kurds were valuable because their military prowess could be used as a buffer against Russia. Besides showing the Kurds’ martial aspirations, the travellers also noted that most of the tribes maintained an armed force of some description.¹⁰⁴ Brant observed that Rejeb Beg, a Kurdish chief of a tribe near Diyarbakir, had 300 horsemen that were regularly paid, properly armed, and ready under his command. Furthermore, if necessary he could call upon an additional 700 horsemen and more than 3,000 foot men.¹⁰⁵ The tribes’ military force continued into the second half of the century. In 1881, George Goschen – in his report to Earl Granville – argued that Kurdish tribes could provide an army, noting that the Kermanchi Kurds who settled in the lands between Penjwin and

¹⁰⁰ Shiel, ‘Notes from Tabriz, Through Kurdistan’, p. 66.

¹⁰¹ Rawlinson, ‘Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Persian Kurdistan’, p. 17

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁰⁴ TNA: FO 78/3133.

¹⁰⁵ Brant and Glascott, ‘Notes of a Journey through a Part of Kurdistan’, p. 359.

Sharbazher in the north-east of Sulaymaniah had 10,000 cavalry and 300,000 infantry.¹⁰⁶ These travellers were indirectly showing the potential of using the Kurdish tribes as a cavalry, while Maunsell explicitly suggested that the British should use the Kurdish tribes as a cavalry, saying that

The strategic importance of the district of Central Kurdistan renders it very important to know what action the swarms of Kurdish horsemen would take. Properly led, paid, and organized by English officers, and their natural spirit and love of fighting roused in a good cause, they would perhaps equal the Cossack,¹⁰⁷ in having the martial spirit, and could be used as Cossacks.¹⁰⁸

Maunsell seems to be suggesting that the British use the ‘martial’ Kurds for political and imperial purposes. The British travellers of the earlier periods indirectly presented the Kurds as a martial race, but towards the end of the nineteenth century, the British imperial agenda and its needs led Maunsell to directly express his desire to recruit Kurds as part of a British cavalry, in order use them in the serve of British agenda.

Whilst the British travellers’ depictions of the Kurds as martial were apt, this quality was not inherited and ontological, but rather the result of their region serving as the battle ground for different armies, causing the Kurds to develop fighting skills. As Cynthia H. Enloe has argued, the Kurds’ military successes were largely due to historical and geographical factors. Their country had been occupied many times, and their experiences in fighting foreign invaders ensured that militarism became an important part of their culture.¹⁰⁹ The weak role of the government in Kurdistan was another factor that paved the way for the Kurds to remain tribal and cavalry groups. However, these groups were misused by the Ottoman Empire, which recruited the Hamyidian Cavalries in its campaign against the Armenians, causing the Kurds to become involved in the subsequent Armenian Genocide.

¹⁰⁶ TNA: FO 881/4450, Mr Goschen to Earl Granville, Constantinople, 2, and 3 March 1881.

¹⁰⁷ The Cossacks settled in the northern lands of the Caspian and Black Sea, and were famous for martial characteristics and used in the military service by Russia. Cossack, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

¹⁰⁸ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 167

¹⁰⁹ C. H. Enloe, *Ethnic Soldiers State Security in Divided Societies* (Middlesex, 1980), p. 44.

Violence and feuds in Kurdish tribal society

According to the twentieth-century anthropologist Edmund Leach, nineteenth-century travel writers seriously exaggerated the extent to which the Kurds devoted themselves to violence, murder, and looting.¹¹⁰ Through reading the nineteenth-century narratives, it becomes obvious that the travellers aimed to show that the Kurds were a primitive, violent, and quarrelsome people, who constantly fought each other. For example, George Flower believed that Kurds 'may be deemed the fiercest of all God's family of man even more so than the Arabs and Bedouins'; Goths and Vandals were compared with them.¹¹¹ Furthermore, the travellers drew comparisons between the Kurds and the European tribes such as the Scottish Highlanders, as mentioned above, and suggested that inter-tribal Kurdish fighting was primarily the result of competition for economic sources, particularly pasture lands.

For a long time, the British believed that the Scottish Highlanders were a quarrelsome and violent people.¹¹² They accordingly imposed this feature on the Kurds. James Fraser was one such traveller, who also compared the Kurds and Scots with the Swiss highlanders, on the grounds that they all tended to feud among themselves.¹¹³ He quoted the Scottish poet Walter Scott (1771-1832) in order to describe the fighting and bloodshed of the Kurds and other ethnicities near Urmia: 'When the street of High Dun Edin / Saw falchions gleam and lances redden'.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, in the 1880s Gerard observed that the Kurdish tribes in the southern region regularly feuded amongst themselves, and noted that these hostilities weakened the Kurdish tribes in the same way feuds weakened the Scottish Highlander tribes.¹¹⁵ Accordingly, the travellers tended to see similarities between (what they deemed to be) primitive people.

Besides showing the nature of Kurds as quarrelsome the travellers attempted to discuss the reasons behind the Kurds' alleged proclivity for violence, highlighting

¹¹⁰ E. R. Leach, *Social and Economic Organisation of the Rowanduz Kurds* (London, 1940), p. 55.

¹¹¹ Flower, *Three Years in Persia*, vol. 2, p. 18.

¹¹² Streets, *Martial Race*, p. 8.

¹¹³ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 176.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 57.

¹¹⁵ Gerard, *Notes of A Journey Through Kurdistan*, p. 33.

economic factors as the main reason. According to the Scottish philosopher Henry Home Lord Kames, when the pasturelands of pastoral primitive tribes were insufficient or exhausted Kurds would either claim unoccupied land or fight others in order to seize their land.¹¹⁶ For example, the Zerzas tribe had an ongoing feud for pasture land with two other Kurdish tribes, the Rewendis and the Bilbas.¹¹⁷ Millingen reported that Kurdish tribes sometimes established coalitions against other tribes, primarily for the sake of obtaining further lands. He observed that the Shikaks, Mugurus, and Takurus tribes fought an aggressive campaign against the Millan tribe, because the latter had fertile land. In order to invade it, they organised 2,500 men to fight the 1,600 men of the Millan tribe, which ultimately resulted in the defeat and forced exodus of the Millan.¹¹⁸ The British travellers thus attempted to demonstrate that these Kurdish tribes were lawless and relied on force to obtain economic resources. In addition, the government in these Kurdish areas was presented as weak, because when reference was made to blood feuds, nothing was said about the role of the government.

The late nineteenth-century travellers were influenced by negative coverage of the Kurds who were reported to have attacked the Armenian communities in Anatolia. Some of these travellers saw the oppression of the Armenians at the hands of Hamidie cavalries, and depicted the Kurds as a cruel and barbaric people. Sykes suggested that the Hamawands were a warlike people, who were constantly fighting with the other tribes surrounding them, such as the Jafs.¹¹⁹ Maunsell, who was in Kurdistan during the Armenian Issue, reported that the Kurds were bigoted and constantly quarrelled with Christians, and William M Ramsay made a similar comment, about Kurds' attitude towards Christians.¹²⁰ Bird however described the non-tribal Kurds as settled and also as generally peaceful, orderly, and fair, but not towards Christians, including Armenians.¹²¹ However, this was an unusual conclusion to draw, because most of the sources simply confirmed that the Kurdish tribes participated in the Ottomans' oppression of Armenians. Thus, the travellers depicted

¹¹⁶ L. Kames, and H. Home, *Sketches of History of Man*, edited by J. A. Harris, vol. 1, p. 93.

¹¹⁷ <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/kames-sketches-of-the-history-of-man-vol-1>

¹¹⁷ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Persian Kurdistan', p. 19.

¹¹⁸ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 345-6.

¹¹⁹ Sykes, *Dar-ul-Islam*, p. 202.

¹²⁰ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 166 ; W. M. Ramsay, 'From Impressions of Turkey', *The International Journal of Kurdish Studies*, 22 (2008), pp. 40-1.

¹²¹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 372; Ramsay, 'From Impressions of Turkey', pp. 40-1.

some Kurdish tribes as violent, dangerous, and troublesome. Both travellers and newspaper correspondents shared the same cultural background, so British newspapers also presented Kurds as brutal and violent. For example, the *Saturday Review* of 21 September 1889 stated that, 'it is a distinguishing feature of the Kurd that he seems to have a love of killing where nothing is to be gained by it'. Thus Kurds were depicted as highly aggressive people who committed many crimes.¹²² In an article in, *Macmillan's Magazine*, the Kurds were presented as the enemy of the Armenians whilst simultaneously identified as a people who engaged in many blood feuds amongst themselves.¹²³

Besides the economic factors, the travellers highlighted social and other factors of Kurdish inter-tribal fighting. Shiel suggested that when a young couple from different tribes fell in love but their parents forbade the match, then the lovers were obliged to escape, which could result in a blood feud occurring between the two tribes.¹²⁴ Sometimes the Kurds fought over minor issues. For example, in 1820 Rich reported upon a quarrel that had occurred some years past 'about a dog'. The argument happened between two neighbouring districts within the Khoshnaw tribe, and approximately 17 men from each side were killed.¹²⁵

The British travellers imposed their preconceived notions on the Kurds, and frequently exaggerated their depictions of the Kurds as violent people, since although it was true that blood feuds often occurred, most Kurds did not spend their time fighting, as some travellers believed. Moreover, while British travellers highlighted the violence they missed one important point: the sense of forgiveness amongst Kurds. According to the nineteenth-century Kurdish scholar, Mollah Mahmud Bayazidy, forgiveness was a special quality among the Kurds. For example, if the family of a murdered person had the opportunity to kill the murderer in revenge, they would often choose to forgive the person instead.¹²⁶ Either the British travellers were unable to comprehend Kurdish society or they selectively highlighted the points that they wanted to present. To some extent, Bird's comment about the Bakhtyari Kurds supports Leach's claim that the travellers exaggerated.

¹²² 'Kurds and Armenians', *The Saturday Review*, 21 September 1889, p. 318.

¹²³ 'Kurds and Christians', *F. R. Macmillan's Magazine*, 91 (1905), pp. 382-3.

¹²⁴ Shiel, 'Notes from Tabriz, through Kurdistan', p. 70.

¹²⁵ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 150.

¹²⁶ Bayazidi, '*Risalat fe Adat u Altaqalid al Akrad*', p.56.

She noted that murder did not always lead to revenge, but that feuds had three levels among the Bakhtyaris, when someone killed a person from another tribe. The tribesmen of the victim would punish the murderer by either 1) killing him, 2) confiscating his goods and cattle, or 3) preventing him from crossing their lands and ceasing any relationship with him.¹²⁷ Thus she claimed even when the feud started there were two other non-violent ways to exact revenge, without killing the perpetrator.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the British travellers throughout the nineteenth century depicted Kurdistan under the rule of the Persian and Ottoman Empires as a ruined and corrupted country. In reality, their ideas were largely substantiated because these two countries were plagued by corruption and a lack of control over remote regions. It is likely that the British travellers' decision to highlight these problems was based on an imperialist agenda, and this is particularly true of the travellers of the latter part of the century. However, these two governments were to an extent involved in the corruption in Kurdistan. Besides the fact that they wrote these accounts as proposals for their officials, Fraser, Ainsworth and Rawlinson were officers and Maunsell was vice-consul and consul. Therefore, they may have written to the government in order to provide themselves with bilateral projects in the future for reforming and developing these countries, whilst simultaneously serving their countries' goals. In particular, in Maunsell's writings, the imperial agenda is clearly seen. These agendas and aims have led the scholar Mary Louise Pratt to call these travellers 'imperial eyes', with Roy Bridge calling them the 'informal empire'.¹²⁸

Due to corruption and the weak policy of the two governments, the Kurdish tribes were able to remain strong and ruled their territories. The British travellers in the late nineteenth century were influenced by anthropology, and applied some anthropological frameworks to their understanding of the Kurdish tribes. In particular, by highlighting the tribes' primitive democracy, the early travellers aimed to show that the Kurds were in the

¹²⁷ Bird, *Journey in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 55.

¹²⁸ Bridges, 'Exploration and Travel Outside Europe (1720-1914)', p. 53.

primitive stage of development. By presenting Kurds as having a warlike nature and reporting upon incidents of violence among the Kurds, the travellers imposed their own prejudices. However, the travellers of the late-nineteenth century were influenced by social Darwinism, and did not believe in the universality of human nature. Therefore they did not record the alleged primitive democracy because they considered primitive people to be racially different from developed people. By collecting information on the Kurds, the travellers contributed to anthropological research, because most of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century theories were based on information collected by travellers, officers, and officials who journeyed outside Europe. The British travellers investigated many aspects of Kurdish lifestyle and culture, and the next chapter will discuss these observations.

Chapter 5 Aspects of Kurdish Culture from the Perspective of British Travellers

Introduction

This chapter will investigate some aspects of Kurdish culture from the perspective of British travellers, including the Kurdish language, religious doctrine, hospitality, and the sartorial style of the Kurds. The culture of any society is complex and acquired through a long process. The British anthropologist Edward Burton Tylor identified culture as ‘that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of the society.’¹ Based on this definition this chapter investigates to what extent British travellers recognised Kurdish culture as distinct from the other ethnicities surrounding them including Turks, Persians and Arabs, who considered Kurds to be primitive people. When the British travellers came to Kurdistan they were more willing and able to recognise unique aspects of Kurdish culture, compared to other ethnicities in the Middle East who were neighbours of Kurds. However, these ethnicities shared some cultural aspects. For instance, Kurds had a similar tribal structure to Arabs and shared the same religion, though Kurds followed different doctrines and some belonged to minor religious groups, which only existed in Kurdistan. In addition, the travellers were particularly interested in discussing certain aspects of Kurdish culture, and aimed to reveal the Kurds through these cultural aspects to their readers. They wanted to show them that Kurds shared some common cultural norms with other Muslims, because Kurds belonged to the wider Oriental society, and Islam was the most influential religion in the region. At the same time, they were quite different from the other Muslim communities surrounding them, and travellers tried to show how they were originally, linguistically and culturally different from other people. Therefore, this chapter will deal with the representation of Kurdish customs and traditions from the viewpoint of British

¹ E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture, Research Into the Development of Mythology, Philology, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, vol. 1 (London, 1871), p. 1.

travellers. In addition, British travellers were able to identify small differences in cultural practice between Kurdish communities rather than treating the Kurds as a single homogenous entity, because of tribal differences and geographical distance. In particular, travellers like Porter showed that the manners of Kurds in mountain areas remained unchanged² when far from the other ethnicities.

It is also worth noting that travellers were different from one another, and varied in the detail they included about Kurdish culture. Some like Rich who stayed in Kurdistan for more than six months were able to observe Kurdish culture in more detail, whilst others such as Harris who made a quick journey through Kurdistan from Tabriz to Baghdad spent only a brief period observing their way of life.

In the late 19th century the travellers were influenced by anthropological thought, which encouraged them to see 'primitive characteristics' across all Middle Eastern communities. For that reason Edward Said and other post-colonial scholars have criticised European narratives and attitudes towards Oriental people who they considered did not change. It is important to challenge Said's position.

Furthermore, the internal political issues in the Ottoman Empire also played a role in changing travellers' perspectives on Kurds. Travellers were heavily influenced after 1878 by newspaper coverage of the Armenian Issue, which persuaded them to show Kurds in a more negative light. The British applied their ideological background in highlighting several aspects of Kurdish culture.

It is important to note that previous scholarship has not critically explored how the perspective of British travellers affected how they viewed Kurdistan. In 2009, Garnik Asatrian researched some aspects of the Kurdish people and culture, such as their origins and language.³ He discussed the theories that had been written about the ancestors of the Kurds, and believed that dialects had marked differences between them.⁴ This chapter will investigate how the British travellers wrote about Kurdish language and its dialects, and

² R. K. Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Russia, Armenia, ancient Babylonia during 1817, 1818, 1819, 1820*, vol. 1 (London, 1822), p. 458.

³ G. Asatrian, 'Prolegomena to the Study of the Kurds', *Iran and the Caucasus*, 13, no. 1 (2009), pp. 1-53.

⁴ Ibid.

other cultural aspects of their lives. Another relevant study is *Al Kurd fi mandhur al mustashriqin* or 'Kurds from the viewpoint of the orientalists', written in Arabic and published in 2002 by the Kurdish writer Badirkhan Sindy. Sindy relied upon the body of work created by European writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, summarising their views about the Kurds in an uncritical and descriptive way.⁵ He also did not differentiate between the travellers who were travelling at different times, and how this factor shaped their views.

The chapter is divided into several sections covering aspects of Kurdish culture, which the British travellers focused on. The sections are in the following order: language, religion, Kurdish dress, hospitality among Kurds, the differences between Kurds and other regional ethnicities the decline of the nomadic lifestyle, and robbery, a topic potentially relevant to the travellers.

Kurdish language

British travellers saw Kurdish language as distinctive, and sought to understand the Kurds through their language, because language has a significant role in identifying people. In addition, they were keen to understand the dialects of the Kurdish language in order to find tribal differences, or regional differences. Most of the travellers towards the end of the nineteenth century presented Kurdish as an Indo-European language (the theory discussed in detail in Chapter 1) and attempted to find similarities between the Kurdish and European languages.

The British travellers represented the Kurds as the aboriginal people of the region, and tried to prove it by pointing to the distinctiveness of the Kurdish language. A number of travellers presented Kurdish as a different language from the other neighbouring languages in the region, while Kurds were surrounded by three major ethnicities, Arabs, Persians and Turks. For example, Kinneir, who visited Kurdistan at the beginning of the

⁵ B. Sindy, *Al-Mujtamah Al Kurdi fe Mandhur al Istishraqy* [Arabic text, Kurdish Society in the viewpoint of the Orientalism] (Erbil, 2002).

nineteenth century, simply said that Kurds spoke their own language.⁶ Similarly, Millingen believed that the Kurdish language was completely different from Persian and Turkish,⁷ and was inclined to identify the differences between Kurds and the dominant nations through their language. In addition, a discussion in 1894 between Sir Henry Howorth, Mr. Holmwood, and Douglas Freshfield, the Vice President of the RGS-IBG, even tried to prove that Kurdish was the language of the indigenous people who had lived on that land for a long time. The argument was based on an inscription found by Professor Syce, which when deciphered proved that the Kurdish language was distinct from other languages.⁸

Friedrich Schlegel believed that the Persian and Sanskrit languages had more connections with Germanic languages and Greek than Semitic, Chinese, African, and American languages.⁹ On the basis of this theory of the origins of Indo-European languages, travellers were often inclined to establish a link between Kurdish and European languages. Amongst these was Millingen in the late 1860s, who had found similarities between Kurdish and European languages, and argued that one of the most peculiar characteristics of the Kurds was that their word for *no* was similar to the English, French, and Italian words. He also observed that Kurds shortened their names in a similar manner to the English, with Hassan becoming Hasso, Ali becoming Halo, and Muhammad becoming Mukho, and ‘Abdulrakman[sic] Abdulrahman Harro like our English Harry’.¹⁰

Furthermore, Spottiswoode argued that Kurdish was a branch of Iranian languages,¹¹ which formed a large branch of the Indo-European languages. From this position he argued that Kurdish was a branch of Indo-European. Bell also attempted to demonstrate that Kurdish was related to Indo-European languages, arguing that it was free from Semitic vocabulary.¹² According to this theory, whilst the Kurds were the neighbours of the Arabs, their language was sharply different. The British Officer E. S. Soane, who

⁶ Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire*, p. 143.

⁷ Millingen, *Wild Life Among the Koords*, pp. 215-216.

⁸ H. Howorth, Mr. Holmwood, Douglas Freshfield, General Strachey, ‘Kurdistan: Discussion’, *The Geographical Journal*, 3, no. 2 (1894), p. 93.

⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 98

¹⁰ Millingen, *Wild Life Among the Koords*, p. 216.

¹¹ Spottiswood, ‘Sketch of Tribes of northern Kurdistan’, p. 245; H. Sandwith, *A Narrative of the Siege of Kars* (London, 1856), p. 209; B. B. Edwards, ‘Note on the Kurdish Language’, *Journal of American Oriental Society*, 2 (1856), p. 121.

¹² Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 238.

published *Notes on Kurdish Dialects* in 1909, was the first British traveller to analyse the Kurdish language in depth. He wrote a book of basic grammar, and tried to cover all the various linguistic elements such as nouns, verbs, and adverbs. Whilst he discussed the different Kurdish dialects he focused more on the southern Kurmanji dialect. In his book, however, he tried to strengthen the argument that Kurdish was related to Indo-European languages. Soane suggested that the Arabic alphabet did not fit the Kurdish language, and that English letters could be substituted.¹³ He considered that English letters were more appropriate as the Kurdish language was closer to the English language than to oriental languages, in large part because Arabic and Kurdish are from different language families, with Arabic being a Semitic language and Kurdish being Indo-European.

Travellers also used Kurdish dialects to differentiate between the tribes, to find the roots of different races among Kurds, or to prove that the geographical isolation of the districts and regions created these different dialects. Rich tried to distinguish the dialects of the Kurdish language and identify them with the names of regions or places. He identified several dialects for Kurdish in several places and categorised them by the name of tribes, including the Luri and Baban Kurds in Sulaymaniah, and the Khoshnaw, Bilbas, and Feileh, or by the name of the regions, such as the Rawanduz, Amadia, and Khurasan.¹⁴ He argued that only small differences existed between the Kurdish dialects, with the Khurasan dialect differing from the Baban dialect in Sulaymaniah, but remaining easily understandable. Beside the dialect differences, he also argued that the tribal differences led Kurds to adopt different styles of dress. For example, he believed that the sartorial style of the Khoshnaws was different from that of the Baban Kurds,¹⁵ but gave no further detail. Finally, he aimed to show more differences between the tribes, and made a small dictionary that included some synonyms shared between Kurdish dialects and categorised them under several headings such as proper Kurdish, Bilbas, Luri, and Feileh dialects.¹⁶ He was

¹³ E. B. Soane, *Notes on Kurdish Dialects: the shadi branch of Kurmanj Sulamaniah (Southern Turkish Kurdistan) A Southern Kurdish Folksong in Kermanshahi* (London, 1909), p. 1. before him, Samuel A. Rhea, wrote about Kurdish in Hakkary entitled 'Brief Grammar and Vocabulary of the Kurdish Language of the Hakari District', *Journal of American Oriental Society*, 10 (1872-1880).

¹⁴ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 130.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 101, 110.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 394.

perhaps the first traveller who tried to find the differences between tribes by identifying dialects.

Spottiswoode, who visited Kurdistan after Rich, identified Kurdish dialects in greater detail. He believed that the Kurdish language was one entity but geographical factors caused it to appear to be composed of numerous branches. He therefore divided Kurdish dialects geographically. For example, Revendi was spoken by the people of Mush, Erzurum, Bitlis, Kars, Bayazid, Khoi, Erwan, Maku, and Urmia. The dialect of Hakkary was used by the provinces of Bohtan, Hakkary, Amadia, and Diarbekir. Sori was another dialect used by the Bebe (Baban), Bilbas, Zerze, and Mukri, Khosuan (Khoshnaw) in the provinces of Sulaymaniah, Kirkuk, and the vicinities of Baghdad. Khuramaki or Kurmanji was used by the Duzik in Dersim.¹⁷ Spotswood's analysis covered the entire Kurdish language, and it is possible that he read the previous travellers' texts. In the 1890s Harris also believed Kurdish was one language, but it was divided into dialects. He tried to show tribal division via dialects because he said 'it differs in dialect, but is practically comprehensible to all tribes'. In addition, he also discussed the dialects, using a similar categorisation to the current division of the Kurdish language, yet omitting Gurnai. He identified Kermanji, which was divided into northern and southern dialects, both of which were understood by most of the tribes. The exception was the Zerze dialect around Urmia, which was incomprehensible to other Kurds.¹⁸ Thus, as the century progressed the travellers became more familiar with the Kurdish language and towards the end of the century correctly identified dialects. The British travellers saw the Kurdish language as one language but, as Spottiswoode said the geographic limitation differentiated the various dialects.

Finally, most of the British travellers throughout the nineteenth century considered the Kurdish language was distinct from the other languages, but the lack of communication, and tribal differences led some different dialects to appear. The travellers of the latter

¹⁷ Spottiswoode, 'Sketch of Tribes of northern Kurdistan', pp. 245-6.

¹⁸ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 179. This was quite normal, and one dialect which is incomprehensible can exist among all languages. For example, this can be seen in the Arabic spoken dialects, as the Levantine dialect is not comprehensible to Arabs in Morocco. The travellers might have wanted to imply that the Kurdish language was an indication of their national unity. O. F. Zaidan, 'Arabic Dialect Identification', *Association for Computational Linguistics*, 40, no. 1 (2014), p. 173.

decades of the nineteenth century considered the Kurdish language to be a part of the Indo-European language group, and some tried to draw similarities between Kurdish and other European languages.

Travellers' observation on the Religions of the Kurds

Islam

British travellers often wrote about Islam as a religion of the majority of the Kurdish people. Some travellers expressed a negative attitude towards Islam, considering it as a barrier to development affecting Muslim ethnicities, including the Kurds. In addition, they focused on presenting the differences between Kurdish religious doctrine and that of other Muslim groups surrounding them. Beside that they tried to identify some differences between Kurds and other Muslims, and even showed some worship practices which differentiated Kurds from other Muslims.

Edward Said also observed that British travellers had a negative attitude towards Islam, exemplifying Burckhardt's idea of Islam as trivial, bare, and wretched.¹⁹ Some travellers' comments certainly fit with this model and they criticised the Kurds' faith. For example, Rich believed that it was one of the reasons for the alleged backwardness of the Kurds. He believed that individuals could not progress as long as they remained Muslim. He claimed that the Prophet Muhammad corrupted everything that he touched, and suggested that the Kurds were dogmatic and did not believe any ancient history unless it was mentioned by their Prophet.²⁰ Similarly, towards the end of the nineteenth century, Bird's views on Islam echo those of Rich.²¹ Some of the travellers during the nineteenth century viewed the situation from an Orientalist perspective, with Rich and Bird blaming Islam for the problems affecting Eastern people, particularly the Kurds.

¹⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 208.

²⁰ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 310.

²¹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 258-9.

However, although the travellers accurately reported the Muslim situation in the nineteenth century, their comments did not relate to religion itself, but to the interpretation of it. During this period religious scholars of the time relied on the *Ijtihad* (interpretation) of medieval scholars, which hindered the pursuit of knowledge and education. As Said argues, thanks to Islamic *ijtihad* more recent interpretations of religion were gradually abandoned by Muslim scholars, and this process became ‘one of the major culture disasters of our time, with the result that critical thinking and individual wrestling with the problems of the modern world have simply dropped out of sight. Orthodoxy and dogma rule instead’.²² This dogma led the Kurds within Muslim society to encounter many problems.

However, many travellers paid specific attention to the Kurdish Muslims. British travellers tried to show that Kurds were different from other Muslims, either the majority of Kurds who were Shafi’hi, or practised some other minor religions. They showed that Kurds were different from the Turks and Persians: Kurds followed Shafi’hi doctrine while Persians followed Shi’ite doctrine, Turks followed Sunni Hanafi. They called attention to a minor unique religious doctrine, Ali Ilahi, a doctrine peculiar to Islam. They also mentioned Yazidis who were not Muslims, and whose religion only existed among the Kurds.²³ However, travellers did not discuss these religious differences but aimed to show that they were culturally significant.

Travellers tried to show Kurds as exotic, and that Kurds’ understanding and interpretation of Islam and performing worship was different from that of other Muslims. Both Millingen and James Bryce considered that Kurds’ ways of worshipping were different from those of other Muslims. For example, all Muslims during the 30 days of Ramadan are forbidden from eating, drinking and smoking, but they found that Kurds were smoking during the daytime, and considered smoking was not breaking fast because it had not existed during the time of the Prophet, and he made no mention of it.²⁴ Millingen showed not only that Kurds interpreted the fundamental pillars of Islam in a different way from the wider Muslim community, but also that they were thinking critically.

²² Said, *Orientalism*, p. xxi.

²³ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia*, vol. 2, p. 167; Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 178.

²⁴ Millingen, *Wild Life among Koords*, p.218; J. Bryce, *Transcaucaisa and Ararat Being Notes of a Vacation Tour in the Autumn of 1878* (London, 1878), p. 328.

The travellers in the first half of the century considered Kurds as pious and tolerant, even more so than Turks and Persians. For example, when speaking of the Baban Pasha, Rich noted that he was a pious man, and that his conversations with Rich during Ramadan were all about religion. Pasha was represented as a man of faith and piety who exhibited tolerance and humility, in marked contrast to the arrogant and intolerant Turks.²⁵ In addition, Shiel believed that the Kurds were tolerant towards the Armenians, and appreciated their industrious spirit, yet he did not like the Persians who forced Armenians to convert to Islam and carried off their daughters.²⁶ This point shows that the Kurds were tolerant in particular towards Armenians in the first half of the century. Due to the Kurdish involvement in the Armenian issue, later travellers often depicted the Kurds as a dogmatic people, and fanatical towards Christians. Maunsell for example noted that religious fanaticism led the Kurds to develop an antipathy towards Christians.²⁷ Bird called the Kurds in Hakkary (which were neighbours of Christians) 'fanatics'.²⁸ Travellers were thus directly affected by the political issues which happened in the nineteenth century. It becomes obvious that the British travellers' beliefs had changed: in the first half of the century they represented the Kurds as tolerant people while, in the second half they depicted them as an intolerant ethnicity.

Finding the Roots of ancient religions

When British travellers came to Kurdistan they aimed to find the roots of minor religious groups and identified Kurdistan as the relevant location. When they discussed Ali Ilahi as a minor Muslim religion, they presented the Kurds as belonging to the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. Similarly they discussed Yazidis as a non-Muslim religious sect, who like the Al Ilahis, were only seen in Kurdistan. As one of the sources which provided information for the travellers was the Bible, when travellers came to Kurdistan they tried to find traces of scripture, and in this instance they searched for the Ten Lost Tribes among the Kurds.

²⁵ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 139.

²⁶ Shiel, 'Notes on a Journey, from Tabriz through Kurdistan', p. 57.

²⁷ TNA: FO 881/7332, Major Maunsell to Sir N. O'Connor, Van, 16 June, 1889.

²⁸ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 373, 378.

According to the Bible, the Jewish people were descended from the patriarch Jacob and his twelve sons: Simon, Reuben, Issachar, Levi, Naphtali, Dan, Asher, Gad, Benjamin, Joseph, Judah, and Zebulun. The tribes were divided into two kingdoms, with Simon and Judah settling in the south. The remaining ten tribes belonged to the northern kingdom, which was invaded by the Assyrians between 731-21 BCE, and the ten tribes were enslaved by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser and brought to Media and Assyria. Many of those captured subsequently left and went to previously uninhabited remote lands.²⁹ In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it was believed by some that the ten lost tribes' descendants could be found in the Anglo-Saxons.³⁰ This story of the lost tribes served as a justification for the British 'racial empire', as they viewed themselves as a blessed people.³¹ When they discussed the Ali Ilahis, they considered them to be the descendants of the lost tribes. Rawlinson observed that the Ali Ilahis had a special religious doctrine among certain Shi'ite Muslims in Kurdistan and described one of their shrines in Zohab, which believers visited in order to make animal sacrifices.³² He claimed that the Ali Ilahis were the descendants of the Jews who had been captured by the Assyrians. One point that supports his argument was that these Kurds greatly revered David and their religion was a mixture of Sabian, Christianity, and Islam.³³ Rawlinson claimed that their physiognomy clearly indicated that they were originally Israelite Jews,³⁴ without discussing their appearance in detail. Bird, who travelled to Persia and Kurdistan with the Anglican Missionary Society, also aimed to find traces of the lost tribes of Israel, and agreed with Rawlinson that the Ali Ilahis were descendants of these tribes.³⁵ She noted that there was a sacred place named Dukani David, or 'Shop of David' near Zoahab.³⁶ Other travellers sought the lost tribes amongst other ethnicities, including Ainsworth, who thought he had found them in the Chaldeans. His reasoning was that the names of some places in Kurdistan where the

²⁹ T. Parfitt, *Black Jews in Africa and Americas* (London, 2013), pp.13-14.

³⁰ C. Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 205.

³¹ Ibid, pp. 44, 204.

³² Rawlinson, 'Notes on a March from Zohab at the foot of Zagros', p. 39.

³³ They remained a Jewish-Christian minor group in south Iraq, J. Elukin, 'Maimonides and the Rise and Fall of Sabians: Explaining Mosaic Laws and the Limits of Scholarship', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 63, no. 4 (2002), pp. 619-633.

³⁴ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a March from Zohab at the foot of Zagros', p. 36.

³⁵ Scarce, 'Isabella Bird Bishop', p. 244.

³⁶ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 1, p. 85.

Chaldeans settled were very similar to places mentioned in scripture. For example, Chebar or Habor was similar to Khabur (in Zakho), and the pasture referred to as Gozan in scripture was similar to the Zozan pasture in Kurdistan.³⁷ Ainsworth, citing information from Dr Grant, claimed that the Yazidis, Chaldeans, and Nestorians were descendants of the ten lost tribes.³⁸ The British travellers identified some Kurds among the whole Kurdish community as sacred people, who were descended from the Ten Lost Tribes, and thus argued for the uniqueness of Kurdish society.

The travellers aimed to find links between minor religions and ancient religions such as Zoroastrianism. The Yazidis³⁹ were a minor religious group in Kurdistan that the travellers were keen on discussing, although they tended to have different ideas about their origin. Shiel considered the Yazidis to be a civilized people and noted that their name derived from Yazid, the son of Muhawia who murdered Husen, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. He believed that they were the remnants of an old religion based upon Zoroastrianism that had survived even after the arrival of Islam. They were also called devil worshippers because they believed that the devil was a rival deity named Ahriman, who had to be worshipped because he was responsible for all evil acts. They also worshipped Hormuzd, who was responsible for goodness.⁴⁰ Millingen, like Shiel, believed that the Yazidis' faith could be traced back to Zoroastrianism because they worshipped God and the devil at the same time, praying to God because they believed he was merciful and good and worshipping the devil in order to avoid his harmful influence. According to their beliefs, Satan did not obey God's order and was therefore thrown into hell.⁴¹ When they spoke about the roots of Yazidis as Zoroastrianism they referred to the Old Testament because according to scripture Cyrus the king of Persia who was Zoroastrian had a good relationship with these ten lost tribes, and when he conquered Babylon allowed these tribes

³⁷ Ainsworth, *Travel and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, vol. 2, pp. 256-61.

³⁸ Ainsworth, 'The Assyrian Origin of the Izedis or Yezidis-the So-Called "Devil Worshipers"', p. 37.

³⁹ C. Allison, 'Unbelievable slowness of mind': Yezidi Studies from Nineteenth century to Twenty-First century', *The Journal of Kurdish Studies*, 6 (2008), pp. 1-23.

⁴⁰ Shiel, 'Notes from Tabriz, Through Kurdistan', p. 95.

⁴¹ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 276. The idea of Satan's disobedience exists in Christianity, as well as in Islam. J. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, book 1, verses 195-230; Holy Quran, chapter 15, verses 30-31.

to return to Jerusalem.⁴² Based on that point Millingen looked favourably on Zoroastrianism.

In contrast, Ainsworth discussed several traits that the Yazidis had possibly obtained from Christianity, seeing this religion as the root rather than Zoroastrianism. The first was that they baptised their children in the same manner as the Christians, and they also kissed the thresholds of Christian churches and took off their shoes before entering. Wine was sometimes mentioned as the blood of Jesus (derived from Christianity), and they would hold a cup of wine with both hands because it was considered sacred, to the extent that if a drop spilled on the ground, they would clean it carefully.⁴³ Forbes believed that their religion had absorbed new influences and become a mixture of Islam, Christianity, Magians, and devil worshipping. Their glorious saint was Sheikh Adi and their holy book, the Black Book, was not permitted to be seen by other people.⁴⁴ Maunsell reported that the religion of the Yazidis was quite peculiar and was more sympathetic towards Christians than Muslims.⁴⁵ He demonstrated that their religion derived from Christianity, although it is possible that the Yazidis' affinity to Christianity was perhaps related to nineteenth-century occurrences that may have included the frequent experience of harm at the hands of Muslims.

It is true that the British travellers were interested in finding the roots of ancient religions among the Kurds, as Kurdistan was close to the heart of the Assyrian Empire, which was mentioned in the Old Testament Travellers identified Kurdistan as a settlement of the descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes. Similarly, they regarded Kurdistan as a place of distinct religion which was Yazidism.

⁴² Bible, Old Testament, Ezra, 2.

⁴³ Ainsworth, *Travel and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, vol. 2, p. 188.

⁴⁴ Forbes, 'A Visit to the Sinjar Hills in 1838', p. 424.

⁴⁵ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 149.

Travellers' observations on Kurdish Dress

British travellers identified Kurdish dress as distinct from that of other ethnicities. Travellers tried to find differences between the sartorial style of Kurds in different tribes, different districts, and different social classes. Kinneir observed that the Kurds had their own distinctive style that distinguished them from other ethnicities, such as the Turks and Persians.⁴⁶ Harris had similar ideas about Kurdish clothes.⁴⁷

Most of the British travellers' accounts mention the turban as an important symbol of Kurdish dress. The travellers attempted to differentiate between the different styles of turbans in various Kurdish tribes in various regions. Rich claimed that the turban clearly distinguished Kurds from the Persians, Turks and Arabs. The turbans of people around Sulaymaniah were made from checked silks in yellow, red, and blue, with some silver and gold intermingled.⁴⁸ When Millingen visited Kurdistan in the 1860s, he observed that, the size of turbans indicated social status for Kurds near Mush, much like European ladies' chignons.⁴⁹ This analogy suggests an orientalist perspective, in that Millingen was implicitly trying to feminise Kurdish men by likening them to European women. Furthermore, Harris noted that near Soujbulack turbans were like caps made from silk, again encircled with a silk handkerchief, and that the colour of the turbans was gold and dark claret, with 'here and there a narrow stripe of some brilliant hue'.⁵⁰

The regional differences were noted in the travellers' comments, with Rich observing that the clothing of the Kurds in Sulaymaniah, particularly that of the upper class, comprised a gown covering the whole body and an angora shawl, and the inner clothes included a vest that was fastened at the throat and adorned with a piece of silk.⁵¹ In contrast to the Sulaymaniah Kurds, he depicted the clothes of the Hawrami Kurds who he called 'Avroman Koords' [sic] as more similar to Persian clothes, consisting of a coarse

⁴⁶ Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire*, p. 143.

⁴⁷ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 188.

⁴⁸ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 289.

⁴⁹ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 42.

⁵⁰ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 189.

⁵¹ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 289.

white woollen dress and black-topped cap.⁵² Thus, the dress of the Hawrami Kurds was simpler than that of the Kurds of Sulaymaniyah. Maunsell described the clothes of the 'Hatroschi' Atrushi Kurds of northern Kurdistan and suggested that their attire was different from that of the surrounding people. They dressed in short pelisses made from goat hair and decorated with gold lace and 'green tassels' which opened at the front. They also wore red waistcoats and loose trousers of the same colour, 'or a curious patchwork pattern', and the sleeves of the shirt were long, to the extent that they reached the ground when the wearer was walking.⁵³

Another point that travellers attempted to make was the differences between the clothes of wealthy Kurds and those of the ordinary or poor Kurds. Shiel observed in Bitlis that the rich Kurds' clothes were made from silk, while the clothes of the poor were made from cotton or 'coarse woollen manufactures of their villages'.⁵⁴ However, in the late nineteenth century, Bird described the wealthy Kurds in Bitlis as wearing different styles of clothing, similar to those of the Syrians. They wore undergarments and short jackets with sleeves made from silk and cloth decorated with gold. Kurds also wore satin and silk trousers that widened at the foot. Wealthy Kurds carried pistols and jewelled daggers.⁵⁵ Bird described the poor Kurds in Bitlis, saying:

the poorer Kurds wear woollen socks of gay and elaborate patterns; cotton shoes like the *gheva* of the Persians, camlet trousers, wide at the bottom like those of sailors; woollen girdles of a Kashmir shawl pattern; short jackets and felt jerkins without sleeves. The turban usually worn is peculiar. Its foundation is a peaked felt cap, white or black with a loosely-twisted rope of tightly-twisted silk wool or cotton around it.⁵⁶

It is clear that the economic situation of each class was reflected in the way that they dressed. Bird presumed that the traditions and clothes of Kurdish people were reliable

⁵² Ibid., p. 202.

⁵³ Maunsell, 'Eastern Turkey in Asia and Armenia', pp. 232-3.

⁵⁴ Shiel, 'Notes on a Journey, from Tabriz through Kurdistan', p. 75.

⁵⁵ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 353-354.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 353.

indicators of economic status, and thus was trying to create a typology or taxonomy with which to categorise the Kurds.

The travellers' accounts also reveal some changes in Kurdish dress over time, which gradually incorporated manufactured clothing in Europe (which discussed in chapter 7). Kurdish clothes changed slightly over the period under review, and the quality of dress changed as well. The previous chapter provided three pictures of Kurds (Figures 4. 1-4. 3), including Rich's depiction in 1820 of a Jaf Kurd (Figure 4. 1) who wore loose clothing and a fur gown in a simple style. In contrast, the two other figures were taken in the last decade of the century, with markedly different styles of dress. These figures wore short jackets, with different trousers and footwear from the person in Figure 4.3, Ibrahim Khan, who lived in northern Kurdistan and so was perhaps influenced by European culture. He is depicted wearing trousers and shoes that were very similar to the European style. These changes may have happened as a result of the arrival of European products in Kurdistan during the later stages of the nineteenth century. Finally, travellers showed that the Kurds had their own distinct sartorial style, but at the same time did not hide the tribal and class differences indicated by Kurdish clothes.

Hospitality among Kurds

Hospitality was one of the characteristics of primitive societies.⁵⁷ British travellers' views may have been influenced by the thinkers and philosophers of the eighteenth century in this regard. Montesquieu said that hospitality was 'most rare in trading countries, while it is found in the most admirable perfection among nations of vagabonds'.⁵⁸ Ferguson similarly argued that primitive people were hospitable and generous to foreigners, and that hospitality was sacred among them.⁵⁹ The travellers who came to Kurdistan observed hospitality among the Kurds, and presented Kurds as a most hospitable people. Kurds reportedly provided their best food for guests, and obliged foreigners to accept their

⁵⁷ E. A. Hoebel, *Man in the Primitive World* (London, 1949), p. 233.

⁵⁸ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, translated by T. Nugent vol. 1, p. 317.

⁵⁹ A. Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (London, 1979), pp. 101, 242.

invitations. They dealt with guests in a friendly manner, and travellers often observed that they were protected from enemies/weather by the hospitable people who provided them with refuge. The travellers presented the Kurds as the most hospitable people in the east. Rich reported on the hospitality of the Kurds in both Baghdad and Kurdistan.⁶⁰ On the subject of Kurdish hospitality in Sulaymaniah, he said, 'I never experienced such hospitality', and for that reason he considered Sulaymaniah his home.⁶¹ Furthermore, on his departure he noted:

I quit Kurdistan with unfeigned regret. I, most unexpectedly, found in it the best people that I have ever met with in the East. I have formed friendships, and been uniformly treated with a degree of sincerity, kindness, and unbounded hospitality, which I fear I must not again look for in the course of my weary pilgrimage; and the remembrance of which will last as long as life itself endures.⁶²

Rich clearly presented the Kurds as more hospitable than other ethnicities in Asia Minor. He visited many places in the region, and had contact with many races such as Arabs, Turks, and Persians. He lived in Baghdad among Arabs and Turkish officials and dealt with these races. Harris drew similar conclusions in the latter decades of the century. The Kurds he encountered were cheerful, brave and',⁶³ an 'hospitable to such a degree that even my Arab servant, who thought his people the most hospitable people in the world, was put to shame d he noted they were more hospitable than Persians.⁶⁴

In addition, Harris found some differences between Kurds and people around Tabriz. He noted that people in Kurdistan were willing to deal with Christians and invited them to drink coffee, but in the large Persian city of Tabriz people refused to even trade with the so-called 'infidels'.⁶⁵ Harris also wrote that the Kurds dealt with him in a friendly way, while the Turkish caravan-men and shopkeepers would not feed, water, or assist him. He could not do anything until the Kurds arrived, when they helped him in the Maragha's

⁶⁰ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 67.

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 266-7.

⁶² Ibid., p. 327.

⁶³ Harris, 'Wandering in Persian Kurdistan', *Edinburgh Magazine*, 158 (1895), p. 736.

⁶⁴ 'The Kurds', *The Saturday Review*, 28 November 1896, p. 570

⁶⁵ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 115.

caravansaries.⁶⁶ Harris' account suggests that while the Kurds had strong religious feelings, they were also tolerant of other religions.

Travellers found that Kurds were willing to serve food and offer accommodation to travellers, and that Kurds were obliging in hosting the foreigners. When travelling to Soujbulack, Fraser noted that although he and his companions wanted to go to a Carvansarai (similar to a hotel), the Darogah (administrator) of the town sent his men to collect the travellers so that he could host them. After a long discussion, they finally persuaded Fraser to accept their invitation, and brought him with his companions to the Darogah's house, where they were served with kindness and hospitality. When Fraser had tried to refuse their invitation, one of the men said 'Do not dishonour me by refusal'.⁶⁷ Similarly, Taylor was stopped when passing through a village in upper Mesopotamia, when the Kurds refused to allow him to pass 'before tasting their hospitality'. After Taylor accepted, the Kurds brought him and his group to the guest house of the village and offered pilaw (and boiled meat) with 'sundry savoury adjuncts'.⁶⁸ The travellers showed that hosting guests was a source of dignity and honour for the Kurds.

The British travellers observed another kind of hospitality in Kurdistan, through the provision of protection, sanctuary, and security. Sykes, when visiting a Kurdish chief named Ibrahim Pasha of Mili near Jazireh, saw several kinds of people who sought the protection of the chief as a form of shelter. Some of these people had escaped from the government's prison whereas another was a Yazidi who had converted to Islam, and had been forced to escape from his murderous relatives. There was also a Kurdish robber, and Shamar Arab Bedouin who had escaped from a feud.⁶⁹ The hospitality traditionally shown by Kurds led them to protect venerable people, regardless of their ethnicity or religion, in particular when they saw people who were wronged or oppressed. Mark Sykes recounted that Ibrahim Pasha of Mili, the Hamidiye leader (Brigadier-General) led many Christians, Armenians, and Chaldeans during the Armenian conflict to take refuge in his town Viranshehr and settle in the areas surrounding it, thus protecting them from the oppressors.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 151.

⁶⁷ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, pp. 105-6.

⁶⁸ J. G. Taylor, 'Journal of a Tour, in Armenia, Kurdistan, and upper Mesopotamia, with Notes of Researches in the Deyrsim Daghs, in 1866', *Journal of Royal Geographical Society of London*, 38 (1866), p. 309.

⁶⁹ Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, p. 318

According to Sykes he built a bazaar for them, and during the Armenian Massacre, he protected 10000 Armenians⁷⁰ through his hospitality and generosity. The travellers found that the Kurds did not harm their enemy when the travellers became their guests. According to Rawlinson, if an enemy entered their territory with a distinguished foreigner, he would not be attacked or harmed because they would consider that he came in the shadow of their guest. For example, some Guran Kurds escorted Rawlinson to Chardwaer, the centre of the nomadic Kurds,⁷¹ with whom they were engaged in a feud. Rawlinson recorded how Jemshid Beg, chief of the Faili Kurds, told him that ‘had they [the Guran Kurds] slain, a hundred of my men [...] they are your sacrifice, the Guran having come here under your shadow they are all my guests’. Rawlinson went on to note that he insisted upon providing the regiment with supplies as a part of Rawlinson’s entertainment.⁷² Travellers noted hospitality among the Kurds because they saw them to be primitive people. All travellers commented on the topic,⁷³ and James Felix Jones wrote at length about it in *Kurdish Hospitality*.⁷⁴

The differences between Kurds and other regional ethnicities

Travellers often observed that the Kurds were different from other peoples in the region. The travellers according to their experiences among Kurds or other people, or their ideological background, compared vice and virtues between Kurds and other ethnicities. Some travellers praised Kurds over other ethnicities, while other travellers praised Turks and Persians over Kurds. They wrote about the personality and customs of both Kurds and other ethnicities.

Regarding family issues, Rich compared Kurds with other ethnicities, in particular the Turks, because he lived in a British residence in Baghdad and was thus familiar with the lifestyle of the Turkish officials and Arabs. After living in Kurdistan for nearly six months,

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 324

⁷¹ Some Kurdish tribes near Kermanshah who follow the shi’ite doctrine.

⁷² Rawlinson, ‘Notes on a March from Zohab at the foot of Zagros’, p. 50.

⁷³ Ramsay, ‘from Impressions of Turkey’, p. 36; Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 104, 371.

⁷⁴ Jones, *Memoirs of Baghdad, Kurdistan and Turkish Arabia 1857*, p. 143.

he also became aware of Kurdish lifestyles and familial concerns. He believed that the Kurds were devoted to their wives and children, whereas the Turks did not care about their families. For example, he referred to a Turkish officer in Baghdad, Divan Effendi, who narrated with ‘perfect composure’ how after the death and funeral of his one-year-old son, he had attended the council.⁷⁵ By contrast, the Kurdish Prince Mahmud Pasha of Baban was, according to Rich, grief stricken when his son died. He loved his wife and children, claimed Rich, as much as Europeans did. Pasha is reported to have said, ‘I loved that poor child better than Jacob loved Joseph’.⁷⁶ Rich’s ideas on family would have been derived from the ethos underlying British industrial society in the nineteenth century, whereby women and family should be respected and protected and the man of the household was responsible for working and ensuring his family’s well-being.⁷⁷

Rich expressed surprise about the freedom enjoyed by Kurdish sons in the East, remarking of the boys that ‘they smoked in front of their father[s] freely’ and ‘they all put themselves at their ease’. By contrast, the Arabic and Turkish boys would not dare to sit down if their fathers were present.⁷⁸ Here, Rich claimed that Kurds loved family more than the Turks. Rich’s book reveals that he had positive attitudes towards Kurds. However, it is possible that he was biased in his praise of them, as he appears to have disliked the Turkish Vali of Baghdad, Dawd Pasha.⁷⁹ Besides, it is possible that Rich was influenced by the hospitality the Kurds had shown him, which in contrast with his unfriendly relationship with the Turkish Vali in Baghdad led him to praise Kurds over Turks.

Rawlinson drew up several differences between Kurds and Turkmen. Having travelled frequently through the territory of the Kurdish and Turkman tribes from Tabriz to Baghdad, he was perhaps more familiar with the lifestyle of both ethnicities. He tried to differentiate between the Kurds and Turks in Sulduz, observing that ‘Among the Turks of Azerbaijan the usual cast of countenance is sullen, and with no expression but that of dogged determination: the features of Kurds betoken intelligence, cheerfulness, and

⁷⁵ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol.1, p. 303.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 304-7.

⁷⁷ L. Davidoff, ‘Class and gender in Victorian England’ in Judith Newton, Mary Ryan, and Judith Walkowitz, *Sex and Class in Women’s History* (London, 1983), p. 20.

⁷⁸ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 91

⁷⁹ Lane-Poole, ‘Rich, Claudius James’

independence'.⁸⁰ In addition, Fraser also, praised Kurds over the Arab nomads and Turkmen.⁸¹

Most of the travellers above, when comparing the Kurds with other ethnicities, tended to praise the Kurds more highly. However, there were other British travellers who viewed the Kurds less favourably than the other ethnicities. For example, Mignan claimed that the Kurds were uncivilised, having not changed for more than twenty centuries. He argued that neither the Persian Empire nor the Arab Caliphate could change them, and that even the Turks had not had a positive impact on the Kurds.⁸² He described the Kurds as treacherous, turbulent, and envious people.⁸³ In addition, a newspaper correspondent wrote that Kurds were inferior to Christians in terms of intellect, but had the power to improve their situation. However, he added that they still had some savage characteristics.⁸⁴ Riley's view may be considered representative of an Orientalist perspective, but it is also clear that he was influenced by recent events in Armenia.

The travellers drew differences between Kurds and other ethnicities surrounding them for several reasons. Perhaps the background information these travellers had obtained from ancient literature or previous travellers who visited the region influenced whether they praised Kurds or criticised them. But their opinions largely reflect their own experiences. If they were dealt with in a friendly manner like Rich⁸⁵ they spoke positively about Kurds, and vice versa.

Decline of the Nomadic Lifestyle

According to Edward Said the British travellers in their Orientalist discourse showed that Orientals remained undeveloped in a timeless society, and had problems in their thinking.⁸⁶ The British travellers showed some development in Kurdistan, and described how Kurds could develop and change their lifestyle. The most important change was that some

⁸⁰ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Persian Kurdistan', p. 16.

⁸¹ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 51

⁸² Mignan, *Winter Journey through Russia*, p. 221.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 226-7.

⁸⁴ Riley, 'Christians and Kurds in Eastern Turkey', pp. 452-3.

⁸⁵ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 38, 104, 208.

Kurdish tribes abandoned their nomadic lifestyle and settled in villages. Expanding urbanisation was another key point that the travellers highlighted, as they observed that the towns and cities were gradually growing, which reflected what they saw as the Kurdish adoption of an orderly lifestyle. The abandonment of the nomadic life in favour of settlement and the establishment of agriculture was of consuming interest to the travellers, because it was considered to be an important stage of human development. In particular, the pastoral style of life was seen as the big impediment to economic and social development.⁸⁷ In 1830, Rawlinson noted that the Mukris had almost completely changed their nomadic behaviour and were now settled in their villages, although during the summer they still pitched their black tents outside their villages.⁸⁸ Rawlinson depicted the situation with the Mangur and Mamash, two tribes near Soujbulack, in a similar way, since they were settled in the villages and had adapted to cultivation.⁸⁹ Spottiswoode noted in 1863 that the Shekak Kurds who settled between the lakes of Urmia and Van were nomadic and primitive, and also claimed that they led a barbaric lifestyle, yet they too were gradually changing their lifestyle and adopting agriculture. They settled and gave up their barbaric characteristics, becoming more civilized and involved in commercial activities through closer trading relations with cities and towns.⁹⁰ These observations are important because they showed that the nomadic norm of Kurdish life was undergoing significant change. They are also important because the Europeans saw themselves as the apex of civilisation and considered farming and settlement as integral to their position. The Eurocentric view of modernity was imposed on Kurds, and we need to therefore read their accounts as subjective. In the late nineteenth century, Bird suggested that the Bakhtyari chief, Muhammad Taki Khan, who was a friend of Layard, successfully controlled so-called wild tribes and introduced order among them. Huseen Kuli Khan, another Bakhtyari chief, also tried to bring the tribes under his command, and obtained a positive result in his policy.⁹¹ These examples show that the travellers observed the development of Kurdish tribes during the nineteenth century.

⁸⁷ G. Falah, 'The Process and Patterns of Sedentarization of the Galilee Bedouin 1880-1982', PhD Thesis (University of Durham, 1982), p. 6.

⁸⁸ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Persian Kurdistan', p. 34.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

⁹⁰ Spottiswoode, 'Sketch of the Tribes of Northern Kurdistan', p. 245.

⁹¹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 1, p. 378.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century Sykes observed that the number of Kurdish tribes that had abandoned their nomadic life had increased. He observed that the Girdi tribe, which consisted of around 1,200 families and resided in Girdmamik to the north-west side of Erbil, had abandoned their former lifestyle of living in tents nearly sixty years before his arrival. They were then no different from the other mountainous tribes around them.⁹² Similarly, he recorded his observations of another Kurdish tribe, the Shemsiki, which had approximately 900 families. The Jibranli was another tribe who lived north of Diyarbakir and had also been nomadic, spending three months in their houses and the other nine months in tents. However, according to Sykes, they were rapidly changing their customs, and were increasingly settling and working upon farms.⁹³ Sykes held some negative views about Kurdish tribes, as mentioned in chapter 2, but, as a result of his visiting Kurdistan at various times in the late nineteenth century, and returning to Kurdistan more than once at the beginning of the twentieth century, he observed more changes among these primitive and pastoral Kurds.

One of the changes in Kurdish lifestyle was the development of towns and cities. However, urbanisation only slightly changed the Kurdish culture and people adapted to the civilised lifestyle, but at the same time it was important as Kurdish life improved. A comparison of the narratives of travellers over the course of two decades, the 1830s and 1890s, reveals that some development occurred in Kurdish towns. For example, when James Brant visited Bitlis in 1838, he observed that it was a town situated 5,156 ft above the sea, and that there was a ruined castle that had belonged to the former Beg of the town. To the east of this castle was the bazaar, situated alongside a river. The bazaar was extensive, yet the road through the shops was very narrow, to the extent that only one or two people could enter abreast. The roof of the shops was close and light entered through perforations in it. There were two good Khans, and the population of the town was estimated to be 2,000 Kurdish Muslims and 1,000 Armenians. There were three mosques, all of which had visible minarets, and 12 takiahs of the Dervishes. The houses were flat-roofed and the buildings were built from stones and volcanic rocks, with square bricks

⁹² Sykes, 'The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire', p. 456.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 477.

cemented by mud.⁹⁴ When Bird visited Bitlis nearly 50 years later there was some obvious improvement to the place. Firstly, she referred to it as a city and not a town, indicating that it had increased in physical size and had a bigger population. The market of the city was improved and had become one of the busiest in the Ottoman Empire. The style of the buildings had changed, since notable features of the city now included its large buildings, gardens, and courtyards. During the intervening years, the population had increased to approximately 30,000 people, including 20,000 Kurds.⁹⁵ This significant rise was the result of many villagers and nomads coming to and settling in the city.

The travellers observed the improvement of the Kurdish lifestyle by the end of the nineteenth century, which confirmed that economic and urban growth coincided with increasing levels of tolerance and adaptation to modern ways of life. Sykes considered that the development of urbanisation went hand-in-hand with the adoption of a more civilised lifestyle. When he visited Koi Senjaq in the early 1900s, he said that in comparison with the 1882 report that had been written by an anonymous Dominican father, the town had improved in wealth and size; it had a good bazaar, the merchants were gradually becoming rich, and they had built large commodious buildings. In the markets they supplied equipment to the surrounding tribes. In the past, the people of the town had been religious fanatics and very poor, and they spent most of their time fighting with the other tribes in the surrounding areas, yet Sykes observed that the situation had changed, and the problems had been sorted out.⁹⁶ In his view, as a result of economic improvement, the people of the town had a chance to make contact with many people from outside the town and thus develop increasing levels of tolerance and improve their standard of living.

The travellers observed the changes, and development in Kurdistan, the most important element of which was the settlement of the nomadic tribes. In the nineteenth century large numbers of Kurds started to settle and abandon pastoralism, which was regarded by the British as a major improvement in lifestyle. In addition, the travellers observed some development in the Kurdish towns and cities, which proves that from their perspective the Kurds were not stagnating.

⁹⁴ Brant and Glascott, 'Notes of a Journey Through a Part of Kurdistan', p. 380.

⁹⁵ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 352.

⁹⁶ Sykes, *The Caliph's Last Heritage*, p. 344

Robbery among Kurds

Many travellers who came to Kurdistan discussed robbery among Kurds or presented Kurds as robbers. Some travellers considered robbery was an identifying characteristic of Kurds and considered that the majority of the community were robbers.⁹⁷ Mignan said Kurds throughout the region were robbers, and that in the north on the border of Georgia Kurds attacked villages and towns and carried off the most beautiful girls among the Circassians and Georgians. On the banks of the Tigris in the south they robbed the traders who dealt with Baghdad or other cities.⁹⁸ He argued that most of the Kurds saw robbery as a common occupation. Fraser believed that the Kurds were inclined to become robbers unless they were prohibited from doing so, suggesting that the Hakkary tribe was inclined to robbery, and that if given the chance they would commit theft. All Kurdish tribes, he claimed, were potentially unsafe if not controlled.⁹⁹ These two travellers commented that the majority of Kurds were robbers if they had a chance.

The British travellers who visited Kurdistan towards the end of the nineteenth century, especially during the Armenian Issue, tended to discuss robbery in relation to what they saw as Kurdish characteristics, accusing the Kurds of robbing the Armenians. Bird reported that the Kurds plundered Armenians but noted that sometimes the Armenians exaggerated the extent of the robbery which they suffered.¹⁰⁰ Maunsell reported that the Kurds in the Armenian plain were fanatics and robbers.¹⁰¹ Sykes similarly commented that the Armenians were plundered by the Kurds in the plain of Mush.¹⁰² It is apparent that some Hamidiye Kurds plundered Armenians, but not all; nonetheless, some British travellers attempted to demonise the Kurds and present them as robbers who oppressed the Armenians.

⁹⁷ Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Russia, Armenia, ancient Babylonia*, p. 469; J. Williams, *Two Essays on the Geography of Ancient Asia* (London, 1829), 246; T. Alcocks, *Travels in Russia, Persia, Turkey and Greece in 1828-29* (London, 1831), p. 83.

⁹⁸ Mignan, *Winter Journey through Russia*, p. 235.

⁹⁹ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 61

¹⁰⁰ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 330.

¹⁰¹ Maunsell, 'Eastern Turkey in Asia and Armenia', p. 233.

¹⁰² Sykes, *The Caliphs' Last Heritage*, p. 409.

In contrast to the previous observers, some other travellers who crossed Kurdistan in the 1830s and 1890s believed that robbery was not a common element of Kurdish culture, and that when the Kurds were involved it was because they were obliged to be. Rawlinson said that in the district near Hamadan, 'the Kurdistanis' were almost depopulated by the 1830s as a result of the heavy taxation imposed on them by the Persian government, and thus plundering increased as a result of poverty.¹⁰³ Even in the 1890s Wheeler argued that, 'The impression that they [Kurds] are all robbers is far from the truth. Many of them, indeed, make robbery their business, but the great majority live quietly in their mountain villages, pursuing lawful occupations'.¹⁰⁴ Harris argued that the Kurds only robbed Persian and Turkish merchants and that if the Turks and Persians who visited Kurdistan did not obtain the protection of the Kurdish chieftains beforehand, they would be robbed and killed by the Kurds. However, rather than being the result of a monetary incentive, this would have been because of religious reasons, in particular the rivalry between the Sunni and Shia followers.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, Harris claimed that the Armenian merchants had commercial relations with the most remote parts of Persian Kurdistan and that it was very rare that they faced molestation and violence at the hands of Kurds.¹⁰⁶ Harris' comment reflects his belief that Kurds robbed Persians and Turks as a reaction to the misgovernment of the two dominant nations. He came to Persian Kurdistan during the last decades of the century during the Armenian issue in the Ottoman Kurdistan, but according to him that conflict had no serious effect on relations between Persian Kurds and Armenians, as the affected location was northern Kurdistan which was under the rule of Ottomans.

British travellers can be divided into two groups: the first group considered the majority of Kurd were robbers, irrespective of tribe and place, and Fraser and Mignan belonged to that group. The second group of travellers considered that only some Kurds engaged in robbery. The second class of travellers presented some excuses for robbery by Kurds such as bad or weak government, and the unfriendly relation between Kurds on one side and Persian and Turks on the other.

¹⁰³ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Persian Kurdistan', p. 41.

¹⁰⁴ Wheeler, *Ten Years on the Euphrates or Primitive Missionary Policy Illustrated*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁵ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 182.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Conclusion

Travellers tried to apply ideas they already held about Kurds, and highlighted the aspects they wanted. As foreigners with a different linguistic and cultural background, they were not best placed to accurately represent Kurdish society. They found that Kurds were different from other ethnicities around them in several respects. In terms of language they indirectly considered Kurdish belonged to the family of Indo-Europeans languages, as they were generally interested in the theory of Indo-European relationships. The religious doctrine was another cultural element by which travellers distinguished Kurds from other Muslims. Furthermore, Kurdistan was identified as a land of two distinct minor religious groups such as the Ali Ilahi, a small Muslim Shi'ite group, and the Yazidi, a distinct religious group which only existed in Kurdistan. Hospitality, tolerance, kindness were observed among the Kurds. Beside these virtues, travellers noted some vices in the Kurdish, and sometimes presented them as fanatics and robbers. While, some of the travellers' comments were true they exaggerated some points, such as Kurds being robbers. This was particularly true in the second half of the century, when the Kurdish plundering of the Armenians shaped the British travellers' views.

British travellers, in order to show that they deeply comprehended Kurdish society, presented numbers of cultural differences among Kurds. Kurdish language was presented as one language but due to tribal difference, and regional differences some dialects had appeared. Similarly, travellers showed Kurdish dress was different from that of the other ethnicities in the region but was also subject to regional difference. Due to the topography of the country, as it was a mountainous area, and as a result of the tribal differences, some small cultural differences were rightly identified by the travellers.

Chapter 6 British Travellers' Views on Kurdish Women

Introduction

This chapter will discuss British travellers' observations on the social and political role of Kurdish women. It was rare for the British to travel through Kurdistan without recording their thoughts on the local women in their diaries or reports, because they considered the position of Kurdish women in society as a key element, which allowed them to investigate wider questions about social mores, Kurdish culture and the level of civilisation among Kurds. This chapter discusses how British travellers showed the importance of the social, political, and military role of Kurdish women in the community, and found a high level of liberty among Kurdish women. It will also explore the differences noted by the British travellers between Kurdish women and other Muslim women in order to present them as primitive people.

However, European travellers also tended to see Kurdish women as synonymous with Oriental women in general, and as quite different from their Western sisters. As such, they tended to present them as exotic, in keeping with the orientalist perspective that shaped western perceptions of the region. Exoticism was thus used by colonial travellers to perpetuate the difference between the East and the West,¹ and the Kurds were not exempt from these exotic portrayals.

The British possessed particular preconceived notions about Oriental women. Edward Said argues that the Europeans saw the Orient as a place of daydreams, fantasy, sherbet, harems, dancing girls, princesses, and ointments. In the nineteenth century, European ideas of sex were tightly intertwined with notions of morality, legality, and even economic and political commitments.² Similarly, Rana Kabbani believes that the Europeans had preconceptions about the East being the site of 'lascivious sensuality', and these

¹ R. Celestin, *From Cannibals to Radicals: Figures and Limits of Exoticism* (Minnesota, 1996), pp. 1–27.

² Said, *Orientalism*, p. 190.

notions were widespread in the mediaeval period in Europe and have even continued to the present time. Such attitudes reached their peak in the nineteenth century as a result of increased contact between the East and West.³ However, this chapter will argue that British travellers differed in significant ways from the position of Said and Kabbani, as they also showed Kurdish women as strong, free and intelligent.

The position of Kurdish women has received comparatively little attention from anthropologists and historians. Roselezam et al. assessed the writings of Isabella Bird, who like other Europeans depicted Persian women as unusual and exotic.⁴ Whilst the article is valuable for any discussion of the exoticisation of Eastern women by nineteenth-century British travellers, the authors focused primarily on Persian females rather than Kurdish women, in contrast to this thesis. The Dutch anthropologist Martin Van Bruinessen wrote an article about the position of Kurdish women, entitled 'Matriarchy in Kurdistan? Women Rulers in Kurdish History' which focused on showing how Kurdish society is distinct from other Muslim societies in the East, and unique in that it gave equal rights to women. Van Bruinessen concentrated on some female tribal leaders and politicians in the twentieth century, particularly the women who joined the PKK (Kurdistan Worker's Party). However, his main focus was on Kurdish female leaders in the twentieth century, as he wished to argue for a long history of female leadership in Kurdish society. He supported his argument by discussing examples of distinguished Kurdish women in the nineteenth century and earlier periods, and he also returned to Kurdish Folklore to strengthen his position. Within his discussions of Kara Fatima and Adela Khanum, Van Bruinessen made little use of British travel literature.⁵ He later revised and amended his argument and changed the title to 'From Adela Khanum to Leyla Zana: Women as Political Leaders in Kurdish History' and published it as a chapter in *Women of A Non-State Nation: the Kurds*, edited by Sharzad Mojab. In this chapter van Bruinessen argued that the Kurdish nationalists believed that all Kurdish women enjoyed the same rights as men, and greater liberty than their sisters in the Middle East. Van Bruinessen claimed that in reality only women of the ruling

³ Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions*, p. 6.

⁴ Roselezam et al. 'The exotic portrayal of women in Isabella Bird Bishop's journey in Persia and Kurdistan', pp. 779-793.

⁵ M. V. Bruinessen, 'Matriarchy in Kurdistan? Women Rulers in Kurdish History', *An International Journal of Kurdish Studies*, 1-2 (1993).

families held high positions in society. He also noted that women in some parts of Kurdistan had more freedom than their Persian, Turkish and Arab sisters, but not all.⁶ However, van Bruinessen referred only to the writings of the Kurdish nationalists, but the British travellers nearly presented a very similar account of the position of Kurdish women to that of the nationalist scholars. There are two points to be noted: first, van Bruinessen overlooked what had been written by British travellers during the nineteenth century before the nationalist movement had fully developed because he depended solely on Soane and Edmonds when he wrote about Adela Khanum, and relied on British newspapers when he discussed Kara Fatima. Moreover, there are many British travellers who wrote in detail about Kurdish women, and they tried to show the many kinds of freedom enjoyed by Kurdish women and their important roles in society, for example in the plans and plots of their tribes. The second point is that most of the British travellers, when discussing the liberty of Kurdish women, were blind to the social hierarchy surrounding them. The majority of travellers merely differentiated between classes of male Kurds but saw Kurdish women as a whole rather than categorising them according to their social hierarchy.

Mirella Galletti is the author of 'Western Images of Women's Role in Kurdish Society', which was published in Mojab's edited collection. In the article she discussed the perspectives of some European travellers and missionaries ranging from the nineteenth century to the early twentieth century. She portrayed a multi-faceted picture of Kurdish women which relied on the European descriptions. However, like van Bruinessen she rejected the claim of the Kurdish nationalists that Kurdish women had more liberty than their Muslim sisters. Furthermore, she argued that Kurdish nationalist scholars who argued that Kurdish women were in some ways similar to European women, were trying to obtain more support for their own agenda. Her argument is partly true but through reading the travel literature it appears that the British travellers themselves tried to draw similarities between Kurds and European tribes to show that they were in a similar stage of primitivism. In particular, British travellers drew many similarities between women of the Scottish highlands and Kurdish women. Finally, Galletti believed that travellers did not draw an accurate portrait of Kurdish women, but showed them in a romantic light.

⁶ M. V. Bruinessen, 'From Adela Khanum to Leyla Zana: Women as Political Leaders in Kurdish History' in S. Mojab (ed.), *Women of A Non-State Nation the Kurds* (Costa Mesa, 2001), pp. 95-107.

Another study of Kurdish women was developed by a Danish anthropologist, Henny Harald Hansen, whose work was published in 1961. The publication was the result of a field study, as the writer visited southern Kurdistan in the summer of 1957 and made a comparative study of the situation of Kurdish women in both urban and rural areas. She visited a number of places throughout southern Kurdistan with an interpreter, and wrote in detail about Kurdish women in the 1950s. She described several aspects of women's daily lives at that time, such as their jobs, marriages, personalities, and clothing. She found that in the cities and towns women might study and acquire skills and qualifications, with many of them becoming medical doctors and teachers. However Hansen also believed that Islamic culture had deep roots among Kurds, and had a significant influence on Kurdish women in the twentieth century. At the same time, she aimed to show that since the early twentieth century the lifestyle of Kurdish women had gradually changed and they had adopted a western lifestyle, in particular in their dress. Hansen wanted to prove that there was progress among Kurdish women.⁷ In general, her focus was on data obtained from her visit to Kurdish villages and cities, and her subject mid-twentieth-century Kurdish women.

Building on this literature, this chapter will provide the first detailed analysis of the way in which British travellers discussed and described Kurdish women over the course of the nineteenth century. It is divided into five sections, the first of which discusses role of European primitive women, the second section discusses the British travellers' observations on the liberty of Kurdish women. The third section will discuss the martial and political role of the Kurdish women in society, and in particular focus on some female Kurdish tribal leaders. The fourth section presents British travellers' perspectives on the style of Kurdish women's clothing, and the final section will discuss marriage in nineteenth-century Kurdish society.

Role of European Primitive Women

The British always emphasised the important role played by women in Kurdish society and the freedom and influence that they enjoyed. Their comments have to be understood in the context of their own historical understanding of the position of women in 'primitive'

⁷ H. H. Hansen, *The Kurdish Woman's Life* (Copenhagen, 1961).

societies in Europe. For example, the women of the Teutonic tribes, described by Tacitus in the *Germania* were believed to have enjoyed high status and liberty.⁸ According to the Roman historian Tacitus, the Germanic women were represented as symbols of honour, chastity, and faithfulness. They were partners to men in all situations, and although they had different tasks they held positions equal to those of men.⁹ Germanic women were seen as symbolising faithfulness and loyalty to their husbands.¹⁰ According to these myths Germanic wives had the same rights as their husbands, and they participated in work alongside their husbands. Besides that, partnerships between husbands and wives were ‘marked by fidelity and chastity’.¹¹ The Germanic females had another martial characteristic. When someone killed a family member, if there were no male relatives then it would fall to the women to seek revenge. Many faithful women avenged their lovers in Germanic literature.¹² For example, the Waelsing girls were known for seeking revenge for their brothers and father.¹³ Germanic women were also expected to participate in battles. Historians and antiquarians of the nineteenth century suggested that the women of the Germanic tribes participated in battles alongside their men, and had some important duties such as supplying the army with food and treating any injuries.¹⁴

Anthropologists and historians of the Victorian era believed women in Anglo-Saxon England also held high positions in society and were the equal of their brothers and fathers, and they had more rights than in any other period before the modern era.¹⁵ In particular, Christian Anglo-Saxon women were ranked high in society, especially high-class women

⁸ J. Rendall, ‘Gender, Race and Progress of the Progress of Civilisation’, in Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (ed.), *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (London, 2005), p. 72.

⁹ B. Murdoch, *The Germanic Hero: Politics and Pragmatism in Early Medieval Poetry* (London, 1996), p. 161.

¹⁰ G. F. Sweringen, ‘Women in the Germanic Hero-Saga’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 8, no. 4 (Oct, 1909), p. 505.

¹¹ J. Rendall, ‘Tacitus engendered: “Gothic feminism” and British histories, c. 1750-1800’, in G. Cubitt (ed.), *Imagining Nations* (Manchester, 1998), p. 62.

¹² Sweringen, ‘Women in the Germanic Hero-Saga’, p. 506.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 507.

¹⁴ Rendall, ‘Tacitus engendered: “Gothic feminism” and British histories’, p. 58; M. P. Speidel, *Ancient Germanic Warriors: Warrior Style from Trajan’s Column to Icelandic Sagas* (London, 2004), p. 76.

¹⁵ Rendall, ‘Tacitus engendered: “Gothic feminism” and British histories’, p. 69.

as they had economic and political power.¹⁶ Like the Germanic women, Anglo-Saxon women were presented as warriors.¹⁷

Celtic women, such as those in Scotland, were also believed to have occupied a high position in their society. Rendall relied on *Ossian* (a series of verses fabricated by James Macpherson between 1759 and 1762) which demonstrated the thinking of people in the eighteenth century with regard to Celtic society. According to this text, women in ancient Caledonia (Scotland), were ranked high in society and that helped to form the image of the Scots as a primitive people.¹⁸ The idea that European primitive women played a significant role in society had an impact on British travellers, as they observed the positive and active role of Kurdish women in society and believed that Kurdish society was at a the primitive level of progress. Therefore, they highlighted some aspects of Kurdish women such as liberty and leadership.

Liberty of Kurdish Women

British travellers observed that Kurdish women were given more liberty than Persian and Turkish women.¹⁹ Rich was one of the first travellers in the nineteenth century to mention liberty in relation to Kurdish women, noting with reference to women around Sina that ‘Men and women could live together without the slightest affectation of concealment’.²⁰ He considered Kurdish women were the first women in the east to have such freedom, and observed that it was ‘quite novel’ to him as he had never seen people in the East like Kurdish women, who mixed with men without any tendency towards concealment.²¹ From his accounts it appears that he believed that Kurdish women were independent because they

¹⁶ B. Åström, ‘The Creation of the Anglo-Saxon Woman’, *Studia Neophilologica* (1998), p. 25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁸ J. Rendall, ‘The Progress of “Civilization”: Women, Gender, and Enlightened Perspectives on Civil Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain’, in K. Hagemann (ed.), *Civil Society and Gender Justice: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (New York, 2008), p. 68.

¹⁹ Porter, *Travellers in Georgia, Russia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia*, p. 198; Bryce, *Transcaucaisa and Ararat*, p. 328; Horatio Southgate differentiated between Kurdish and Persian women, see *Narrative of A Tour through Armenia, Kurdistan, Persia and Mesopotamia*, 2 vols (London, 1840), p.120.

²⁰ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 107.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

were less civilised than the Turks and Persians, with most of them living in rural areas unlike the urban Turks and Persians. In general the travellers argued that the nature of Kurdish tribal life led to greater female freedom because both men and women were needed to participate in the labour of daily life.

According to the travellers the liberty of Kurdish women could be clearly observed in their clothing, within Muslim society. The veil was considered to be a restriction to freedom but the travellers believed that Kurdish women did not use the veil, and they noted unveiled women in many parts in Kurdistan. Rich, for example, remarked that the women of the Jaf tribe, and ordinary women in Sulaymaniah did not use veils or handkerchiefs on their faces as the Arab women did.²² Fraser noted that the Arab tribal women concealed themselves when they went abroad, because the Arabs were worried that their women might be seen by foreigners, and therefore even young girls dressed like old women, to keep themselves hidden.²³ Comments made by travellers in the middle of the century and towards the end of the nineteenth century reveal that Kurdish women still did not use the veil.²⁴ For example, Harris observed that Kurdish women did not veil themselves as other Muslim women did, and thus the Kurdish women of Amirabad were unveiled.²⁵ According to Bird, wearing the veil was a prerequisite for Persian women, and those who went out without it were seriously punished by the mob.²⁶ In contrast, she noted that Kurdish women were unveiled.²⁷ These travellers discussed unveiled Kurdish women in general terms but in reality most of their examples were of women of rural areas which suggests that the Kurdish women of the villages and tents had more freedom than women living in the city and town-dwellers.

Some travellers tried to identify differences between the women of different social classes, particularly when they discussed their clothes. For example, Rich noted a slight difference between the Kurdish women of the high ranking families and the ordinary people. Women from ordinary families in Sulaymaniah visited the centre of town or the

²² Ibid., pp. 181, 285.

²³ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 278.

²⁴ Ainsworth, *Travel and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, p. 250; Wilson, *Handbook for Travellers in Asia Minor*, p. 64

²⁵ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 171.

²⁶ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 1, p. 103.

²⁷ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 192, 206.

bazaar without concealing themselves, and in summer could be seen in the early morning in bed with their husbands. They would wake up and tend to their duties in the house, their roofs no more than five or six feet off the ground.²⁸ However, he saw women from high-status families hiding their faces and covering themselves, so that no-one could recognise them when they visited bazaars and towns.²⁹ Both observations suggested that, contrary to van Bruinessen's argument, the women of the ordinary Kurds had more freedom than those of the high-ranked families, and the women of the pastoral Kurds had more liberty than the city and town dwellers.

There was a popular belief among Europeans that in developed and civilised societies the (political and social) position of women was weakened and their freedom was restricted. The position of women was thought to have been weakened with the appearance of commercial society in Europe. In the earlier stages women held higher positions, and were able to maintain friendships with men.³⁰ Thus the British travellers tried to show that the Kurdish women in villages and tents had more freedom than their counterparts in the towns and cities, and even that the morality of the first group of women was higher than the latter. Like Rich, Shiel believed that among the urban Kurds, only women who belonged to high-ranking families would have worn the veil, while women in tents had more liberty to exhibit themselves freely. Tent-dwelling women had a high status in the family and played a considerable role in the encampment's affairs.³¹

The social and sexual mores of the Kurds were frequently discussed. The travellers believed that Kurdish women were highly ethical, yet observed that there was a difference between the rural women (those living in tents and villages) and their sisters in towns and cities. Again, Harris argued that rural women had a higher level of liberty, and that betrayal and immorality were very rare amongst Kurdish women, in part because the punishment for sexual immorality was death for both guilty people.³² The British traveller Lucy Garnett

²⁸ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 285.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 284.

³⁰ Rendall, 'The Progress of "Civilization"', p. 67.

³¹ Shiel, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz', p. 70.

³² Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 171.

observed that there were many stories about female chastity,³³ one of which involved a married woman who wanted to visit her parents' house. She was accompanied by only one manservant on her journey, who along the way deliberately tried to delay their progress. When the sun set before they had reached their destination, they were obliged to stay a night in an 'untenanted Khan', and that night the servant tried to proposition her. However, she defended herself and killed the servant using a small knife.³⁴ Whether the story is true or not it suggests that Kurdish women had strong personalities, and were willing to risk their lives to protect their honour.

Through reading the travellers' comments it becomes apparent that travellers believed that sexual morals were very different among the female city-dwellers and women from the villages and tents. Harris observed that 'amongst these wild mountain people the moral standard is very high; only in the towns do they seem to have sunk to the level of the Persians and Turks'.³⁵ The travellers suggested that the higher class Kurds who dwelled in towns restricted and controlled their women. It is possible that the travellers were influenced by their own idealization of the rural areas, which they considered to be more authentic and also ideal places for both men and women to live.³⁶ In particular, some travellers considered the rural areas to be much better than the urban centres in terms of morality, viewing the latter as areas that provided more opportunities for corruption, including immoral behaviour by young women.³⁷ It should be noted that after World War II the level of education had increased among women in towns and cities in particular in southern Kurdistan, and some of them became medical doctors, teachers, and nurses.³⁸ This development proves that the aspirations of educated women had changed and these female teachers and doctors became stronger even than their sisters in the rural areas.

³³ The British officer Major Noel claimed there was no word for prostitution in the Kurdish language: E. M. Noel, *Diary of Major E. M. Noel on Special Duty in Kurdistan from Jun the 14 to September 21 1919* (Basrah, 1920), p. 69

³⁴ L. J. Garnett, *The Women of Turkey and Their Folk-Lore*, vol. 2 (London, 1891), pp. 122-3.

³⁵ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 218.

³⁶ K. Murphy, *Fears and Fantasies: Modernity, Gender and the Rural-Urban Divide* (Oxford, 2010), p. 2.

³⁷ S. Griffith, 'Idealization of Rural Areas', *Seen Not Heard* (2011), p. 118.

³⁸ S. Mojab, 'Women in Politics and War: the Case of Kurdistan', *Working Papers*, no. 145 (Michigan State University, 1987), p. 5.

Martin Van Bruinessen believes that Kurdish women in some specific places enjoyed liberty but that this privilege was not extended to all Kurdish women.³⁹ His argument is partly true as the travellers noted that the Kurdish women of the rural areas had more liberty than the urban-dwelling women. More generally, the travellers compared the liberty of Kurdish women favourably with that of their Turkish counterparts, because they saw that Turkish society was more urban than the Kurdish communities and regions. Rich, who visited Sulaymaniah, argued that the Kurdish women had similar rights to their husbands, and he claimed that they laughed at the slavish submission of their Turkish sisters.⁴⁰ In his account, relations between both sexes in Kurdish communities were based on respect and love, while the relationship between Turkish couples was based on male superiority and female subordination. It is likely that he was influenced in this view by his belief in the primitivism of the Kurdish tribes. When Millingen visited northern Kurdistan he wrote in detail about Kurdish women in a village named Nusheh in northern Kurdistan. He noted that they appeared well-organised and were willing to receive foreigners even in their harem. They were neither timid, peculiar, nor frightened, unlike the Armenian ladies he had encountered, and nor were they like the Turkish women who he claimed were only ‘trained to imitate’ reticence and modesty. Millingen noted that the Kurdish women were not fearful or shy when they met him, but rather talked with him when he asked about their husbands and children.⁴¹ As previously noted, the information could be at least partly true, because in villages Kurdish women’s participation in work led them to acquire more freedom than they would otherwise have had elsewhere in the region. A traveller like Millingen thought that Kurdish women on the whole had more liberty than Turkish women, although like many other travellers he failed to distinguish between different levels of liberty that existed amongst Kurdish women.

The travellers presented Kurdish women as occupying specific jobs within the community. Bird was particularly interested in medicine, having received some medical training at St Mary’s Hospital in London,⁴² and this is clearly reflected in her travel

³⁹ Bruinessen, ‘From Adela Khanum to Leyla Zana: Women as Political Leaders in Kurdish History’, p. 103.

⁴⁰ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 285.

⁴¹ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 126-127.

⁴² Middleton, ‘Isabella Lucy Bird Bishop’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 5, p. 571.

writings. She travelled to Persia and Kurdistan with a box of medicine,⁴³ and thus her interest often led her to focus on the health of the people in the areas to which she travelled. According to Bird, medical treatment was a highly important occupation in Kurdistan that was only available to women, and as such, among the Bakhtyari, only women could become *Hakim* (medical local doctors) because men were considered to be ‘too unsettled to be *Hakim*’.⁴⁴ If a father had some knowledge or experience of medicine, he would pass it on to his daughter rather than his son. Some of these female *Hakims* performed vital procedures such as extracting bullets from injured bodies.⁴⁵ Thus, Bird presents the Bakhtyari women as having a high level of liberty and able to perform a vital service within the community and to treat and touch the body of men.

Mirella Galleti believes that in terms of education Kurdish women were not alike, as the women of southern Kurdistan were more educated than their sisters in the north.⁴⁶ Her argument is partly supported by the travel literature. Garnett for example highlighted women of Sulaymaniah which was an important city for intellectual activities, during the eighteenth century and later on, as being educated.⁴⁷ She also reported that the daughters and wives of educated Kurds around Sulaymaniah⁴⁸ could write and read in the Persian language, which was the literary language in Kurdistan at the time.⁴⁹ It seems fair to say that in other urban centres around Sulaymaniah women were also educated. However, Galleti omitted to mention the educational status of women in the eastern part of Kurdistan, where thanks to the efforts of families and Christian missionaries some Kurdish women could read and write and some were well-educated. Literacy was associated with Christianity but Isabella Bird stated that in Hamadan,⁵⁰ among the Armenian female students, a few Muslim girls could also be seen. Furthermore, she noted that whilst most

⁴³ Scarce, ‘Isabella Bird Bishop’, p. 244.

⁴⁴ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 74.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Galleti, ‘Western Images of Women’s Role in Kurdish Society’ in Mojab (ed.), *Women of A Non-State Nation the Kurds*, p. 209.

⁴⁷ Garnett, *The Women of Turkey and Their Folk-Lore*, vol. 2, p. 130.

⁴⁸ The education of females in other regions was usual, for example among Bakhtyaris the women were educated and even learnt foreign languages. E. N. M. Ross, *A Lady Doctor in Bakhtiari Land* (London, 1921), p.92

⁴⁹ Garnett, *The Women of Turkey and Their Folk-Lore*, vol. 2, p. 130.

⁵⁰ When in Hamadan, Bird visited the Armenian quarter and noted that the Armenians were polite people. However, she did not estimate their numbers. Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 146.

Kurdish women were illiterate, women from high-class families could read the Quran and recite poetry.⁵¹ As previously noted, in most places only boys had the opportunity to study but it is important to note that at that time, the daughters of some ordinary Kurdish people did in fact have access to education and it was not limited exclusively to the elite.

There is evidence to suggest that more Kurdish women than those reported on by the travellers had access to education, in particular in the towns in eastern Kurdistan. One notable example was Mah Sharaf Khanum (1806-1847), also known as Masturay Ardalany, whom the travellers did not comment upon, even though some of them visited her town, Sina. Khanum was from a high-class Kurdish family in Sina, and was educated under her father's guidance. She was interested in history and writing poetry, and indeed a book of her poems was published in 1926.⁵² Her book *The History of Ardalan* was later published in 1946. The Russian writer, Vasiliva, noted that as far as she was aware, she was the only female historian in the Middle East during the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵³ This suggests two points. First, some Kurdish women, particularly in towns, were able to study and learn, albeit on a small scale, then the number of educated women gradually increased. Second, the British travellers did not provide a thorough representation of Kurdish society, perhaps, because many of them were men and largely ignored women. More pragmatically, it reflects the fact that they did not have access to certain areas of society and that linguistic barriers prevented them from grasping the most important information.

British travellers' observations on the political and Martial role of Kurdish women

According to Rana Kabbani, Europeans believed that Oriental women lacked a strong personality and were always hesitant, fluctuating 'between desire, pity, contempt and

⁵¹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 254.

⁵² The capital of Ardelan was a Kurdish principedom, but in the nineteenth century it was weakened by the Persian government.

⁵³ Y. E. Vasiliva, 'About life and writings of Mah Sharaf Khanmy Kurdistany in the first half of the nineteenth century', *Some Articles in Kurdology*, translated from Russian to Kurdish by A. Q. Sultany (Sulaymaniyah, 2008), pp. 41-42.

outrage'.⁵⁴ They were depicted as the victim of men's sensuality, and presented as lazy and lascivious.⁵⁵ However, in the view of the British travellers Kurdish women were generally exempt from that judgement. They were presented as powerful women who could run their community. The travellers' comments challenged the long held preconceptions Europeans shared regarding Eastern women, including Kurdish women. Millingen presented Kurdish women as strong characters, even occupying political and martial roles within their communities, but did not distinguish which class of women had more rights. It was common to observe the significant political role of Kurdish women. Travellers noted that women were in constant communication with men, which led them to participate in the latter's decision-making process, and thus the women became firm and strong. This easy and free communication between the sexes differentiated the Kurds from other Muslim groups, as women participated more in social and political issues. They argued that Kurdish women knew a great deal about their own tribes, including their plans, plots, and blood feuds. Their participation in political issues was very important.⁵⁶ Even Mark Sykes said they 'express their opinion in public affairs with as loud voice as any suffragette that they want',⁵⁷ which showed that the Kurdish women had considerable power. Both travellers discussed Kurdish women as a whole, without explicitly distinguishing between social classes. However, another traveller, William Francis Ainsworth categorised the social hierarchy of Kurdish women and focused on high-class females, rather than on all travellers. According to their accounts, Kurdish women acted as mediators and often ended disputes and conflicts amongst the men. Rich noted that in villages near Sina, women held a great deal of power, and sometimes had the ability to resolve disputes amongst their men that might otherwise have ended in bloodshed.⁵⁸ It appears that women ending conflicts was a common occurrence amongst Kurds, and was not confined to a certain area. Millingen recorded one occasion in the 1850s when the Shikak Kurds near Van began fighting, and twenty-four of them were killed. Government officials were able to end the

⁵⁴ Kabbani, *Imperial Fiction*, p. 26.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 250-251; L. Sheil, *Glimpses of Life and Manners in Persia* (London, 1856), p. 268; Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 248; M. Sykes, 'Journeys in North Mesopotamia' *The Geographical Journal*, 20, no.3 (1907), p. 254.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 107.

fighting with the assistance of a number of women.⁵⁹ This contributed to the travellers' perceptions of Kurdish women as symbols of a peaceful, integrated society. This perception was corroborated by the Kurdish writer Bayazidi, who confirmed that when feuds developed amongst Kurds, it was the women who generally ended them. When conflict erupted between rival villages, such as a feud that occurred between Hakkary and Bohtan, the religious Sheikhs or women would try to resolve the dispute by asking both sides to stop fighting.⁶⁰

Travellers observed the political leadership of Kurdish women, which they presented as unique in Muslim society at the time. Ainsworth recorded that near the Sinjar desert there were two villages in close proximity to each other. One of them was Chil-Agha, where he and his friends were warmly welcomed by a lady who was the chief of the village.⁶¹ By recording this encounter, he revealed that Kurdish women had the right to become leaders of their community. Although scholars like van Bruinessen believe that it was impossible to generalise about whether Kurdish women had more liberty than Persian, Arab and Turkish women, Ainsworth considered that political privileges were not equally extended to Kurdish women from all classes, but only women of the ruling families held significant positions in society.⁶² His argument about the leadership of Kurdish women is true, because all women leaders in Kurdistan came from the ruling families. In a tribal society like Kurdistan it was very difficult for a woman to become a leader without having a family background, which was equally true for male chiefs, as Kurdish people believed in the charismatic features of special people. Therefore, most Kurdish male leaders shared the same family background.

Other travellers also documented the leadership of Kurdish women in larger communities. For example, Millingen reported that the wife of the chieftain of the Milan tribe⁶³ had a number of important roles, as she was her husband's confidante, treasurer, and adviser. Millingen described how she directed and ruled her tribe with the courage of a

⁵⁹ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 252-3.

⁶⁰ Bayazidi, *A Letter about the Traditions and Customs of Kurds*, p. 19.

⁶¹ Ainsworth, *Travel and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, vol. 2, p. 120.

⁶² Bruinessen, 'From Adela Khanum to Leyla Zana: Women as Political Leaders in Kurdish History', pp. 100-101.

⁶³ The Milan tribe were settled in the plain between Mardin and Khabur, A. H. Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon with Travels in Armenia, Kurdistan and the Desert* (New York, 1853), p. 315.

man, despite only being twenty-two years old when her husband passed away. After his death, she gained the esteem of the tribal elders, and subsequently became the chief and ruled over the tribe.⁶⁴ Travellers depicted her as having more political capability than any of the older men in the tribe.

In the British travellers' accounts and other writings of the nineteenth century, the Kurdish women were not just acknowledged as leaders of their tribes but also as accomplished military leaders, capable of dealing with the government in a wise way. During the Crimean War, a female Kurdish tribal chief named Kara Fatima ('Black Fatima') attracted the west's attention, and *The Illustrated London News* published a detailed report about her. The article presented her as a leader of a tribe that wished to become independent from the Sultan's authority, and thus contest Ottoman rule. Kara Fatima was from the Kurdish town of Marash, and ruled an unnamed yet large tribe that could provide 4,000 horsemen.⁶⁵ Thus, the article revealed that in such a tribe, all members, regardless of sex, had the ability to assume a dominant martial and political role. Kara Fatima was described as being a small and dark woman aged around sixty, who dressed like a male warrior, albeit 'with nothing of the Amazon in her appearance' or that of the Greek female warrior more familiar to European readers, and who was described as possessing supernatural characteristics. According to the newspaper, after her husband had been imprisoned by the Ottomans, she assumed the role of tribal leader and took a cavalry, approximately 300 men, and money to the Sultan, in order to show her tribe's readiness to fight in his name in order to convince him to release her husband.⁶⁶ The newspaper portrayed her as feminine and loyal to her husband, in accordance with Victorian mores. Moreover, the newspaper noted her diplomatic capability, reporting that she intelligently tried to display her tribe's loyalty to the Sultan in order to ensure the wellbeing of her husband. The newspaper emphasised her power and capability in leading the tribe.

⁶⁴ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 251; Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 248.

⁶⁵ 'Kara Fatima at Constantinople', *Illustrated London News*, 22 April 1854, p. 363.

⁶⁶ 'Kara Fatima at Constantinople', p. 363.

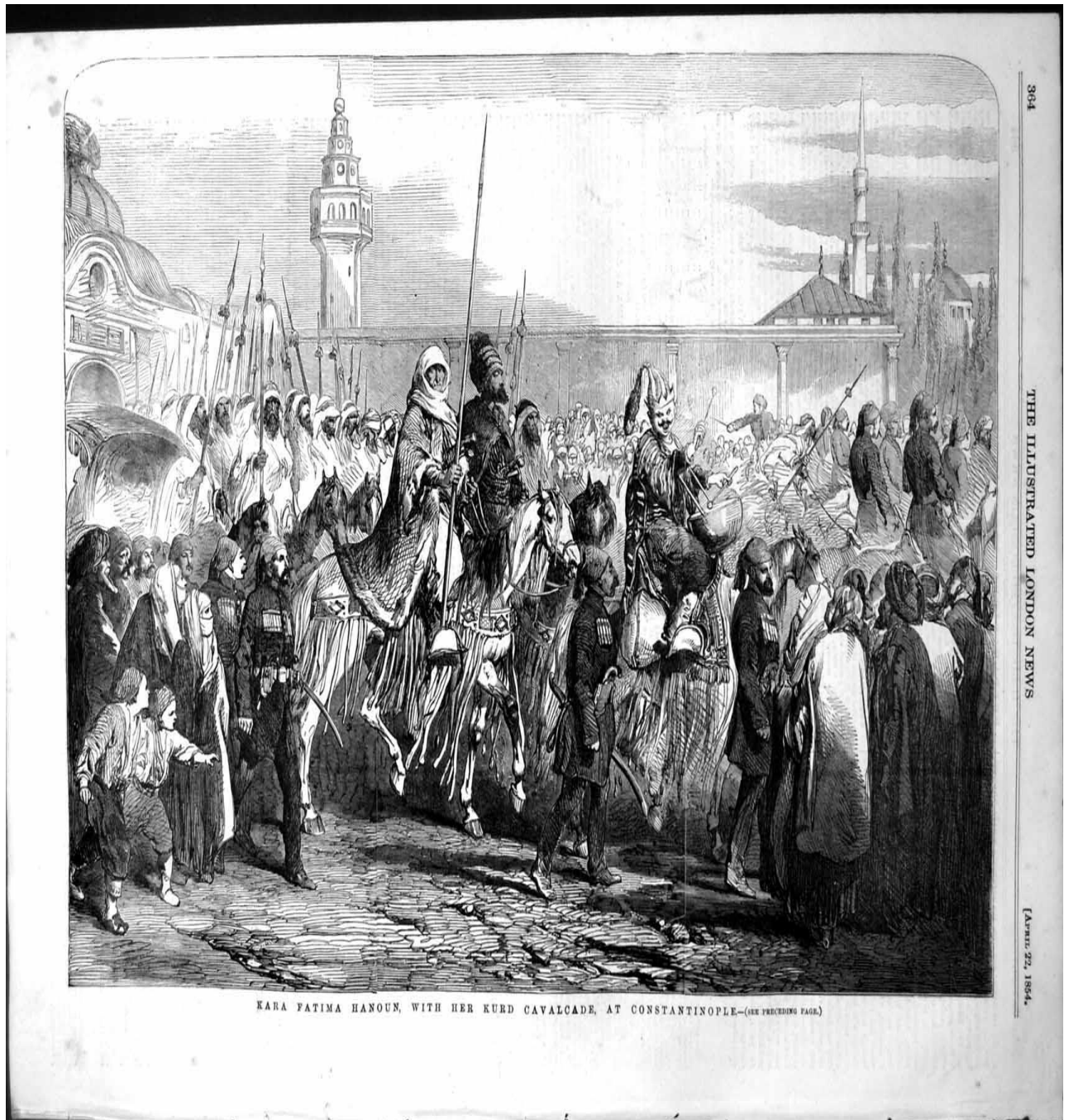


Figure 6.1: picture of Kurdish female leader Kara Fatima riding through Constantinople taken from the article in *The Illustrated London News*, 22 April 1854.

The article observes that she is depicted in the picture as wearing

a very dirty pelisse, with broad sleeves, dirty white trousers and yellow boots, long pistol and a yataghan in her girdle, and in her hand, a lance bearing as a pennant a darkish rag. Her head-dress was a long piece of white linen, wrapped all over and round the neck, but leaving the entire face visible. She wore no jewellery. Her charger, like those of her attendant cavalcade, was a sort of lean and ungroomed animal, of little blood, but with long flowing mane and tail, and the bony head and inverted and curved neck, which is characteristic of the Kurdistan steeds.⁶⁷

In this description, Kara Fatima was presented as an exotic woman, starkly opposed to the traditional British female norms, in large part because she wore dirty clothes, did not wear jewellery, and carried a pistol and lance, like a man. However, it is possible that this depiction was meant to convey the fact that she was busy with tribal issues and did not have time for ornamentation or a careful attention to clothing.

According to the British texts, another famous woman was Adela Khanum, who lived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Soane, who came to Kurdistan during the earlier years of the twentieth century, admired the power of Adela Khanum, describing her as an influential leader, as she was the wife of Othman Pasha, influential powerful chief of the Jaf tribe. Whilst a guest in their house, Soane observed that, she was unique amongst Muslim woman, as she had obtained power and was effective at using weapons.⁶⁸ However, the thing he admired most about her was her political capability and communication with her family, from whom she received advice. Therefore, her position gradually became stronger. When Othman Pasha was absent, which he frequently was as a result of journeys to Sulaymaniah, Mosul, and Kirkuk, Adela ruled and developed the town of Halabja in his place. Furthermore, Soane said that during her era, she introduced many orders and laws to the districts and valleys surrounding Halabja.⁶⁹ According to him, she ruled the tribe and its surroundings whilst her husband simply spent his time in the pursuit of leisure and smoking water-pipes. As such, it fell to Adela to build baths and deal with

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ E. B. Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan in Disguise* (London, 1912), p. 216.

⁶⁹ E. B. Soane, 'The Southern Kurd', *Journal of the Central Asian Society*, 9, part 2 (1922), pp. 44-5.

local issues, and thereby her power was strengthened.⁷⁰ Soane represented her as the real ruler of the tribe, even when her husband was present, and argued that political capability was more important than gender. Furthermore, he praised her role in improving urbanisation, noting that when she married Othman Pasha, she started to build houses according to the Sina model, employing Persian artificers and masons to build her own house in the Persian style.⁷¹ She also built a bazaar in Halabja that consisted of four rows of shops that connected with other shops via narrow streets, and thus commercial activities were revived.⁷² In addition, he reported that she improved the economic situation of the region by creating the market. Soane represented Adela as an exotic example of a Kurdish woman in the East, one who could change a faraway, small village in the Ottoman Empire into a thriving town.⁷³ But he also presented her as having the characteristics of a proper politician, working on laws and reorganising her districts.

Regarding Adela Khanum's leadership role, van Bruinessen believes that if Adela had not been a member of the high-class family of Sina, and did not have a tolerant husband it would have been difficult for her as a Kurdish woman to become a leader of the community.⁷⁴ His argument is true, but the tolerance of Kurdish males towards women, and their trust in the political capability of the opposite gender should not be underestimated, because without men's acceptance and willingness to submit to female power, Adela could not have ruled a large tribe like Jaf, and the districts around Halabja.

Military duties were part of a man's role, but travellers in Kurdistan noted that Kurdish women also possessed martial capabilities, as well as their political role, as we have seen in the case of Kara Fatima. Kurdish women would fight alongside their male counterparts. Millingen noted that 'Koordish [*sic*] women are always on the alert, ever ready to jump on the saddle'. When fighting alongside men, Millingen reported that the women could be identified by their red gowns.⁷⁵ As mentioned in Chapter 4, there were many battles between the Kurds and the Ottomans, particularly during the 1830s when the

⁷⁰ Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan*, p. 219.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Hubbard, *From Gulf to Ararat*, pp. 174-5.

⁷³ Soane, *To Mesopotamia and Kurdistan*, p. 220.

⁷⁴ Bruinessen, 'From Adela Khanum to Leyla Zana: Women as Political Leaders in Kurdish History', p. 98.

⁷⁵ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, pp. 251-2.

latter, under the leadership of Rashid Muhammad Pasha, sent an army to control the Soran Emirate and other Kurdish emirates and small dynasties.⁷⁶ For example, Brant recorded how Haji Zilal Agha, the wife of a Kurdish chief, fought beside her husband whenever their village was attacked, and assisted him by 'loading his rifles'.⁷⁷

Some Kurdish women served as guards, and the British travellers reported that their ability sometimes exceeded that of the men. Rich noted that in Baghdad, Divan Effinde (a Turkish official) had a servant who Rich had initially believed to be a man, but ultimately discovered was in fact a woman from the Bilbas tribe. He described her as the bravest soldier, an excellent horsewoman, and a very good servant, and considered she gave honour to her sex and was irreproachable in her duty. He reported that a man once attempted to dishonour her and so 'she ran him through his body saying she would do so even to her master in a like case'.⁷⁸ Rich continued to observe that she was very proud of her ability to use weapons such as the lance and guns.⁷⁹ She wore Kurdish male dress, with a poignard (dagger) at her belt and wore a silk shawl on her head, was aged between twenty-five and thirty, and had a Kurdish countenance and sunburnt face.⁸⁰ It was significant that a woman could mix with men and keep her honour and dignity, in particular at such a young age, and at the same time it was important for a woman to use weapons like, or even better than, men. As mentioned above, most Kurdish women could use some form of weaponry, but the case of the servant woman described by Rich appears to have been unusual, even amongst Kurdish women. Essentially, the British were 'othering' the people of the East, through their orientalist, ethnocentric, and exoticising tendencies. However the Kurdish people were being even more 'othered', as they were not only the Eastern 'other' but distinct within that context. They were being presented as the 'other' of the 'other'.

⁷⁶ The travellers in 1830 mentioned this, in particular Brant and Glascott, whos in their 'Notes of a Journey through Part of Kurdistan' mentioned that many places resisted the Ottoman army.

⁷⁷ Brant and Glascott, 'Notes of a Journey through a Part of Kurdistan', pp. 349-357; McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, pp. 42-47.

⁷⁸ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 285.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 285-6.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 286.

Women's clothing

Although the British were particularly interested in the independence and liberty of Kurdish women, despite orientalist preconceptions, nonetheless they were also keen to document the appearance and clothing of Kurdish women, just as they were in other areas of the Ottoman Empire and Persia. The British travellers regarded the clothes of Kurdish women as colourful and attractive. This was reflected in their writings, some of which focused on Kurdish women and their attire, as has already been discussed briefly in relation to the dirty clothing of Kara Fatima, the red gowns of the fighting Kurdish women, and the male attire adopted by the servant described by Rich. However, these examples were exceptional ones, and thus Maunsell's general illustration of Kurdish clothes is of use when considering female clothing. He observed that the most distinctive characteristic of Kurdish women was their colourful and bright clothes.⁸¹ Rich also commented on Kurdish women, in particular high-status women, who wore colourful clothing, and observed that they wore red and yellow silk.⁸² The wearing of colourful clothes could be seen as part of a long cultural tradition among the Kurds, as was the brightness of the Kurdish female dresses.

Travellers often described the headdresses worn by Kurdish women, emphasising them as an attractive part of the overall attire. Most travellers commented on the headdress, describing it to be an exotic form of clothing. Rich described the headdress as very heavy and difficult to wear, observing that 'it frequently rubs off a good deal of the hair from the top of the head'.⁸³ He added that the headdress usually consisted of a silk handkerchief or rainbow-coloured shawls, tied together, and which hung down over the shoulders.⁸⁴ He also claimed that the headdress was central to the identity of the Kurdish women, and was one of the most significant symbols of Kurdish clothing. In the late nineteenth century, Harris also noted that the Kurdish wife of an Agha wore a large turban decorated with gold, which was worth nearly £100.⁸⁵ Thus, his comment presents Kurdish women of high-ranking families as exotic and extravagant. Bird interpreted the headdress as a decorative piece of

⁸¹ Maunsell, 'Kurdistan', p. 107.

⁸² Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, pp. 180-1.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 288-9.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 288.

⁸⁵ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 237.

clothing, and described black coronets decorated with silver coins, and red cloths that were worn on the backs of the women's heads.⁸⁶ Each traveller, when mentioning the headdress of a Kurdish woman, described it as an attractive symbol that was unique to Kurdish women.

Rich claimed that Kurdish women were experts in ornamentation, and argued that specific adornments were chosen according to the season or the wealth of the wearer, and that dresses were variegated with silk and striped with gold, which came from Constantinople.⁸⁷ Rich's comments on Kurdish women are significant because he lived for a long time in Sulaymaniah, and also visited Sina in the eastern part of Kurdistan, and was therefore more familiar with Kurdish culture than many travellers. Brant similarly wanted to show that Kurdish women were decorative, and noted that in Van women would ornament themselves with Venetian glass,⁸⁸ although he did not specify whether the glass was worn on the headdress or around the neck. This comment suggests, however, that the Kurdish people were influenced by Western development, which increased gradually over the nineteenth century. Tattoos were another kind of ornamentation used by the Kurds, and Layard suggested that they were common amongst Kurdish women. He reported that the Kurdish women of the Mili tribe, who lived near the Khabur River, had heavily tattooed arms and other parts of their bodies, but less so than the Bedouin ladies.⁸⁹

The British travellers reported that Kurdish women even decorated their trousers, which Rich reported were loose and large, fastened via a belt that had two large silver or gold clasps.⁹⁰ He also observed slight differences between the trousers worn by rich women and those worn by poor women, noting that peasant women wore trousers made of coarse blue calico and shift, tied together with a belt.⁹¹ It appears that the trousers worn by Kurdish women did not change over the period under review, because Harris also described

⁸⁶ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 192.

⁸⁷ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 287.

⁸⁸ Brant and Glascott, 'Notes of a Journey through a Part of Kurdistan', p. 393.

⁸⁹ Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh*, pp. 314-15.

⁹⁰ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 287.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

towards the end of the nineteenth century a number of Kurdish peasant women in Soujbulack wearing wide trousers similar to those described by Rich.⁹²

The British travellers depicted differences between the fabrics used by different classes. Rich noted that the clothes of the high-class Kurdish women were made from silk, while the poorer Kurds used cheaper materials such as coarse calico.⁹³ Layard also commented that the high class Yazidi women wore strings of amber, coral, coins, glass, and agate around their necks, and most of their ornaments were made from coral, gold, and silver. Women from ordinary families were adorned with small silver coins, glass beads, and small pieces of metal.⁹⁴

The travellers considered the Kurds to be clannish and primitive, and thus they aimed to depict similarities between the clothing worn by Kurdish women and Scottish women, who, as mentioned earlier, were used by the British travellers as a European example of a tribal culture. Fraser, for example, when he crossed the lands around Selmas, saw some Kurdish women come to wash their clothes, and observed that they were dressed in a similar manner to the Scottish fashion, 'with bare legs to a pretty considerable height'.⁹⁵ Furthermore, Rich found similarities between the Kurdish and Scottish women, citing the chequered tcharokhia worn by the women in Penjwen as similar to the plaid of the Scottish highlanders.⁹⁶ Layard also observed that the grey or yellowish apron that Kurdish women tied around their shoulders was quite similar to the Scottish plaid. The apron fell over the silk clothes worn underneath, and was the traditional attire of the Yazidis and some Christians in the region.⁹⁷ From these comments, it appears that the travellers considered the Kurds and the Scots to be at nearly the same stage of development, using their similar clothing to justify this claim.

⁹² Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 198.

⁹³ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, pp. 287-8.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 288-9.

⁹⁵ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 49.

⁹⁶ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, pp. 180-1.

⁹⁷ Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh*, p. 86.

Travellers' observations on marriage

The British travellers normally presented marriage as part of the Islamic religion that was dominant in the region, as Kurds were Muslims and had many practices in common with other ethnicities surrounding them. The travellers nevertheless observed some differences between the Kurds and their neighbours. According to the travellers, Kurds married in the same manner as other Muslims. However, regarding the liberty of women in marriage, a small distinction was observed between Kurdish and other Muslim women. Garnett, who wrote about women in the Ottoman Empire, noted that liberty was reflected in all aspects of Kurdish women's lives, adding that a Kurdish woman had the right to choose her husband, albeit only with the approval and consent of her father, and that 'the practice of courtship is not unknown'.⁹⁸ In contrast, Hume-Griffith discussed choosing a girl for marriage in Mosul,⁹⁹ and in doing so concentrated on the parents of the boy rather than the role of the girl. In particular, she reported upon a man's mother, who apparently had a significant role in marriage arrangements because she was tasked with finding a proper wife for her son.¹⁰⁰ As such, these two travellers presented different opinions on the topic of marriage, with Garnett arguing that Kurdish women enjoyed greater freedom in Kurdistan compared with men, and Hume-Griffith suggesting that girls in cities such as Mosul lacked the right to choose a husband.

With regard to arranged marriages, Garnett observed that marriages normally occurred after the approval of both families. The Kurds' marriage reflected their Muslim faith, and always occurred in the presence of a religious man, who would accompany the relatives of the bridegroom to the bride's family, after which the religious man would marry the couple.¹⁰¹ Fredrik Barth and Sharzad Mojab believe that the need for the permission of father, brother or grandfather during the performance of the marriage is proof that Kurdish women had little liberty, because the marriage could not take place without the

⁹⁸ Garnett, *The Women of Turkey and Their Folk-Lore*, vol. 2, p. 131.

⁹⁹ However, there were many Kurds living in Mosul but Kurds mixed with other ethnicities and Mosul was a multi-cultural city.

¹⁰⁰ M. E. Hume-Griffith, *Behind the Veil in Persia and Turkish Arabia* (London, 1909), p. 245.

¹⁰¹ Garnett, *The Women of Turkey and Their Folk-Lore*, vol. 2, p. 133.

permission of close male relatives.¹⁰² However, the presence of a male relative can also be interpreted as a form of guardianship for women, more related to the demands of religion than to the subjection of women. Moreover male relatives played a passive role in elopements, a further argument for Kurdish women's liberty. Some travellers commented upon elopement as a distinct form of marriage amongst the Kurds, which was of interest to the British in large part because it was uncommon in Europe, particularly during the Victorian era. In Kurdistan, a couple would elope when a girl was not allowed to marry her lover. Rich called this 'bride theft', as it involved a man carrying off his female lover, and described it as a common and binding form of marriage among some Kurdish tribes.¹⁰³ According to Garnett, couples would decide to elope if unable to obtain consent for the marriage from the girl's father or her family.¹⁰⁴ This shows that British travellers believed that Kurdish women possessed strong enough personalities to defy their parents' wishes and marry the man they loved, rather than one chosen for them. Perhaps this trait was attributed to the concept of liberty that the travellers identified in the Kurdish women.

Despite the fact that Islam permitted a Muslim man to marry up to four wives, Garnett observed that 'Kurds are practically monogamist' and most Kurdish men had only one wife.¹⁰⁵ However there is a theory that while ordinary Kurds were monogamous some Kurdish chiefs and tribal leaders had more than one wife.¹⁰⁶ There were differences among the Kurdish people; Kurdish society should not be considered as a single entity.

The travellers depicted a romantic picture of the Kurdish wedding. During betrothal, some sweets and refreshments were provided.¹⁰⁷ Rich recorded his observations on the importance of marriage to the Kurds, presenting the marriage festival as an important occasion and stating that people of all classes and ages participated in and danced at it.¹⁰⁸ The family of the groom would arrange a big party and distribute food and sweetmeats to

¹⁰² F. Barth, *Principles of Social Organisation in Southern Kurdistan* (Oslo, 1953), p. 30; S. Mojab, 'Women in Politics and War: the Case of Kurdistan', *Working Papers*, no. 145 (Michigan State University, 1987), p. 4.

¹⁰³ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 152.

¹⁰⁴ Garnett, *The Women of Turkey and Their Folk-Lore*, vol. 2, p. 131.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁶ A. H. Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains A Narrative of an Expedition to Assyria* (London, 1867), p. 314; W. R. Hay, *Two Years in Kurdistan* (London, 1921), p. 44.

¹⁰⁷ Garnett, *The Women of Turkey and Their Folk-Lore*, vol. 2, p. 131.

¹⁰⁸ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 2, p. 282.

the bride's relatives.¹⁰⁹ Lousia Gebb who visited the region in the early twentieth century witnessed a wedding where the bride was wearing ornaments and put a feather crown on her head, the bridegroom with some friends on horseback was transferred to the bridegroom's house, and was accompanied by hundreds of 'brightly dressed' people, leading the bride with 'sound of bagpipes and flutes and the shouts and laughter' of the companions.¹¹⁰ Then in the house of the bridegroom they organised the party which would last for three days. The guests would perform the national dance, called the *chopy*, which Bird recognised as similar to the contemporary Greek dance, the *arnaoutika*.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 1, p. 356.

¹¹⁰ L. Gebb, *By Desert Ways to Baghdad* (London, 1909) p.101

¹¹¹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 1, p. 356.

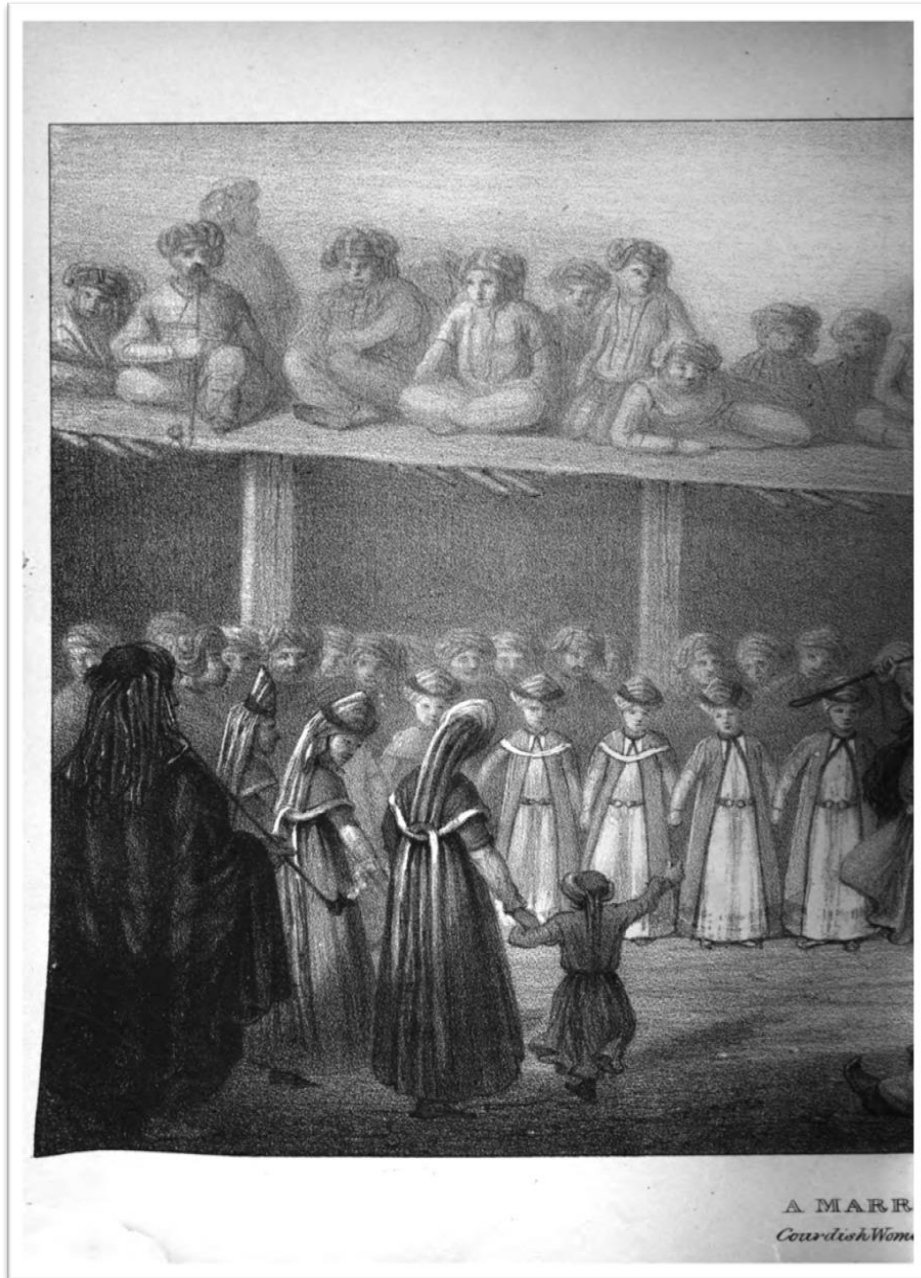


Figure 6.2: Kurds' dancing, sketched by Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p.282

Rich also depicted the wedding party performing *chopy*, and observed a resemblance to an Irish song:

Most of them [the guests] were linked by the hand in the dance called the Tchopée [*sic*], forming a ring not joined at the ends, which nearly enclosed the court-yard. These evolutions consisted in swinging to and fro with their bodies,

and marking time, first with one foot, then with the other, sometimes with good heavy stamps in a way which reminded me of the Irish song, “rising of Gad and sinking on Sukan;” While the gaiety of their hearts would occasionally manifest itself in wild shrieks.¹¹²

Rich considered that the Kurdish dance performed at weddings had deeper historical roots, suggesting that it might have derived from the remotest period of ancient history: ‘the Chopee [*sic*] (a kind of Kurdish dance) is a variety of the Greek Sirto, or Romeka, less animated and varied’.¹¹³ This comment may indicate an element of Orientalism, in that he believed that Muslims obtained their culture ‘from the Judeo-Christian, Hellenistic, and Austro-Germanic civilisations’.¹¹⁴ Thus, the British travellers often tried to find similarities between the Kurdish culture and their own or other European cultures, to corroborate their belief that the former was indebted to the latter. Examples such as this indicate the British travellers’ propensity to impose their own cultures or pre-existing knowledge on the Kurdish people they encountered.

Conclusion

In conclusion, travellers presented many positive features of Kurdish women, and considered that they had more liberty than other Muslim females. They believed that Kurdish women had leadership qualities, and they could govern their society. This position has been criticised by recent scholars like Mojab, and Bruinessen, as they considered that only women from ruling families were allowed to become leaders of their communities. It is true that all Kurdish female leaders came from ruling families, but female leadership is not the sole criterion for judging the liberty of Kurdish women. Many other aspects of society were highlighted by travellers which show that Kurdish women enjoyed more liberty than other women in neighbouring societies. As travellers showed, Kurdish women had access to political power, with some of them having an active role, for example, in

¹¹² Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 282.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 287; Garnett, *The Women of Turkey and Their Folk-Lore*, vol. 2, pp. 132-3.

¹¹⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 304.

maintaining the peace and harmony of the community, by ending disputes or even feuds caused and perpetuated by men. They played an important role in discussing their tribe's affairs. In the twentieth century, and even now some Kurdish women continue to retain their political and military roles in society, in particular among PKK, the Kurds of Turkey, and YPG, the Kurds of Syria. Then, the fact that women mix with men, and even welcome foreigners can be considered as an important point and proof that Kurdish women enjoy a great amount of liberty.

However, it is important to remember that besides what travellers found on the ground, their beliefs were based on preconceived notions shaped by their own understanding of European history, and in particular their belief in the greater liberty allowed to women in primitive societies. Thus, they applied these perspectives to Kurdish women, and assessed them in relation to the liberty enjoyed by Turkish, Persian and Arab women. Therefore, it is possible that travellers might have exaggerated in praising the liberty of Kurdish women, as they did in describing the nationalist feeling of Kurds. For that reason, when they saw the freedom of Kurdish women in specific places they assumed that this applied to the whole country, or they could not distinguish the level of freedom among women of different classes. Cultural and linguistic barriers, and the short time which they spent in the country, prevented the travellers from understanding Kurdish society properly, including the position of women. Finally, besides focusing on cultural aspects of Kurdish society, the British travellers also concentrated on the economic aspects of Kurdistan, the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 7 Economy of Kurdistan in the Nineteenth Century

Introduction

This chapter analyses how the British travellers assessed the relevance of Kurdistan to British economic strategy. In order to do so, it is important to discuss the reasons behind the British interests in the region at the time. The chapter will analyse how these interests were reflected in the travellers' accounts. In particular, travellers tended to highlight the main overland routes that crossed the country, as well as recording the important commercial centres, cities, and towns, in order to show the connections between other regions in Asia Minor, because at the time the Asia Minor was an important market for British products. They also highlighted some Kurdish cities and towns as markets for selling their products. They tried to document the extent of British products' popularity and competition between their products and those of other countries. Furthermore, most of the travellers in the second half of the century focused on the small industries within Kurdistan, particularly the urban centres where a few small factories were located, perhaps with the aim of understanding what kinds of product might be produced there to encourage the merchants of their country to supply these products to Kurdistan. At the time it was easy for cheap British products to compete with the local Kurdish products. The travellers came from an industrial country, therefore they keen to investigate the mineral sources in the Kurdish areas, as mines were viewed as important for improving industry. However, the most important consideration was oil, and during the later stages of the nineteenth century Kurdistan gained significance in the view of the British because it had some important oilfields. The British travellers presented their orientalist perspectives on the economic sectors in Kurdistan. Firstly, they highlighted the crucial role of Christians in developing commerce and industry in Kurdish society, to show that Christians were living in the Orient but belonged to Western society. Secondly, in their orientalist consideration, they wrote at length about undeveloped agriculture and serious impediments to the development of agriculture. However, there were also fertile lands, and abundant water for irrigation.

Regarding modern scholarship, V. Necla Geyikdagi's *Foreign Investment in the Ottoman Empire* (2011) is illuminating. Geyikdagi focuses on the Ottoman Empire as an undeveloped country in comparison with European nations, arguing that it lacked industries and that there were only a few efforts to industrialise the Empire by establishing some factories in Constantinople. He also observes that some schools were established, such as the Imperial Naval Engineering School. Necla investigated the commercial relationship between Britain and the Ottoman Empire, in particular after the signing of the 1838 agreement, which resulted in a significant increase of exports from the Ottoman Empire to Britain. In addition, as a result of that strong relationship with Britain, small industries in the Ottoman Empire began to shrink, with the textile industry being seriously affected as native products could not compete with cheap cotton products from Manchester, for example. Necla also focused on the economic problems of the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century, such as bankruptcy and loans from European countries, which in the second half of the century led to the interference of the latter during the country's time of crisis. Generally, the book discusses the interference of Europeans, particularly Britain, in the Ottoman Empire.

Sarah D. Shields' *Mosul before Iraq: Like Bees Making Five-Sided Cells* (New York, 2000) focuses on the economy of the city during the nineteenth century. She investigates its commercial relations with the European countries, as well as what kinds of European products and raw materials were used in the city, and government policy towards the small industries and their products. She used many sources such as British archival reports and a few traveller accounts, as well as secondary sources about the history of Mosul, but she did not use some of the most important sources, such as the travel narratives of F. R. Maunsell, who compiled important information about Mosul.

It is worth mentioning that there are some weaknesses to the sources, which as a result will be treated carefully. The first is that the discussions on the economy of Kurdistan at that time were not always specific to that area, as travellers often made comments about the broader context of the Middle East economy in general. Thus, studies of the economic situation of Kurdistan inside the greater Middle East are often made without reliable data

about the economic development of Kurdistan.¹ For example, Rassam claimed that there were no reliable statistics about importing and exporting in Mosul because there was no Custom House, and the books or registers of the merchants were not reliable.² This was true for all Kurdish cities and towns.

The aim of this chapter is not to discuss the whole economic system, but to focus on the British interests in the country and the travellers' observations on the economy of Kurdistan. The subsections are divided accordingly, with the first one focussing on the importance of the Kurdish territories from the British perspective, as well as the travellers' observations on trade in Kurdistan. Then, the chapter will present a discussion of the travellers' investigations into small industries and mineral wealth. After that, it will present the British travellers' perspectives on agriculture in Kurdistan.

The Importance of the Kurdish territories to the British

Great Britain had interests in all territories within the Ottoman Empire and Persia, but the geographic position of Kurdistan was considered particularly important for its strategic agenda. The British already possessed India and aimed to secure the whole Middle Eastern region also, including the Persian Gulf, north of Arabia, the mountains between Persia and Armenia (including Kurdistan), Mesopotamia, and the Syrian desert.³ Kurdistan was the heart of this region, and thus occupied a strategic position within the territory that nineteenth-century Britain wanted to secure. The British Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century effectively controlled much of the world's commerce and they had two basic policies. Firstly, to maintain their commercial superiority, Britain had to find new markets for its industrial products. Secondly, besides the policy of protectionism for domestic agriculture, they attempted to find new places to provide cheap and abundant supplies of raw material.⁴ In Kurdistan, some important provinces could be identified that

¹ R. Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy 1800-1914* (London, 1981), p. 24.

² B. P.P., HC: 1896, *Deplomatic and Consular Report on Trade and Finance Turkey, for Year 1896*, no. 196.

³ S. A. Cohen, *British Policy in Mesopotamia 1903-1914* (Reading, 1976), p. 3.

⁴ V. N. Geyikdagi, 'The Economic Views of a Nineteenth Century Ottoman Intellectual: The Relationship between International Trade and Foreign Direct Investment', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 47, no. 3 (2011), p. 536.

might provide both a market for manufactured goods and could serve as a source of raw materials.

Mesopotamia was of particular importance in the British perspectives. Kurdistan accounted for a large part of Mesopotamia, particularly the north. During the first half of the century, it occupied a significant position in the strategy of British policy brokers due to the presence of both the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, which traversed the region and thus offered a potential connection between India and the Persian Gulf. In addition, establishing a route through Mesopotamia meant that the dangerous Red Sea could be avoided, as well as the monsoon season in the southwest.⁵ Furthermore, using steam power on these rivers was preferable and easier than travelling by sea.⁶ Plans were also made by the British to construct canals from the Tigris and Euphrates, not only for navigation but for irrigation of cotton fields in the areas around the two rivers. This was at the time when the British manufacturers were seeking an alternative to the American sources of cotton due to the disruption caused by the American Civil War.⁷ For that purpose, Thomas Love Peacock, who worked for the East India Company, was sent to prepare a proposal for navigation,⁸ and Frances Chesney, a British Artillery officer, also visited the region to compare the Egyptian route with the Euphrates route in terms of navigation.⁹ Both Chesney and Ainsworth described the undertaking as one of the most important British economic projects.¹⁰ However, after working and investigating it, ultimately the navigation of the Euphrates was not a success, partly because of the insecurity of the region due to rivalries between the Arab tribes and partly because the channel of the Euphrates was very shallow, meaning it flooded easily and made passage difficult for ships.¹¹

Besides navigation, the railway was an important instrument for accomplishing British goals in Mesopotamia. After the Crimean war, Britain was afraid of Russia's influence over Mesopotamia. For that reason, Lord Salisbury, who was the Foreign

⁵ Bailey, *British Policy and the Turkish Reform*, p. 66.

⁶ Ireland, *Iraq: A Study in Political Development*, p. 44.

⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, 25 May 1861.

⁸ Searight, *The British in the Middle East*, p. 157.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Chesney and Ainsworth, 'A General Statement of the Labours and Proceedings of the Expedition to the Euphrates, under the Command of Colonel Chesney, Royal Artillery, F. R. S', p. 411.

¹¹ Searight, *The British in the Middle East*, pp. 162-163.

Secretary at the time, asserted that Britain would not accept Russia's rule over the Euphrates and Tigris.¹² In order to improve access to Mesopotamia, the British proposed a railway through the region. They were granted the concession of a railway between Syria and Iraq (Mesopotamia) in 1860 with the guarantee of six percent interest. Finally, the project failed because the House of Commons refused to underwrite the warranty and the company refused to take up the project unless the Ottomans provided more security in the area.¹³ However, the British project was not successful in establishing a railway, although British travellers in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century still hoped to do so and their writings often refer to that ambition. Maunsell said that the main problem in the region was that people could not communicate easily with profitable markets. There were insufficient people and most of the lands were depopulated and lay idle. However, he argued that if the soil were well used then production would be rapidly increased, and added that the best way to improve the country would be to establish the railway and in so doing open up better communication between Kurdistan and Europe. He observed that besides the economic profit, setting up a railway would enable people in Kurdistan to adopt western values more easily. The proposed railway would connect the Indian railway lines to the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁴ Furthermore, when investigating the oil fields in Kurdistan, Maunsell suggested establishing the railway in order to invest in the region's wealth. He considered these oil mines to be spread over a distance of 220 miles in length and 60 miles in breadth, therefore determining that a railway connecting Baghdad, Kifri, Mosul, and eventually the Mediterranean would be ideal.¹⁵ Similarly, Mark Sykes highlighted the potential of railways in Mesopotamia.¹⁶ The travellers thus demonstrated that besides profit and investment in the region, the railway would serve the British Empire's colonial interests in India.

Van and its environs also attracted the attention of the British due to its potentially strategic location and its mixed population of Kurds and Christians. In the late 1860s Millingen recommended that routes across Lake Van should be developed, largely because

¹² G. E. Kirk, *A Short History of the Middle East from the Rise of Islam to Modern Times* (Lincoln, 1961), p. 88.

¹³ R. S. Bullard, *Britain and the Middle East from the Earliest Times to 1950* (London, 1951), p. 41.

¹⁴ Maunsell, 'Eastern Turkey in Asia and Armenia', p. 239.

¹⁵ Maunsell, 'the Mesopotamian Petroleum Field', p. 532.

¹⁶ Sykes, *Dar-ul-Islam*, pp. 144-5

the lake and its surroundings were important and it would provide a convenient route from Erzurum to the Black Sea. Furthermore, such a route would connect two important markets in Van and Mush, as well as some Persian provinces, such as Selmas, Khoi, Urmia, and Tabriz, to the Black Sea. During the Turko-Russian war, Persia used that route because it was far better than the route from Bayazid and Toprackaleh, which passed near the Russian border.¹⁷ Millingen's suggestion for improving navigation in the region was thus not only to develop British economic interests, but also to compete with Russia.

From the 1880s onwards, besides political issues such as Sheikh Ubaidullah's movement and the rise of the Armenian issue, the potential economic importance of Kurdistan became evident. This was largely related to the need for more markets to sell British products in the region. In a report sent by Colonel Trotter to Earl Granville on 23rd December, 1880, the former explained the significance of the Asiatic Ottoman Empire, and he suggested it to the consuls and representatives in Kurdish places such as Erzurum, Dier, and Diyarbakir, either looking after the British interests or political situation.¹⁸

According to the British politician and traveller Curzon, by the late nineteenth century, Persian Kurdistan had become the centre of the British Empire's interests in the region. Curzon praised the commercial activities transacted between Baghdad and cities in Persian Kurdistan like Hamadan and Kermanshah. He said, 'Baghdad, in fine, falls under the category of the Gulf ports, and must be in the zone of indisputable British supremacy'.¹⁹ This comment confirms that in the later stages of the nineteenth century, the British interests in the region rapidly increased, as a result of British industrial development. As discussed in both the introduction and Chapter One, Britain and Russia competed with each other in Asia Minor throughout the nineteenth century. The economic threat of Russia was reflected in the travellers' comments.²⁰

¹⁷ Millingen, *Wild Life among Koords*, p. 143.

¹⁸ TNA: FO 881/4479, 1880, enclosure, Memorandum in a consular service in Asiatic Turkey, Smyrna, December, 1881.

¹⁹ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 2, p. 578.

²⁰ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 2, p. 567.

British travellers' observations on trade in Kurdistan

In the nineteenth century, the British were interested in maintaining commercial relations with both the Ottoman Empire and Persia. The first step was the Anglo-Ottoman commercial mercantile pact of 1838, known as the Balta Lima treaty.²¹ This pact strengthened commercial relations between both sides, allowing British merchants to buy products and raw materials in diverse parts of the Ottoman lands in exchange for paying taxes at the same rate as domestic merchants. Furthermore, there was no longer any prohibition on importing British manufactured products,²² and so the consumption of British wares increased. As a result, the local textile manufacturers could not compete with the cheap British products.²³ The British merchants also enjoyed the privilege of importing products from third countries into the Ottoman Empire, paying only five percent tax to do so. They therefore imported goods such as sugar, timber, and coffee from British colonies until the 1860s.²⁴ Great Britain also considered that it would be possible to develop interests in various Ottoman regions, one of them being Anatolia, where they wanted to promote trade particularly in raw materials such as cotton and tobacco.²⁵ In addition, they established insurance houses and banks, and consolidated their presence by establishing them through consular authorities in cities and towns.²⁶

During the nineteenth century, the British policy for expanding its commercial net was believed to be as important as protecting India.²⁷ Kurdistan had an important strategic position and many key routes passed through it, such as the road from Constantinople to Persia, and Trabzon to Persia.²⁸ Therefore, due to growth British industry the British travellers, particularly in the later stages of the nineteenth century, tried to investigate these Kurdish trade routes. This was in contrast to the travellers of the first half of the century,

²¹ R. Kasaba 'Treaties and Friendships: British Imperialism, the Ottoman Empire, and China in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of World History*, 4, no. 2 (1993), pp. 216-217.

²² Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire*, p. 70.

²³ TNA: FO 195/228, From Namrud Rassam to Stratford Canning, Mosul 26 July, 1844.

²⁴ V. N. Geyikdagi, *Foreign Investment in the Ottoman Empire: International Trade and Relations 1854-1914* (London, 2011), p. 23.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 53-55.

²⁶ Kasaba, 'Treaties and Friendship: British Imperialism', pp. 230-231.

²⁷ Cohen, *British Policy in Mesopotamia 1903-1914*, p. 5.

²⁸ O'Shea, 'The Image from the Outside', p. 71.

who had not focused particularly on economy and simply mentioned these routes in relation to their own journeys. In the 1830s, for example, Rawlinson discussed the relationship between the Christians of Mosul and those of Urmia, documenting the route that crossed some Kurdish areas and connected Mosul to Urmia via Ushni, extending on to Sidak, Rawanduz, Harrir, and Erbil.²⁹ Later travellers such as Maunsell seriously investigated the important commercial routes that crossed Kurdish areas and tied them with some important cities in Asia Minor. For example, the overland routes from Tehran and Central Persia to the Persian Gulf crossed Kurdish lands and passed through places such as Kermanshah, Hamadan, and Tak-iGirra, finally reaching ports such as Bushair.³⁰ On that route, Kermanshah was particularly important, in part because it connected important cities such as Tehran, Isfahan, Baghdad, Tabriz. Each year, approximately 100,000 Shi'ite pilgrims would travel along the road.³¹ Maunsell highlighted another important overland route that connected Baghdad with Mosul and Syria, passing through Kifri, Kirkuk, and Erbil on the way to Mosul, and following the Euphrates to Deir and some places in Syria. Another important road from Mosul crossed Rawanduz to western Persia, and the route between Mosul and Diyarbakir crossed Jazireh and Mardin. The route between Mosul and the Mediterranean crossed Alexandretta, Kharput, and Malatia,³² whereas the route from Kharput through the Euphrates valley crossed Erzinjan through the Dersim Mountains to the north-east, and then on to Erzurum.³³ These routes were important, with some European products travelling via Alexandretta and on through Mosul and Aleppo before being transferred to Azerbaijan, whilst others came via Baghdad through Sulaymaniah to Azerbaijan.³⁴ Finally, the most important overland route was the one that connected Tabriz and other parts of Persia to Turkey, which passed through Bayazid, Erzurum, and other Kurdish regions.³⁵ This was the most important route between Persia and the Ottoman Empire. From their narratives, it is clear that the British understood that their commercial endeavours in the region were reliant upon the overland routes that inevitably passed through Kurdistan.

²⁹ Rawlinson, 'Notes on a Journey from Tabriz through Persian Kurdistan', p. 23

³⁰ Maunsell, 'Eastern Turkey in Asia and Armenia', p. 237.

³¹ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 558.

³² Maunsell, 'Eastern Turkey in Asia and Armenia', p. 237.

³³ Ibid., p. 239.

³⁴ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 527.

³⁵ Maunsell, 'Eastern Turkey in Asia and Armenia', p. 227.

Apart from the various routes across the land, the British travellers highlighted the commercial centres in Kurdistan and documented the commercial activities of the Kurdish towns and cities. The British travellers of the later nineteenth century were particularly keen to find European products there, and to understand the potential capacity of these areas for the consumption of British goods.³⁶ Bird, who came to the region looking to find out about the popularity of European products, mentioned that Russian products were popular in Persian Kurdistan, and she blamed the British for not providing the region near Hamadan with their products, particularly in the later stages of the century. She indirectly tried to attract merchants to invest in Bijar near Sina, claiming that its bazaar was full of Russian products. In a house in Bijar, many Russian products could be seen such as clocks, watches, framed ‘knick-knacks’, and ornamented recesses and tables. She reported that the British products were popular among the native people there, and the locals complained that ‘The English do not try to suit our taste as the Russians do’.³⁷ Bird as a female traveller concentrated on particular products in bazaars, namely the home necessities, which differentiated her from her male counterparts. She also attempted to encourage the British to establish commercial relations with Kurdistan, because she recognised the demand for modern products in the consumption of Russian supplies.

By comparing their comments throughout the nineteenth century, it is clear that the European commercial relationship with some cities in Kurdistan developed and expanded over the course of the nineteenth century. Van’s commercial situation changed, as in the first half of the century there was little trade there, and the number of European manufacturers was insignificant.³⁸ According to Bird, over time, however, Van became more popular with Europeans, particularly the British. In the 1890s, Isabella Bird noted that the bazaar was full of European products, in particular Manchester cottons produced in an oriental style.³⁹ She reported that Van’s commercial relations with Europe had improved over the previous fifty years, because while in the past only Venetian beads had been imported from Europe, now trade had improved and the Armenians had increased their

³⁶ H. Suter, ‘Notes on a Journey from Erz-Rúm to Trebizond, by Way of Shebb-Kháneh, Qará Hışár, Sívás, Tókát, and Şámşún, in October’, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 10 (1840), pp. 436, 439, 443

³⁷ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 181-182.

³⁸ Brant and Glascott, ‘Notes of a Journey through a Part of Kurdistan’ p. 396.

³⁹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 1, p. 102.

enterprises. Many new articles were imported from Europe, including luxuries such as 'Peek and Frean's biscuits, Moir's and Crosse and Blackwell's tinned meats and jams, English patent medicine, Coats' swing cotton, Belfast linens, Berlin wools, Jaeger vests and all sorts of material, both cotton and woollen abound'. In Van, European products were consumed more than in other cities and towns in the area.⁴⁰ The growth in commercial activities was probably related to the growth of industrial manufacture in Europe, as western merchants actively came to the area in search of new markets in which to sell their products.

Erzurum was also identified as a significant Kurdish city that had good commercial relations with other areas.⁴¹ Externally it became the centre of commercial relations between the port of Trabzon, as Europeans brought articles through it and Persia through Trabzon to Europe. Another important aspect of the situation was related to the strategic route that connected Persia with Trabzon in the later stages of the nineteenth century, when the city became an important centre. Many European products were transported through Trabzon to Persia, and the majority of products were British.⁴² Bird was curious to find out about commerce in Erzurum, noting that the Customs House was visible from her room. On one day she counted seven hundred camels arriving with their loads from Erzurum, and observed that the traffic between Tabriz and Trabzon consisted of woollens from Manchester, calico, and sugar.⁴³ In addition, the British Acting-Consul Massy suggested in 1899 that both import and export had increased during the period between 1896 and 1898. There were some raw materials considered important by the Britain such as linseed, furs, and skins (foxes, bears, and wolves) that were easily obtained. At that time, however, British imports in the area had increased by 16 percent, but Massy suggested that British commercial relations still needed to be more developed. He considered the area to be extremely important, and that if any problems occurred then the trade in that area would in all likelihood die out. Therefore, he suggested that Britain should develop a direct and

⁴⁰ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 339.

⁴¹ Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 249.

⁴² Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 388.

⁴³ B. P. P., HC: 1891, *Reports from H.M. Diplomatic and Consular Officers Abroad on Trade and Finance*, no. 878 (London, 1890-91), no. 930, p. 2.

strong commercial relationship via the establishment of a central commercial agency in Constantinople.⁴⁴

From these comments, it appears that the British commercial relationship with these regions via Erzurum gradually increased, as from the 1830s to 1890s they sent their products and raw materials to the region. Curzon noted in 1830 that of 26 European vessels, only one of them was English, and in 1832 there were 42 European vessels and only two of them were English. However, gradually the situation changed as a result of the efforts of the English consul in Tabriz and the English commercial agent in Erzurum. The British commercial relationship increased, and at the very end of the nineteenth century no less than £900,000 worth of British products were moved from Trabzon to Persia.⁴⁵

In southern Kurdistan, the British travellers highlighted a small but important town called Khanaqin. What was of particular interest about the place was its important location in the eyes of the British, as it was situated on the border between Persia and the Ottoman Empire. James Felix Jones, who visited Kurdistan in 1844, said that Khanaqin was the border town between the Ottomans and Persia, and thus occupied the most important position. Most of the influential merchants of Kermanshah and Baghdad travelled there, and there were many agents in Khanaqin and the nearby village of Haji-Kara. Jones reported that an English merchant named Mr. H accompanied him to Khanaqin to build an agency there, with the goal of exchanging English products for Kurdish mountain products, such as galls, gums, and other kinds of drug. For Jones, the importance of Khanaqin was that the trade there was profitable, and he observed that the place just needed an honest agent.⁴⁶ In making that comment, he indirectly encouraged the British to develop commercial relationships with the region. The town remained significant throughout the century. In the 1890s for example, Harris also supported it, noting as others had done before that it was situated between Baghdad and Persia, and thus served as ‘the customs and quarantine station of all traffic of the highroad between Persia and Baghdad’.⁴⁷ According to Curzon, nearly 25,000 mules annually were sent through Khanaqin from

⁴⁴ B. P. P., H C: 1899, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports. Turkey. Report for the year 1898 on the trade of Erzeroum. Reference to previous report, London, Annual Series no. 2233*, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁵ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 2, p. 564.

⁴⁶ Jones, *Memoirs of Baghdad, Kurdistan and Turkish Arabia, 1857*, p. 145.

⁴⁷ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 285.

Baghdad to Persia, and he estimated there to be about 700-800 loads of European cotton and woollen products per annum.⁴⁸

Kermanshah was another important commercial town upon which the British travellers reported, and which was on the high road between Persia and Baghdad.⁴⁹ A huge amount of trade went through this city, but by the 1890s commercial activity had significantly decreased. However, the long caravans of horses or mules continued to pass through the town, and Shi'ite pilgrims journeyed through on their way to Karbala, the holy shrine. Harris reported that the reason behind the reduction of commercial activity in Kermanshah was because Persia had changed the direction of its commercial routes, choosing to trade through Isfahan or Trabzon while trade with the Gulf went via the Karun River instead of Kermanshah.⁵⁰ However, Kermanshah did not lose its commercial position in the nineteenth century, and Maunsell noted in the 1890s that the city was the site of commercial activities involving the British agent, Muhammad Agha Hassan, a native of the city who had a role in developing commercial activities by renewing some caravansaries.⁵¹

According to the travellers, Mosul was one of the most important cities in the region. Besides its historical significance, it occupied a strategic position and was important for Britain. It was the capital of the Vilayet, offered the best route between Kharput, Sivas, and the Black Sea, via Diyarbakir,⁵² and most importantly connected India with the Mediterranean. Maunsell therefore proposed constructing a railway, which would increase the importance of the city and connect the West to the East more effectively.⁵³ The travellers saw Mosul as an important commercial centre, because raw materials from different districts could be bought there and then sent to Alexandretta port, and it was also an important place for the distribution of British products to Persia.⁵⁴

Finally, the British travellers and agents were also increasingly interested in commercial activities and the economic importance of the region. The travellers' comments

⁴⁸ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 2, pp. 577

⁴⁹ B. P. P., HC: 1899, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports. Persia. Report for the years 1897-98 and 1898-99 on the trade*, no.2260, p. 15

⁵⁰ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 253.

⁵¹ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 237-8

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Ainsworth, *Travel and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, vol. 2, p. 127.

help us to obtain information about the commercial network, which existed within the region, during the nineteenth century. Furthermore, it shows that these Kurdish centres were developed as a result of commercial activities, although they were often considered as under-developed and rural areas.

British observations on industry

The British travellers observed and documented the small industries in Kurdistan, and part of their curiosity about the nature of these industries was in order to provide their readers with information about the countries they visited. It would have been important for them to understand the needs of the various regional people in order to encourage their own merchants to provide the required products. Many small industrial centres could be seen in the cities and towns of the Middle East in the nineteenth century, and they tended to produce two kinds of product in particular. Firstly, they produced the items required for daily life in the city, such as furniture, pottery, and textiles. Secondly, they produced articles for export to other cities, which required skill and craftsmanship, such as muslins in Mosul and damask in Damascus.⁵⁵ Kurdistan had many craftsmen and small industries, and the British travellers particularly highlighted the production of Kurdish textiles, carpets, and weapons.

As discussed in the previous section, most of the British exports were textiles, and therefore the travellers were keen to understand Kurdish textile production as well. Taylor noted that the Kurds were self-sufficient in textiles and clothes. They produced cloth from their native cotton, the shallee from mohair, and also short woollen gowns in a variety of colours and textures, which demonstrated the ability of the Kurdish artisans.⁵⁶ The British travellers observed that Kurds exported native textiles to the regional cities across the Ottoman empire. During the early nineteenth century, Kinneir observed the small textile industries in Kurdish towns, reporting that Diyarbakir manufactured silk and cotton and

⁵⁵ Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy*, p. 45.

⁵⁶ Taylor, 'Travel in Kurdistan', p. 57.

exported these products to Constantinople and Baghdad.⁵⁷ Van was also an important area of the textile industry, and produced *Van-abasi-viz* (Van clothes), which were made from goat hair and were popular in Constantinople, where the Pashas would order some pieces.⁵⁸ The travellers observed another centre for the textile industry in Kurdistan, which was Bitlis. Brant reported that in Bitlis, cotton cloth was produced, dyed, and then exported, and documented that short heavy calicoes were widespread.⁵⁹ The importance of Bitlis was later confirmed by Bird during her travels through Kurdistan as noted above. The travellers often highlighted that the cloth manufactured in Kurdish areas was cheap and of a quality good enough to be popular in the regional cities.

The most important textile for the British travellers, however, was the Kurdish carpet, which was considered to be the best in Persia, according to Hume-Griffith, a British traveller. During her visit to Persia and Kurdistan, she noted that in Persia there were many industries, but the most attractive one, to the extent that even the European manufacturers could not compete with it, was the Kurdish carpet:

It is generally acknowledged that the Kurdistan carpets are the best: they are most expensive, being about £3 the square yard. The chief attraction of these lies in the fact that they are alike on both sides, and are very smooth and fine.⁶⁰

She not only considered the Kurdish carpets to be the best but also noted that they were the most expensive. This was because they were made of silk, which cost £500 to £1000, and which was appropriate for the European market.⁶¹ Although many kinds of carpets were produced, one of the most famous Kurdish carpets was the *Mhuajir*, which was woven from mohair, silk, and camel wool.⁶² Another good quality Kurdish carpet, known as the *Karagozlu*, was produced in Hamadan.⁶³

⁵⁷ Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire*, p. 334.

⁵⁸ Millingen, *Wild Life among the Koords*, p. 154.

⁵⁹ Brant and Glascott, 'Notes of a Journey through a Part of Kurdistan' p. 383; Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 351.

⁶⁰ Hume-Griffith, *Behind the Veil in Persia and Turkish Arabia*, p. 43.

⁶¹ W. Buller, 'Oriental Carpets', *The Art Journal*, May 1882, p. 141.

⁶² F. S. 'A Feast of Carpets', *The Academy and Literature*, 30 December 1911, pp. 836-7.

⁶³ B. P.P. HC. Diplomatic and Consular Reports, Persia Reports for 1903-04, p. 45.

Due to the quality of the carpets produced in the Kurdish regions, they became popular in the regional cities and were even sent to Europe. Bell highlighted the features of Kurdish carpets around Erzurum, observing that they were strong and durable, being designed to be passed down through several generations, and were produced using coarse wool from the local fat-tailed sheep.⁶⁴ In particular, carpets that were produced in Bitlis were ‘of a rich soft texture, the patterns displaying considerable elegance and taste: they are much esteemed in Turkey’.⁶⁵ Curzon reported that huge quantities of carpets were woven in Persian Kurdistan, in Kermanshah and its neighbouring areas, and that the ones that were sent to Constantinople were primarily produced by women of the nomadic Kurdish tribes.⁶⁶ In Hamadan, there were two famous districts for making carpets, Sardarud and Mehraban, both of which produced high quality carpets that were exported via Tabriz and Constantinople to Europe.⁶⁷ The British reported not only on the manufacture of Kurdish carpets but also on their export, documenting that they were sent to many places, particularly London and Egypt.⁶⁸ The British press even reported that Kurdish carpets were used at the coronation of the Czar in Moscow.⁶⁹

Oriental carpets such as those produced in Kurdistan became more popular in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century. Wentworth Buller (1850-1917) wrote an article in 1882 in which he stated that nearly twenty years before writing, the Persian carpets were sold in only one or two shops in London but that the situation had changed as their popularity had increased. He continued to note that the oriental carpets had gradually become more popular in Western Europe,⁷⁰ in 1899, the *Illustrated London News* advertised 2,500 Persian Kurdish carpets that were very cheap and wear-resistant,⁷¹ indicating that the production of Kurdish carpets had increased in the late nineteenth century.

⁶⁴ Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, pp. 220-221.

⁶⁵ Layard, *Discoveries in the Ruins of Nineveh and Babylon*, vol. 1, p. 36.

⁶⁶ Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question*, vol. 1, p. 558.

⁶⁷ B. P.P., HC: 1904, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports, Persia Reports for 1903-04 on the Trade of Kermanshah and Districts*, no. 3189 Annual Series, p. 45.

⁶⁸ B. P. P., HC: 1894, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports on Trade and Finance. Turkey. Report for the year 1893 on the trade of Baghdad and Bussorah. Reference to previous report*, no. 1424, p. 4.

⁶⁹ ‘The Czar’s Coronation. Arrival of Royal Guests’, *The Standard*, May 22, 1883, issue 18360m, p. 5.

⁷⁰ Buller, ‘Oriental Carpets’, p. 141.

⁷¹ *Illustrated London News*, May 13 1899.

The British sought to understand the ways of producing Kurdish carpets. They observed that Kurdish carpets were normally dyed with natural tints, and the weavers tended to be women who worked in tents. Using hair from goats, camels, and sheep, they could produce nearly twenty different natural colours from the un-dyed hair alone, with sheep in particular providing lustrous brown and yellow wool. Kurdish carpets were made from fleece that was ‘peculiarly fine and soft’,⁷² and some had blue, red, and yellow on the black background.⁷³ Buller admired the oriental carpets and argued that the English-speaking peoples utilised carpets more than other nations. Therefore, when the English people tried to weave their domestic carpets in the Persian and Kurdish style, they required the same raw materials and thus there was a demand for goat hair from Persia, Asia Minor, and Central Asia,⁷⁴ including Kurdistan.

As discussed, the Kurdish carpets gradually became popular among English people, and this popularity was even reflected in English literature. For example, in the short story entitled ‘The Dead Hand’ in the *North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, a room is described as decorated in the following manner: ‘He paced up and down the room on the slot Kurdish carpets with which the floor was entirely covered’.⁷⁵ Thus, the Kurdish carpet’s popularity began to have an impact on English society, and became a familiar image to the majority of the population.

Finally, the British travellers aimed to highlight the small industries in the region because they were interested in understanding them. They also wanted to attract the attention of British readers, who were interested to know more about Kurdish carpets and how these valuable rugs and carpets were made, in villages and tents.

Weapons were one of the small industries discussed by the British travellers to Kurdistan. As outlined in Chapter 4, the British travellers saw Kurds as a martial race, and they therefore wanted to know about the popularity of certain types of weapons and rifles, in order to provide merchants with relevant information. They observed that many kinds of weapons were produced by local small factories, and noted that the Kurds in particular

⁷² ‘Eastern Carpets’, *Saturday Review*, August 26, 1882, p. 290.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Buller, ‘Oriental Carpets’, p. 143.

⁷⁵ ‘The Dead Hand’, *The North-Eastern Daily Gazette*, December 31, 1895.

reproduced British weapons. Bell highlighted that in the southern part of Kurdistan, there were gunsmiths who could produce Kurdish rifles, Winchesters, and Martinis as well as daggers and knives.⁷⁶ When visiting Bana, Harris observed that gunsmiths could produce excellent Martini rifles from raw iron bought in Russia. He estimated that the price of each Martini rifle was about £4. Furthermore, they could reproduce Prussian brands exactly. He continued to describe them by saying that the Martinis had one or two barrels, and were excellent when shooting at distances of up to 400 yards.⁷⁷ Similarly, Sykes observed home-made weapons when travelling from Baghdad to Mosul. He noted that these weapons were made in Sulaymaniah, and expressed surprise that the Kurds were able to make these rifles. He revealed an orientalist perspective when he observed that ‘the eastern mind appears in the sighting’. He was further surprised when he saw 10-20 English Martini-Henry rifles produced each day in a small factory in Sulaymaniah, where American style Peabody-Martini and Russian Berdan rifles were also made.⁷⁸ Travellers showed that martial aspiration encouraged Kurds to accurately imitate the good brands of weapons at the time. They identified which kinds of weapons were popular among Kurds in order to encourage British merchants to provide them.

British observations on mineral wealth

The British travellers came to Kurdistan from an industrial country, and planned to invest in new areas and so searched for oil wells in order to show the potentiality of the country for future industry. This goal led them to search for mineral sources in Kurdistan. The eastern region was generally seen as lacking significant investment potential, and therefore most of the mines remained untouched, in particular the oil fields. One of the most important natural resources in Kurdistan was oil, a fact which the British had been aware of for a long time. The first travellers to mention it were Robert Ker Porter and Rich, who observed that naphtha was extracted by mining when they were passing from Kifri to

⁷⁶ Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 255.

⁷⁷ Harris, *From Batum to Baghdad*, p. 232.

⁷⁸ Sykes, *Through Five Turkish Provinces*, pp. 56-7

Sulaymaniah.⁷⁹ Some years later, the presence of oil in Kirkuk was mentioned by Ainsworth.⁸⁰ Then, towards the end of the century, the value of oil became increasingly apparent, and the European powers began to compete with each other to obtain the privilege of owning the oil reserves of Mesopotamia.⁸¹ Thus, the British politician and traveller Maunsell followed the footsteps of the previous travellers (particularly Rich) in a quest to discover oil, and commenced a special journey to identify all the oil fields in Kurdistan. He searched intensively for oil in southern Kurdistan, and accurately identified many major oil fields between Mosul and Peshti-Kuh,⁸² and southeast of Mosul, beside the Tigris River at Kirkuk, Kifri, Salahia, Tuz Khurmatu, and Hamam Ali, Mandali, and El Fatha and to the north-east of Lake Van.⁸³ He deemed the oil fields in southern Kurdistan, from Mosul to Peshti-Kuh particularly important because not only were they numerous and well supplied with oil, but they were also near each other. At the end of his report, Maunsell highlighted three important recommendations. Firstly, he raised the importance of finding a way to transfer oil from Mosul to the Mediterranean. Secondly, the Ottoman Empire's political troubles gave the British an opportunity to obtain concessions to invest in that valuable resource. Finally, he emphasised that investment in oil represented the region's most profitable trade.⁸⁴ Although these oil fields remained untouched in the nineteenth century, due to having such an enormous amount of oil in the aftermath of the First World War, the British decided to keep southern Kurdistan under its mandate in order to control the oil there. The travellers' accounts of the nineteenth century played a crucial role in the decision of the British policymakers in Kurdistan because they showed that there was an abundance of oil.

Oil was not the only mineral resource that attracted the notice of British travellers. Coal was another significant energy source that was of interest to the British in the

⁷⁹ Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Russia, Armenia*, p. 440; Rich, *Narrative of a Residence of Koordistan*, vol. 1, pp. 27-8.

⁸⁰ Ainsworth, *Travel and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, vol. 2, p. 200.

⁸¹ C. Eroğlu, Babuçoğlu, Murat, Özil, Orhan (eds.), *Mosul in the Ottoman Vilayet Salnames, translated by Ümit İldan* (Ankara, 2012), p. 11.

⁸² Rich, *Narrative of a Residence of Koordistan*, vol. 2, pp. 136, 227; Maunsell, 'The Mesopotamian Petroleum Field', p. 528.

⁸³ B. P. P., H. C: 1899, *Diplomatic and Consular Reports. Turkey Report for the year 1898 on the trade of Erzerum, Annual Series*, no. 2233, p. 13.

⁸⁴ Maunsell, 'The Mesopotamian Petroleum Field', p. 532.

nineteenth century and was found by Taylor near Dersim,⁸⁵ and other places in Kurdistan. Maunsell and Bell both identified many coal mines in the district of Nurdúz near Van.⁸⁶ In addition, Maunsell noted the presence of coal near Zakho, Rawanduz, Sivas, Hakkary, and the mountain of Mozur Dagħ.⁸⁷ In the Hartoshi Mountains and around the great Zab, abundant amounts of sulphur and sulphurated hydrogen were located.⁸⁸ Carbonate of potash could be found near Bitlis, and was gathered as a cake that could be used instead of soap.⁸⁹ Kinneir investigated an abundant amount of iron and copper around Mardin,⁹⁰ with the latter also being found in Hakkary.⁹¹ In addition, precious metals such as gold and silver were also found there.⁹² Mignan identified many mines in Kurdistan, but particularly near Urmia, where he found the mines of argentiferous and auriferous rocks, and around these mines there were also stones containing alabaster and variegated marble. Besides these, the British also found mines of iron, coal, gypsum, and white calcareous rocks, with ‘pumice and whetstone’.⁹³

To sum up, these British travellers in Kurdistan like their other counterparts searched for unexplored mines and resources in the regions which they visited, and aimed to attract the attention of their investors or politicians by highlighting some important mines in Kurdistan. In particular, in the nineteenth century there was rivalry and competition between the powerful countries including Britain, over having investment and leverage in Asia Minor.

⁸⁵ Taylor, ‘Journal of a Tour in Armenia, Kurdistan, and Upper Mesopotamia, with Notes of Researches in the Deyrsim Dagħ, in 1866’, pp. 306, 335.

⁸⁶ Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia* p. 226; Maunsell, ‘Kurdistan’, p. 85.

⁸⁷ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 102, 104, 155, Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 249.

⁸⁸ Maunsell, ‘Kurdistan’, p. 84.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire*, pp. 335-6.

⁹¹ Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 249.

⁹² Kinneir, *A Geographical Memoir of the Persian Empire*, pp. 335-6.

⁹³ Mignan, *A Winter Journey through Russia the Caucasian Alps and Georgia*, p. 212; Maunsell, ‘The Mesopotamian Petroleum Field’, pp. 528-32

The economic role of the Christians

Edward Said claimed that the Europeans considered Christians in the East were different from the Oriental people and culturally had more in common with the West. Said exemplified Nöldeke's views when he discussed Greece, showing a 'positive dislike to the Orient'.⁹⁴ The British travellers who came to Kurdistan showed Christians in a positive way, and demonstrated that they had a significant economic role different from Muslims. The economic role of the Christians in Kurdistan was highlighted by the British travellers.⁹⁵ Whilst they were presented as a small minority, they nevertheless played an important role in commerce. The travellers often focused on the Christians' economic role in Muslim society, and highlighted their commercial and industrial activities within it. Ainsworth praised the role of Christians in Sivas and observed that the Romish Chaldean merchants had a vital role in bringing the European products to Rawanduz and its environs, where they exchanged them for raw materials such as tobacco, skins, gall, and other things.⁹⁶ Similarly, Millingen claimed that the Christian Armenians of Van were well known for their experience in commerce, playing an important role in developing trade and importing new products.⁹⁷ Bird observed that there were few Armenians in Erzurum, but that those living there had an impact on commerce because most of them were traders.⁹⁸ Bell also discussed the Armenians in Erzurum, noting that most of the trade was performed by them, and that most of their commercial relations were with Persia, where the trade was chiefly in British manufactured goods.⁹⁹ Individual Christian merchants were also mentioned by the British travellers, including Maunsell, who observed that in Rawanduz there was a Protestant merchant named Tumao who was active in commercial activities between Rawanduz and Urmia, and who was also helpful to the Christian missionaries.¹⁰⁰ The most significant merchant in Mosul was a Christian named Abdul Hadr Shkur, and his three brothers were agents of the British company Messrs Lynch and Brothers, which had a

⁹⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 209.

⁹⁵ V. Pollington, 'Notes on a Journey from Erz-Rúm, by Músh, Diyár-Bekr, and Bíreh-jik, to Aleppo, in June, 1838', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 10 (1840), p. 447.

⁹⁶ Ainsworth, *Travel and Research in Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Chaldea and Armenia*, vol. 2, pp. 12, 321.

⁹⁷ Millingen, *Wild Life among Koords*, p. 267; Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 340.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

⁹⁹ Bell, *Turkey in Asia and Persia*, p. 124.

¹⁰⁰ Maunsell, *Reconnaissances in Mesopotamia, Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 96.

branch in Baghdad.¹⁰¹ The British travellers thus argued that the Christians, particularly the Armenians, were important and more productive than Muslims.

The British travellers also focused on the Christians' role in the small industries. Some of the Christians living in Kurdish towns and cities were craftsmen, with Millingen asserting that most of the craftsmen in Van were Armenians, with occupations including silversmith, shoes-maker, blacksmith, and tailor.¹⁰² Bird noted that in Van the Armenian tailors had American sewing machines and sewed with Yorkshire cloth,¹⁰³ thus revealing that the area was developed and used modern products. Sewing was particularly advanced, because in the past the people in the area had used traditional methods. The Armenians thus had a significant role in the improvement of commerce in Van, and the introduction of modern instruments in the region.

British travellers' observations on agriculture

The British travellers in Kurdistan often discussed the undeveloped agricultural system in Kurdistan. While, when they accurately highlighted the lack of agriculture, they also revealed their Orientalist perspective. Furthermore, as the improvement of agriculture was directly related to the political system of the country, through criticising the undeveloped system of cultivation, they criticised the Persian and the Ottoman Empires. In addition, they discussed crops, as they wanted to encourage the British to invest in cash crops there, and import their country's necessities from Kurdistan. At the same time, however, they investigated the putative backwardness of Kurdish agriculture and the problems that impeded agricultural development. They highlighted the simple method of cultivation to be found in Kurdistan. For example, when Fraser described agricultural practice at Deeza-Khalil, a village near Tabriz, he compared it to English methods, which he argued would be more productive.¹⁰⁴ The farmers did not generally use manure as a fertiliser, except in specific types of cultivation such as when growing cucumbers and melons. They collected

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁰² Millingen, *Wild Life among Koords*, p. 267.

¹⁰³ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, pp. 339-340.

¹⁰⁴ Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 45.

dung as a fuel for winter rather than using it to nourish their plants.¹⁰⁵ Instead of using manure, the land was left fallow for several years in order to maintain its fertility.¹⁰⁶ This meant the number of products was reduced.

The travellers showed that the undeveloped irrigation system meant that the lands remained unproductive. Rich observed that nearly all of the cultivation in Kurdistan depended on rainwater, as the Kurds had not developed irrigation systems.¹⁰⁷ The lands could therefore only be cultivated during the rainy season, and in summer or late spring most of the land was abandoned. Taylor visited Kurdistan in the 1860s, nearly 40 years after Rich, and by this point the Kurds had developed an irrigation system. However, Taylor reported that it was not an efficient artificial system, and considered it as an impediment to the development of cultivation. For example, although people in Nusaybin used their river to irrigate their cotton and rice fields the streams were neglected and a great deal of water was wasted creating marshy swamps that spread harmful diseases.¹⁰⁸ Bird argued that due to the inappropriate system, the abundant water and fertile soil was underexploited. She said the plain of Gawar (near Hakkary) was fertile because it had plentiful water for irrigation and fertile black soil, but was less productive than it could be, and suggested that the land had the potential to produce harvests up to thirty percent greater than existing yields.¹⁰⁹

Another problem highlighted by Maunsell was the poor system of communication. He noted that the plain around Van was fertile and prolific, with an abundant amount of grain, but one of the most difficult problems of the area was the lack of a communication system, which inhibited the growth of agriculture in the region.¹¹⁰ Maunsell reported that Van was famous for its cultivation, but it had problems when attempting to transport grain out of the region, which meant produce often decayed before it could be shipped elsewhere, and often markets could not be found. Therefore, the areas were gradually depopulated because their agriculture was not economically productive. Maunsell accordingly

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Rich, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan*, vol. 1, p. 134.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 56.

¹⁰⁸ Taylor, 'Travel in Kurdistan', pp. 53-54.

¹⁰⁹ Bird, *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, vol. 2, p. 275.

¹¹⁰ Maunsell, 'Kurdistan', p. 84.

recommended the construction of a railway and road system, which would enable the Kurdish producers to connect with both India and the Mediterranean.¹¹¹

The lack of labour was also identified as another impediment to agricultural development. Again, Fraser said that as a result of bad governance, the population of Shnow (a small town in Persian Kurdistan) decreased rapidly as cultivation decreased.¹¹² Maunsell discussed the limitation of agriculture in Sherazur, which was a fertile, well-watered, and large plain nearly eight miles broad and thirty miles long, situated near Sulaymaniah. He noted that whilst it had abundant water and was very fertile, only a few people were involved in its cultivation, because most people did not want to waste their efforts, especially since most of their income went to the Ottoman tax collectors.¹¹³ Generally, when Maunsell discussed the lack of agriculture, he was criticising the wider political system of the Ottoman Empire.

Conclusion

During the nineteenth century, Kurdistan represented a highly important geographical region for the British, connecting Baghdad with Persia, Trabzon with Tabriz and Levant with Persia. It was also a significant market for British products, and it was the main overland route connecting the Ottoman Empire to Persia. That importance was noted by the British travellers, as evidenced by their written accounts. British travellers clearly took considerable interest in the economy of the Kurdish region, which led them to view Kurdistan as a region of particular value to the British imperial agenda. Gradually, the significance of the country to Britain became more apparent, as the travellers of the late nineteenth century displayed more interest in the economic potential of Kurdistan than their predecessors. This interest is connected to the British Empire's need for new resources and markets. For this reason, the travellers documented the existence of small industries in Kurdistan, in cities, towns, and even villages, which demonstrated the popularity of certain

¹¹¹ Maunsell, 'Eastern Turkey in Asia and Armenia', p. 239.

¹¹² Fraser, *Travels in Koordistan, Mesopotamia*, vol. 1, p. 93.

¹¹³ F. R. Maunsell, 'Eastern Turkey in Asia and Armenia', *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 12, no.5 (1895), p. 237.

products. By importing European products, particularly those from Britain, many kinds of Kurdish industries began to disappear, especially textile industries such as clothes and other home necessities. However, the production of carpets continued because Kurdish carpets and rugs had durable features and were well-known in Europe. For example, towards the end of the century, they were even advertised in newspapers.

Due to the rapid development of British industry, and the necessity of marketing products, towards the end of the nineteenth century the British travellers were more focused on the economic aspects of the countries which they visited. In particular, Maunsell searched the whole of Kurdistan with an economic agenda. Other travellers such as Bird and Curzon concentrated on the economic aspects of the country, investigating the popularity of British products in the regions. One must bear in mind that whilst all the economic aspects of the country were important, the most crucial aspect of Kurdistan's economy was the oil found in the south. After the First World War, the presence of oil led to the British decision to keep Kurdistan under its mandate.

The British travellers saw that misgovernment was one of the primary reasons why the economic system remained undeveloped. The Ottoman Empire faced some problems, but the British travellers also applied their Orientalist views both to Kurdistan within the Ottoman Empire, and to Persia. However, at the same time the travellers saw Kurdistan as a significant location, through which British products might be transported to other regions in Asia Minor. The secondary literature regarding the economy of the Ottoman Empire and Persia has neglected the commercial importance of Kurdistan in the nineteenth century. However, it is vital to understand its significance, which led the British as representatives of an industrial country to uncover its strategic value.

Conclusion

The present Kurdish political situation has recently attracted increased scholarly attention, on account of the Kurdish claim for nationhood. The history of the Kurdish struggle for independence, however, and the emergence of nationalism have attracted varying opinions. The Kurds are the largest ethnicity without an independent state. The Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916 testifies to the Kurds' inability to persuade the major powers to build a Kurdish nation-state. The nineteenth-century British travellers' views and accounts are highly significant in this regard as they reveal Kurdish society as internally divided but distinct from the wider Muslim community, and they shed light on the debate about Kurdish nationhood. This thesis is the first comprehensive study which puts the travellers' account into context and analyses them in detail as nineteenth-century travel literature, in order to investigate how the region was constructed as a distinct entity through the accounts of the travellers during the nineteenth century.

This thesis deals with the nineteenth century in its entirety, in order to illustrate how successive travellers continued to present Kurdistan as a different region and considered the Kurds as a distinct people. However it has focused primarily on the 1830s and 1890s, in order to reflect on the effects of the political and intellectual situation on the travellers. In the earlier part of the century, the threat of Russia concerned the British; in the 1890s, the Armenian issue attracted their attention. In Kurdistan, the Kurdish princedoms were discussed extensively by travellers in the first half of the century. When these collapsed in the second half of the century, the Kurdish Sheikhs became the main focus of interest. The intellectual backgrounds of travellers likewise altered during the course of the century. The travellers of the earlier period were under the influence of philosophers of the eighteenth century who believed in the universality of the human being in all parts of the world. These travellers were still influenced by arguments for the role of climate in shaping culture and society; the travellers at the end of the century, however, were influenced by anthropologists, and in particular by social Darwinism.

The British travellers wrote about diverse aspects of Kurdish society, sometimes from an objective perspective, recording information about the nature, geography, and climate of the region, but at other times their accounts were far more subjective and even overtly biased. Some of the views expressed by the British on the subject of Kurdish culture, lifestyle, and norms were obviously built upon preconceptions about the country and its people. These ideas were obtained from various sources, such as the ancient Greek historian Xenophon and also the Old Testament. They held preconceived notions about Islam and Oriental people, and were also influenced by ideologies such as humanist views in the eighteenth century, and racial theories in the late nineteenth century. These perspectives in general helped to structure the British travellers' accounts. Therefore, through reading the travellers' accounts it becomes apparent that they praised some aspects of Kurdish society more than they deserved, and also exaggerated when criticising Kurds or highlighting their vices.

The thesis has answered research questions, presented in the introduction. The first question explored the extent to which the British travellers considered Kurdish people to be primitive. One of the consistent themes that has emerged in the discussion is that the British travellers considered the Kurdish people and their culture to be in an earlier stage of civilization. They showed that even within the wider context of Asia Minor, the Kurds were primitive and did not meet the standards of modern civilization. Many of the travellers arrived in Kurdistan with these preconceived notions, and thus looked for evidence to substantiate their beliefs. When they spoke about the structure of tribal society among the Kurds, they spoke from a position of assumed superiority and saw them as inferior. This view was reflected in many parts of their writings, as they imposed the concept of primitivism on the Kurds explicitly or implicitly. As Kurdish society was predominantly tribal, the travellers highlighted many aspects of the tribal societies. In many cases, they compared Kurdish tribes in the nineteenth century with the European primitive tribes in the seventeenth century or earlier times. For example, they presented Kurdish women as part of primitive society and highlighted some positive aspects of their roles. In addition, they also drew many similarities between Kurdish tribes and Scottish Highlanders. By focusing upon the depiction of primitivism this thesis has shown how British travellers considered Kurds to be noble savages, and how they highlighted many virtues among them, such as primitive

democracy, and the role of the white beard council in solving the tribes' issues. Since the Kurds had local tribal armies, their weapons were also considered as symbols of primitive society. Furthermore, most of the British travellers considered Kurds to be a martial race. The British may have applied their ideas about the martial race of India to the Kurds, as in the nineteenth century they saw many different ethnicities in India such as Muslims, Punjabi Sikhs, Nepali Gurkhas, who were recruited and organised by the British, and played an important role in the British colonial agenda.¹ The idea of Kurdish militarism later had a significant impact on the British decision-makers and their attitudes towards the Kurds. For example, when the British came to Mesopotamia after the First World War, they recruited some Kurds as a light army, which served the British agenda in the region.² Thus, the writing of ordinary travellers, as well as government officials, had an important impact on later developments concerning politics and Britain in the region.

To what extent did the British travellers recognise differences between Kurds and other ethnicities in the East? The travellers' accounts normally highlighted some differences between the ethnicities they encountered in order to apply their ideas about the role of climate in creating racial differences, and they tried to apply anthropological perspectives to these ethnicities in particular in the late nineteenth century. Many travellers tried to ascertain the distinct features of the Kurds, and therefore this study has explored the extent to which the British travellers recognised the differences between Kurds and other ethnicities in the East. They highlighted many aspects of the Kurds, such as their origin, language, costumes and even territory in order to present Kurds as different from the other Muslims. They argued that the Kurds were originally different from other communities, relying on Xenophon's belief that they were the descendants of the Carduchis.³ In addition, they identified the Kurdish language as linguistically different from the languages of the other ethnicities surrounding them, and presented the Kurdish language as a branch of the Indo-European family, which was totally different from Arabic and Turkish. The travellers drew attention to many cultural differences between the Kurds and other Muslim

¹ G. Rand, and K. A. Wagner, (eds) 'Recruiting the 'martial races': identities and military service in colonial India', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 46, no. 34 (2012), p. 233.

² S. B. Eskander, *From Planning to Partition: Britain's Policy Towards the Kurdish Question 1915-1923* (Hawler, 2012), p. 62.

³ Xenophon, *Anabasis of Xenophon*, translated by T. Clark (Philadelphia, 1859), pp. 234-268. Most of the travellers used the *Anabasis*, in their writings.

ethnicities. In particular, in some areas they praised the Kurds over other ethnicities, especially sympathetic travellers like Rich, who had a strong relationship with the Kurds. Some of the travellers identified Kurds from their culture. They believed that some typical virtues of primitive people, like hospitality, still existed among Kurds, and indeed considered them to be the most hospitable people in the world. Even when travellers described the Kurdish movements against the Ottomans and Persians, they believed that these movements were a result of ethnic, cultural barriers, and linguistic difficulties as they often relied on inadequate interpreters. On the other hand, some travellers singled out Kurds by their vices, and considered that the Kurds were less developed than the other ethnicities surrounding them, in particular the Persians and Turks, on account of their primitive nature.

The British travellers differentiated Kurdistan from its surrounding areas by trying to identify the pre-existing tribal boundaries. Two travellers, Millingen and Maunsell, even identified what they believed to be the boundaries of Kurdistan. However, their comments also reflect that several other ethnicities were also living within the territory, including Christian groups such as the Armenians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans, as well as Turkmans and Arabs. Whilst boundaries existed, land disputes still occurred, as the Armenians in northern Kurdistan claimed that the land had originally belonged to them. The importance of the boundaries sketched by the nineteenth-century travellers is reflected in the nationalist Kurdish demands of the present day, as in 2017 the Kurds are still struggling to gain independence. After the First World War, Kurdistan was divided into four parts between four nation states, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Despite these lands being part of Kurdistan, in some places the demography changed due to the removal of the Kurds and the settlement of people, such as Arabs, from the dominant nations. People were obliged to register themselves with a different ethnicity. In particular, in the southern part of Kurdistan there remains a dispute between the Kurds and Arabs which started in the Mosul governorate from Sinjar in the Syrian-Iraqi border to Mandali and Khanaqin on the Iran-Iraq border, including the Kirkuk governorate.⁴ Nowadays, there is a complicated conflict between KRG and the Iraqi government over these areas. The evidence of the travellers

⁴ P. Bartu, 'Wrestling with the integrity of a nation: the disputed internal boundaries in Iraq', *International Affair*, 86, no. 6 (2010), p. 1330.

confirms that there are strong foundations for Kurdish claims based upon these historical tribal boundaries.

It is important to discuss the significance of Kurdistan as a region for the British travellers and the various British agendas. This factor ties into the question posed in the introduction, which was: to what extent did the political, religious, and economic interests of the British in Kurdistan influence the travellers' experiences and their accounts of the country and its people? The thesis has demonstrated that the British had strong political interests in the region, and many regarded Kurdistan as a significant part of Asia Minor. For the British, Kurdistan occupied a strategic position in the nineteenth century, as it was situated on the route between Britain and India. Some British travellers would pass through Kurdistan on their way east, and noted its importance. Furthermore, the country was also geographically positioned between the Ottoman Empire and Persia, and thus was relevant to British observations on political relationships between the two empires. As Kurdistan was situated in an important arena during Britain and Russia's rivalry, known as the Great Game, it gave the country significant value for the British, and accounts for why the British outnumbered travellers from France, Germany and the United States. For example, in the first half of the century Britain was concerned about Russia's leverage in the region, considering it to be the main threat to its own agenda, and to British interests in India. The British government intensified its close watch over the region and sent James Bailie Fraser in the 1830s to Kurdistan to explore the defensive potential of the country. Closely observing the Russian interests, he recommended British policy makers should be aware of the importance of the region. The security of the country and the need to prevent it from falling into Russian hands were the top priorities of the British. The British wanted the Ottoman Empire and Persia to remain strong, but the Ottomans were also encouraged to undertake reforms in their territory within Kurdistan. Furthermore, in 1890s during the Armenian issue, when northern Kurdistan became a battleground, it came to the attention of Western observers. The British accordingly sent many consuls, politicians and reporters to the region.

As to the political importance of Kurdistan, the thesis has established that the travellers' accounts had a significant impact on British policy makers after the First World

War when the British controlled the region. The travellers' understanding of the Kurds as a primitive and undeveloped people had an influence on British policy and attitudes to Kurdish nationhood. The travellers in the later nineteenth century tended to display more negative perspectives towards the Kurds, and these pejorative opinions may have been related to theories of races and civilisation, which established the Kurds as inferior amongst Oriental people in the minds of the British.⁵ They focused *their* attention on the Kurds as a tribal society rather than viewing them as a nation. Thus, their judgement stands in opposition to those of earlier travellers, including Fredric Millingen. In the end, their thoughts were clearly reflected in the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916, which was signed between Britain and France, in which he represented the British government. The agreement prevented the establishment of a Kurdish nation state during the division of the Ottoman Empire, because Mark Sykes, himself under the influence of other travellers, perceived Kurdish society as consisting of different tribes rather than as a single nation.

In addition to the political importance of Kurdistan, according to the travellers' accounts Kurdistan was significant for British economic and commercial interests. The travellers were unofficial representatives of the imperial interests.⁶ Nearly all the travellers were seeking to investigate the economic potential of the country, and in particular those from the latter decades of the century worked intensively to find markets for British products, including in Kurdistan. They understood that Kurdistan was an important country in which the British could strengthen their interests because it was part of the overland trading route from Britain to Asia Minor, linking the British products to Persia from the Gulf via Kurdistan. In particular there were several strategic routes, such as that through Erzurum, by which they could bring British products from Trabzon to Tabriz, and the Kurdish routes from the Levant to Persia passed through Mosul and the Kurdish regions. Kurdistan was also the key route between Britain's interests in India and the Mediterranean. Furthermore, the travellers considered that Kurdistan was a significant market for the consumption of British industrial products. Hence, the travellers accurately identified the British products which were in demand in Kurdistan, and they highlighted the

⁵ In this regard Mark Sykes observed that the 'Pure Kurds' were the most gullible and unsophisticated ethnicity in the world, 'his nature is entirely averse to philosophical speculation of any sort or kind', Sykes, 'Journeys in northern Mesopotamia', p. 252

⁶ Bridges, 'Exploration and Travel Outside Europe (1720-1914)', p. 53.

competition between British products and the manufactured goods of other countries like Germany, Russia and France. In most cases when the British discussed economic aspects of the area, they highlighted the demand for British products. On the other hand, Kurdish carpets were the only Kurdish products which attracted British attention. Kurdish carpets were considered as a part of Kurdish identity, and the Kurds' carpet-making skills were in high demand in Britain. One of the most famous Kurdish products in Britain was the carpet, which was considered to be highly attractive and the best of its kind out of all Oriental carpets. Thus carpet making was seen as an element of Kurdish identity, and this tradition continued into the twentieth century.⁷

The travellers' recommendations about the economic importance of the country also had an impact on the British policy makers. As the British tried to find new resources for British imperial interests, in particular in the latter decades of the century, the British searched intensively for oil fields. Maunsell accurately mapped the oil fields in southern Kurdistan, and identified the future importance of these fields. Maunsell, who wrote extensively about the oil of southern Kurdistan, accurately identified many of the reserves. He was also vice-consul and consul, and had an impact on British policy in the region. After the First World War, the Sykes-Picot agreement meant that southern Kurdistan should have come under the mandate of France. However, as a direct result of Maunsell's report, the British realised the importance of controlling southern Kurdistan, and therefore cleverly persuaded France to have part of the Syrian land in exchange for what the former knew to be the more lucrative oil region. Further to the economic factors, the British were interested in visiting the country because they wished to investigate the traces of the ancient civilisations which were important in their religion.

In this thesis, it has been established that besides the political and economic importance of the region, religion was also a key point in the travellers' agenda. Religion was seen to play an important role in encouraging the British in visiting and writing about Kurdistan. The Christian denominations in Kurdistan occupy an important position in the British travelogues throughout the century. There are several reasons behind the travellers'

⁷ J. Housego, *Tribal Rugs An Introduction of the Weaving of the Tribes of Iran* (London, 1978); W. Eagleton, 'Kurdish Rugs and Kelims: An Introduction', in P. G. Kreyenbroek, C. Allison (ed.), *Kurdish Culture and Identity* (London, 1996), pp. 156-161.

interest in Christians. First, travellers were sympathetic towards their co-religionists in the East. They also wanted to know about Christian doctrines and its origins, aiming to find the roots of earlier Christianity. The most important reason is that they purposely presented most of these Christians as primitive and superstitious people. In particular their churches were shown as corrupt and in need of reform, in order to provide the justification for sending missionaries to them. Through the influence of the missionaries the British aimed to strengthen relations with the Kurdish Christians in order to wield political influence in the region. Kurdistan was also considered to be the cradle of many ancient civilisations, including Assyria, which attracted British travellers who wished to visit the landscape of the Old Testament. Austin Henry Layard, who was aware that there were Assyrian antiquities in Nineveh, started investigations there, because he knew that finding significant Assyrian antiquities would lead to personal fame and enhance his political and diplomatic careers.⁸ Layard's investigations in Kurdistan and Nineveh led him to find traces of people mentioned in the Bible. His discoveries could be seen to have partially verified the truth of scripture, which at the time was coming under attack by anthropologists, Darwinists, and other scientists. Another reason for the religious importance of Kurdistan was that the British considered it as one of the places where they could find traces of the Ten Lost Tribes, and therefore considered Ali Ilahi to be a descendant of these tribes. Islam as a religion attracted the attention of Europeans who came to the East who believed it to be the main reason for the backwardness of these Muslim societies.⁹ This belief led the travellers to focus more on the religious aspects of Kurdish culture and the extent to which Islam was a barrier to development.

Over the period covered by this thesis significant developments took place both in terms of Kurdish history which were reflected in the travellers' texts as they as they discussed and commented on the political changes in the region. According to the travellers' accounts, leadership in the country in the first half of the century was in the hands of Kurdish princes, and they ruled most parts of the country. This indicates that the situation in the country was stable as the Kurdish Princes had their own system of ruling. According to the travel literature, in which the military and political happenings in the

⁸ Hook, *Empire of the Imagination*, p. 254.

⁹ Schiffer, *Oriental Panorama*, pp. 196-9.

region were closely observed, the Ottomans destroyed these Kurdish Emirates as part of their reform plan. As a result of the demise of the Kurdish emirates, in the second half of the century, the region faced instability, because the Ottomans could not rule these Kurdish regions properly. Instead the rulers were involved in corruption and misgovernment. This thesis offers the first detailed investigation of how Persians and Turks maintained corrupt and tyrannical government in Kurdistan, in the view of the British travellers. When recording the corruption of Persia and the Ottoman Empire the travellers aimed to apply their preconceived views to these two countries, claiming that they could not develop or solve their own problems. They showed how the relationship between developed Britain, with its political, economic, and scientific strength, and the undeveloped and weak Muslim countries, such as the Ottoman Empire and Persia, was also acknowledged. Their comments about the corruption of these two countries were true inasmuch as they identified many areas of misgovernment in the country. As a result of that instability Kurdish religious Sheikhs became the leaders of the Kurdish society. In addition, the travellers clearly noted that the relationship between Kurds and Christians in the first half of the century was neutral, and excepting the campaign that Badir Khan waged on the Nestorians, there was no record of a negative relationship between Kurds and Christians. By the latter part of the century however, the relationship between some Kurdish tribes and Armenians had deteriorated, and the Kurdish tribes fought against the Armenians.

One of the significant findings of this thesis is that, despite their preconceptions of Kurdish primitivism, British travellers observed some important steps towards the modernising and improvement of Kurdish society. They noted some tribes abandoned nomadism and some towns were noticeably developed, in particular towards the end of the nineteenth century. They highlighted how some Kurdish tribes developed from nomadic pastoralism and village settlement to a lifestyle that was more related to commercial development, particularly through the improvement of Kurdish towns and cities. This evidence of change contradicts Said's assertion that Europeans believed Oriental people to live in largely unchanging societies.¹⁰ When travellers considered Kurds to be primitive, it meant that they considered Kurds were simple people who had not adapted to modern

¹⁰ Said, *Orientalism*, pp. 38, 208.

civilisation, but that they did have the capability to develop and civilise themselves, and adapt to modern norms, which is the opposite of Said's position.

In terms of travel writing, the British travellers of each period were influenced by contemporaneous intellectual theories. The travellers of the earlier part of the century were influenced by widespread ideas in Europe, such as the eighteenth-century enlightenment which considered people were universally similar,¹¹ philosophical notions about the role of climate, the topography of human development, nationalism. They highlighted many aspects of Kurdish society; some of their comments were astute and accurate observations, while others were exaggerated and misplaced. The comments of the travellers of the first decades of the century were more positive about Kurds, and they considered Kurds maintained the virtues of their ancestors, such as, primitive democracy, hospitality, and cheerfulness. Towards the end of the nineteenth century in particular, the rapid development of industry and growing belief in Social Darwinism, which influenced anthropological theory in the form of racial hierarchy, led to the Western belief that European society was racially superior and different from that of the Oriental people.¹² Therefore, the comments of the travellers in the late nineteenth century were much harsher about Kurds than the comments of their counterparts in the earlier part of the century, as they did not consider them to be noble savages any more. This mind-set gave the British travellers a sense of authority when it came to writing about Oriental societies, including that of the Kurds. In addition to their preconceptions in the late nineteenth century, the Armenian issue influenced the British travellers' opinions of the Kurds, and the British travellers of the later period often presented Kurds as cruel and blood thirsty. Another distinction worth noting is that, the travellers of the first decades of the century mostly wrote about themselves and their journeys, and their writings were largely focused on their own journeys rather than discussing the regions which they visited. In contrast, most travellers in the latter period of the nineteenth century were less focused on travel writing. Like their predecessors they wrote about areas which they visited and their people, and economic sources, and their accounts were written as reports in the service of an imperial agenda, and became more scientific. Even later travellers who did focus on travel writing

¹¹ Schiffer, *Oriental Panorama*, P. 2

¹² Said, *Orientalism*, p. 207; Odams, 'British Perceptions of the Ottoman Empire 1876-1908', p. 21

presented aspects of Kurdish society in a clearer and more methodical fashion. Therefore, the comments of the travellers in the late nineteenth century give a clearer picture of the Kurds and Kurdistan than those of the earlier periods.

This thesis is the first study which has explored the ways in which British travel literature provides an insight into Kurdish history, including its culture, lifestyle, and political entities. The importance of the travellers' accounts in Kurdish historiography is undeniable, because in the nineteenth century the majority of Kurds were illiterate, and even those who were literate did not usually record their own history and society. Equally, the travellers' accounts cannot be understood as straightforward fact, and should not be used as straightforward empirical sources. The travellers were often influenced by the values and intellectual movements of the nineteenth century, including evangelicalism, liberalism, and contemporary politics. The travellers frequently mixed ideology with fact, perhaps also influenced by linguistic or cultural barriers. This problematic conflation has been exacerbated by Kurdish historiography, since many scholars treat the travellers' texts as objective fact. For example, most of the twentieth-century historians and anthropologists have followed the ideas of Rich about tribes and non-tribal Kurds.¹³ However even the later travellers in the nineteenth century opposed Rich's idea that climate and topography were significant factors in dividing Kurds into 'pastoral' and 'peasants'. In addition, travellers exaggerated in their representations of Kurdish national awareness, in particular during the early decades of the nineteenth century, which witnessed the rise of the Kurdish Emirates' movements. This exaggeration was in large part because the travellers either did not understand or ignored the barrier between various movements of resistance against the Ottoman empire due to tribal divisions, as after movements, or the death of charismatic leaders, the tribes returned to their own tribal structure and restarted their conflict with their rival tribes. In the late nineteenth century, some British travellers and consuls considered that nationalism had emerged among Kurds, but this belief was not universally shared. One notable movement during this time was that of Sheikh Ubaidullah, whose nationalist motivations for separating from the Ottomans and Persians were based on the claim that Kurds were linguistically, religiously, and culturally different from Persians and Turks. An

¹³ Barth, *Principles of Social of Social Organisation in Southern Kurdistan*, p. 14; McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 13.

important feature of the movement, as the British noted, was that it transcended tribal boundaries and united many of the Kurds who participated in it. However, after the end of the movement and the death of the Sheikh the tribes separated again. In addition, the British travellers' comments about the Kurdish women suffer from some exaggeration as, they presented the Kurdish women largely uncritically, depicting them as enjoying a high level of liberty and regarding them as a single entity.

This thesis has investigated the ways in which British travellers portrayed a distinct picture of Kurds and Kurdistan in the nineteenth century. It has also showed that the travellers had a significant impact in attracting British policy makers towards the region, and highlighted the importance of Kurdistan for British commercial agendas. In particular in the late nineteenth century Kurdistan was the market for many British products and at the same time there were several important overland routes to connect Britain to the East. The travellers' accounts paved the way for an innovative understanding of British perspectives on Kurds and Kurdistan. Future lines of enquiry could include looking more thoroughly at British interests during and after the First World War, in order to investigate how Kurdistan remained an important region for British interests in the twentieth century. In addition, further research could be undertaken on the British political attitude towards the current Kurdish political situation, and the British economic interests in the region, in particular in southern Kurdistan, as there is a semi-independent entity since 1991 which has relations with several powers including Britain.

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