

**Commerce and Quarantine in Baghdad:
Contending Visions of Ottoman and British Imperialism in Iraq, 1862-1908**

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in International Studies:

Middle Eastern Studies

University of Washington

2014

Committee:

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Jackson School of International Studies

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Abstract

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This thesis argues that in the second half of the 19th century, the Iraqi provinces of the Ottoman Empire constituted a frontier of imperial contestation between the Ottoman and British empires. The Ottoman Empire sought establish political hegemony over these far-flung provinces through military conquest and a program of developmentalist and colonialist policies in order to defend against the expansion of British strategic interests in the Persian Gulf. Simultaneously, a network of British commercial and diplomatic interests in Iraq sought to create conditions favorable to British economic expansion into this region, adopting strategies of “informal empire.” This contestation is visible in repeated disputes over matters of commercial shipping and the public health policies of quarantine in the face of plague and cholera. Through records of incidents involving the Baghdad-based and British-owned Lynch Brothers shipping firm, I argue that neither the Ottoman nor the British empires achieved the level of dominance that they sought in the region.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my committee members Walter Andrews and Reşat Kasaba for devoting their time and knowledge to guiding me through this project. I would also like to thank Selim Kuru, Anand Yang, Arbella Bet-Shlimon and other faculty at the University of Washington for helping me through the research and writing process, whether they knew they were helping or not. Similarly, I must thank my all friends and colleagues in the University of Washington's Turkish Circle—including Lydia Harrington, Taylor Zajicek, Mehmet Kentel, and others—for the constructive comments they provided on a very early and very shaky draft of this thesis. I am grateful to David Wishard, David Gerard, Rafeel Wasif, and Andrew Yarborough for providing sounding board for the occasional frustrations of graduate work, and to my parents Mike and Darcie Chess for providing a layman's eye and some much-needed copy-editing services. Lastly, I would like to thank Courtney Malcom, simply for putting up with me.

Introduction

In the second half of the 19th century, lower Iraq¹ constituted a frontier that was contested by the Ottoman and British Empires. This thesis draws on the idea of the frontier defined in the comparative work of Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson. They posit the frontier as a "zone of interpenetration between two previously distinct societies" wherein one was usually indigenous and the other was intruding into a new geographic space. The frontier opens on the first appearance of representatives of the intruding society, and does not close until a single political entity has established hegemony over the space.² In the case of lower Iraq, the frontier was contested by the Ottoman state seeking to establish hegemony over its outer periphery, and by agents of the "informal empire" of Great Britain. Initially popularized by John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, the concept of informal empire has been debated, expanded, and reconfigured by a number of scholars. In Gallagher and Robinson's consideration, Great Britain's expansionist policy during the supposedly anti-imperial mid-Victorian period can be summed up as: "trade with informal control if possible; trade with rule when necessary," outcomes that depended on local cooperation and collaboration.³ P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins took up the premise of the Gallagher-Robinson thesis and argued that expansion of formal and

¹ Throughout this thesis, the geographic area under consideration is indistinctly defined. This is in part because the area goes by many names in various historical sources—Iraq, Mesopotamia, Turkish Arabia—and there has been disagreement over whether or not to consider politically Ottoman vilayets together as one geographic space. Some have considered the modern nation state of Iraq an artificial assemblage of disconnected Ottoman provinces, but Reidar Visser has noted that the region encompassing the Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul were generally considered part of one whole in late Ottoman times. See Reidar Visser, "Proto-Political Conceptions of 'Iraq' in Late Ottoman Times," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 3, no. 2 (November 2009): 143–54.

² Howard Roberts Lamar and Leonard Monteath Thompson, "Comparative Frontier History," in *The Frontier in History: North America and Southern Africa Compared*, ed. Howard Roberts Lamar and Leonard Monteath Thompson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

³ John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *The Economic History Review* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 1953): 13.

informal empire overseas was initiated by domestic political and economic changes at home, and driven primarily by the class of London-based financiers they called the “gentlemanly capitalists.”⁴ Like Robinson and Gallagher, Cain and Hopkins note that the successful incorporation of different regions into the informal empire of Great Britain depended largely on the acceptance or resistance of local elites.⁵ In that vein, Reşat Kasaba has noted that British commercial interests in the Ottoman empire appeared self-serving, and were supported by a network of financial infrastructure and Foreign Office consular representation, which provoked different forms of local resistance.⁶ In the case of lower Iraq, the Ottoman state’s own hegemonic ambitions complicated the establishment of British informal empire, with state representatives occasionally taking action to stymie British commercial expansion. Here, the British enacted their informal empire through, and occasionally for the benefit of, British commercial interests—namely the Lynch brothers’ trading company, which employed both Europeans and native Christians and controlled a large share of the shipping industry on the Tigris river.⁷ Such attempts were not always successful, and British commercial actors did not always have the unquestioned backing of their home government. An examination of a series of disputes over

⁴ P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, “The Political Economy of British Expansion Overseas, 1750-1914,” *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 33, no. 4 (November 1, 1980): 463–90; P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, “Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas I. The Old Colonial System, 1688-1850,” *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 39, no. 4 (November 1, 1986): 501–25.

⁵ P. J. Cain and A. G. Hopkins, “Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas II: New Imperialism, 1850-1945,” *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 40, no. 1 (February 1, 1987): 11–12.

⁶ Reşat Kasaba, “Treaties and Friendships: British Imperialism, the Ottoman Empire, and China in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of World History* 4, no. 2 (October 1, 1993): 230–2.

⁷ J. P. Parry has questioned the extent to which British informal empire existed in Iraq in the first half of the 19th century, and the idea that British interest in the Persian Gulf developed out of a desire for commercial expansion and the protection of the approaches to India. See J. P. Parry, “Steam Power and British Influence in Baghdad, 1820-1860,” *The Historical Journal* 56, no. 01 (2013): 145–73. However, if this is taken to be true it is quite clear that by the end of the 19th century, the British were very outwardly defensive of their commercial interests in Iraq.

commercial and public health matters shows that the establishment of Ottoman and British imperial projects in Iraq was an ongoing and contested process in the late 19th century.

Within the history of the Ottoman Empire, Eugene Rogan has used Lamar and Thompson's concept of the frontier in his study of the assertion of Ottoman rule over the region of Transjordan in the 19th century. It constituted a frontier in the sense that the centralizing Ottoman state entered from without and established political hegemony over the local Arab population. There, absent the same degree of Great Power meddling that characterized other parts of the Ottoman periphery outside Anatolia, the Ottoman state had free reign to establish political authority over the existing system of tribal rule through military force and the implementation of Tanzimat reforms.⁸ At the same time, Karen Kern has used similar ideas to discuss the different socio-political order that existed in the frontier provinces of Iraq, and the threat to the Ottoman order posed by Persian migration to Shi'a holy cities and Persian marriages to Ottoman women.⁹ James Onley has put Gallagher and Robinson's conception of informal empire to work in describing the Trucial system of the Persian Gulf as "the Arabian Frontier of the British Raj"—wherein the British employed native agents as representatives of their strategic and commercial interests in the region.¹⁰ Hala Fattah has examined the extent to which the British Empire became integrated into the regional commercial economy of Iraq, Arabia, and the Persian Gulf, as they worked to wrest economic and political influence over local Arab

⁸ Eugene L Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1–20.

⁹ Karen M. Kern, *Imperial Citizen : Marriage and Citizenship in the Ottoman Frontier Provinces of Iraq*, 1st ed.. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ James Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj: Merchants, Rulers, and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1–58.

powerbrokers from the Ottoman state.¹¹ Other scholars, such as Frederick Anscombe, Gökhan Çetinsaya, and Selim Deringil have demonstrated the extent to which Ottoman authorities in Iraq and in Istanbul viewed the British as an emerging threat to their sovereignty in the region, while simultaneously comporting themselves as a modern imperial power in their own right.¹² Despite Ottoman efforts, British imperial commercial and political presence in the Iraqi provinces expanded, accelerating in the latter half of the 19th century. Ultimately, the informal British Empire laid the foundation for and ultimately gave way to more firm British control during the Mandate period and under the Hashemite monarchy.

This thesis examines the imperial contestation between the Ottoman Empire and the British informal empire in lower Iraq over matters of commerce and public health. These two issues were intertwined in and embodied by the Euphrates and Tigris Steam Navigation Company, the shipping company owned by the Lynches. Though the Lynches had myriad business interests in Iraq and London, observers and scholars generally referred to their entire enterprise simply as “the Lynch Company,” the term I use here. The Company had frequent disputes with the local Ottoman government over issues ranging from the type and number of vessels they could operate on the Tigris, to the necessity and efficacy of riverine quarantine imposed during times of epidemic plague and cholera. The sources that I have consulted tilt heavily towards the British perspective. They consist of select published Foreign Office

¹¹ Hala Fattah, *The Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf, 1745-1900* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 91–183.

¹² Gökhan Çetinsaya, “The Ottoman View of British Presence in Iraq and the Gulf: The Era of Abdulhamid II,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 2 (2003): 194–203; Gökhan Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890-1908* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains : Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909*, New Edition (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998); Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 1, 2002): 768–96, doi:10.1086/587011; Selim Deringil, “‘They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery’: The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 02 (2003): 311–42.

documents and medical reports; the memoirs and letters of Thomas Kerr Lynch, one of the owners of the Lynch firm; and the extensive diaries of Joseph Mathia Svoboda, a Baghdad-born Austrian citizen employed by the Euphrates and Tigris Company as a ship's clerk. Svoboda's extant diaries cover the period 1865-1908, and he worked for the Lynch brothers for forty years. I begin this thesis with a brief examination of the major themes in late Ottoman history and the state's efforts to establish central imperial control over its Iraqi provinces. Following that, I present a short history of British political interests in Iraq, the establishment of the Lynch Company, and a biographical sketch of the life and diaries of Joseph Svoboda, whose observations I utilize heavily. Then, I delve into the commercial and public health disputes between the Ottoman and British Empires that surrounded the Lynch Company's operations, before offering conclusions that complicate the notion of informal empire.

The Ottoman Empire's Long 19th Century

In the late 18th century, the Ottoman Empire was faced with a relative decline in its ability to compete militarily and economically with its European rivals abroad—and increasingly at home—though its domestic administration, economy, and culture were thriving. Politically, control of the empire was decentralized, and Istanbul's power did not stretch far beyond the core provinces in Rumelia and Anatolia. The empire was plagued by ongoing fiscal crises and its international position had been weakening for two centuries. This was accompanied by an increasing European commercial presence in the empire. The Christian parts of the empire in southeastern Europe began to form new groups of cultural leaders that would eventually become the trailblazers of Balkan nationalism.¹³ There existed a delicate balance of political power between the Sublime Porte and the locally autonomous ruling class composed of the ayans—a

¹³ Kemal H. Karpat, "The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3, no. 3 (July 1, 1972): 245–8.

diverse group of local notables that wielded economic and political power, the janissary corps, and the ulema.¹⁴ From the late 18th century until the empire's end in the early 20th, the status quo was continuously overturned and re-conceptualized by a series of reform minded statesmen and sultans, each with different visions of solutions to the empire's woes.

Traditional Ottoman historiography consistently portrayed the empire after its burst of expansion under Süleyman as being on a protracted trajectory of decline until its inevitable collapse after World War I.¹⁵ More recent scholarship has analyzed the ways in which the statesmen of the empire actively engaged with the notion of decline in an attempt to secure the empire's future.¹⁶ In his recent survey of late Ottoman history, M. Şükrü Hanioglu identifies several key dynamics that unfolded in the empire's long final century. First among them was the imperial center's attempt to secure the empire's future through the reassertion of direct control over its periphery. This entailed three things: the creation of a modern conscript army, the reformation of the tax system to fund that army, and the modernization of the central bureaucracy. The second fundamental dynamic was the social struggle with the challenges of modernity, including urbanization, technological growth, and the expansion of the public sphere. While initial efforts on this front can be described as westernization or Europeanization, the later part of the 19th century—especially the period under the reign of Abdülhamid II—saw a trend towards the construction of a new and independent Islamic modernity. The last major dynamic

¹⁴ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 8–41; Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, Third Edition (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 9–20; Karpas, “The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789–1908,” 251.

¹⁵ For representative examples see Patrick Balfour Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire* (New York: Morrow, 1979); Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 2 vols. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

¹⁶ Cemal Kafadar, “The Question of Ottoman Decline,” *Harvard Middle Eastern and Islamic Review* 4 (1998): 30–75.

that Hanioglu identifies is the empire's changing relationship with the international system and the Great Powers of Europe. While the empire sought to position itself to more effectively meet external threats, the Great Powers simultaneously hoped to influence the empire from within.¹⁷

Beginning with the reign of Selim III, the sultan sought to assert the authority of the central state over the ayans by replacing the janissary corps with a modern army called the Nizam-i Cedid.¹⁸ Completed under Mahmud II, the elimination of the traditionally independent military class helped to weaken the political position of the religious authorities. The ulema and the traditional military class had typically supported one another against the court and the bureaucracy. As a result, during the 19th century politics became the exclusive domain of the palace and the central bureaucracy. Mahmud's reforms saw internal military campaigns to re-establish Istanbul's control over remote restive corners of the empire, as well as the establishment of government control over religious endowments and institutions, a return to the disastrous policy of currency debasement, the creation of a postal system and the taking of the first census.¹⁹ His reform program also necessitated establishment of a new education system to train an expanded, European-style bureaucracy.²⁰ The degree to which Mahmud's reforms were intended to emulate the West is contested. According to Frederick Anscombe, they could just as

¹⁷ Hanioglu, *The Late Ottoman Empire*, 203–11; Karpas, "The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908," 251–56.

¹⁸ Karpas, "The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908," 252. Here Karpas maintains that Selim III undertook these reforms, not for the creation of a modern state per se, but in order to reestablish an older Ottoman political order. Because of the social changes wrought by the 17th and 18th centuries, Karpas argues that this was impossible.

¹⁹ Stanford J. Shaw, "The Ottoman Census System and Population, 1831-1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 9, no. 3 (October 1, 1978): 325–38. Establishing a new census was crucial for both taxation and conscription purposes.

²⁰ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 43–5; Karpas, "The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908," 256.

easily have been as an attempt to defend the *dar al-Islam* from internal and external threats.²¹ The ongoing processes of social and economic transformation allowed the emergence of a new middle class of Turkish Muslim artisans and landowners.²² In 1838 the Treaty of Balta Limani, also known as the Anglo-Ottoman or Anglo-Turkish convention, established a new policy of free trade between the two empires, ostensibly abolishing monopolies, creating import and export duties, and granting the subjects and agents of the British Empire access to markets throughout the empire. The treaty was negotiated during Lord Palmerston's lengthy tenure as Foreign Secretary, during which time he pursued aggressive policies to expand British economic interests overseas, through formal and informal imperialism.²³ Native Muslim Ottoman producers and merchants felt that this put them at a disadvantage to foreign competitors, and sought to have the terms of the treaty renegotiated.²⁴

Building upon the preceding decades of bureaucratic reform, the Tanzimat was initiated by the Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane in 1839 and expanded upon by the Islâhat Fermânı in 1856. Like previous reform efforts, the Tanzimat focused on the strengthening of the state through military, economic, and administrative reform, but it had an additional component of deliberate social and cultural reform. The Gülhane edict renewed the obligation of conscription; established guarantees of life, honor and the pursuit of property for the Sultan's subjects; and enumerated the principle of equality before the law of all subjects regardless of religion—though the extent to

²¹ Frederick F. Anscombe, "Islam and the Age of Ottoman Reform," *Past & Present* 208, no. 1 (August 1, 2010): 159–60. Anscombe argues that while Mahmud's reign and the Tanzimat era that followed it have chiefly been seen as drive toward secularization and westernization, they should instead be considered an effort to heal divisions within the community of Muslim believers so that energy could be focused on resisting external threats.

²² Karpat, "The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908," 256.

²³ Cain and Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas I. The Old Colonial System, 1688-1850," 523–5.

²⁴ Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of the Middle East, 1800-1914: A Book of Readings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 38–40.

which this was intended is debated.²⁵ Critically, the system of conscription adopted in the Tanzimat era only applied to Muslims—non-Muslims could pay a fee for exemption. The era of the Tanzimat also saw the adoption of two extremely important laws: the Land Code of 1858 and the Provincial Law of 1864. The first of these laws established new regulations for land ownership and inheritance, and established the right of imperial ownership over agricultural land. The second created a system of provincial administration wherein governors and officials would be sent from Istanbul and paid in cash instead of tax farming or land rights. Now, taxation would be handled by salaried collectors.²⁶ Later laws created new police forces distinct from the military colloquially called *zaptiyes*—a gendarmerie under the authority of local administrators. On the cultural and intellectual front, the Tanzimat period initially saw the expansion of press freedom, though this was later curtailed, and a tendency towards cultural westernization and secularization amongst the Ottoman elite. Non-Muslims reached higher places in the social hierarchy than Muslims.²⁷

In the late 1860s and early 1870s there was a growing chorus of criticism leveled at the Tanzimat. Opposition was led by an indistinct confederation of intellectuals and former government officials calling themselves the Young Ottomans, which originated as a secret society of statesmen born around the beginning of the Tanzimat and exposed to the political ideas of western Europe through their positions in the Foreign Ministry and the Translation

²⁵ Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922*, Second Edition, New Approaches to European History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 66; Karpas, “The Transformation of the Ottoman State, 1789-1908,” 258. Karpas argues that the guarantees of security of life and property were engineered to rally the masses behind the throne and bureaucracy against the remaining power of the ayans.

²⁶ Hanioğlu, *The Late Ottoman Empire*, 72–93.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 94–103; Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire*, 142–173.

Bureau (Tercüme Odası).²⁸ In general, the Young Ottomans rejected the Tanzimat reforms on the basis that they subverted the sharia in order to gain favor in Europe, claimed that Tanzimat economic policies would lead to financial ruin, and called for a form of constitutional government based on Islamic principles in reaction to the secularizing tendencies of the “tyrannical” bureaucracy as a means to counteract both the decline of the empire’s international position and the perceived decline in the social position of Muslims within the empire.²⁹ Publicly dissenting, the members of the Young Ottomans were intermittently banished distant parts of the empire or to Europe, where they could more clearly articulate their political ideas. Young Ottoman thought was instrumental in bringing about the first constitutional period in the Ottoman Empire, after a coup d’état led by elder statesmen such as Midhat Pasha deposed Sultan Abdülaziz II in May 1876.³⁰ After a moment of political instability, Abdülhamid II ascended to the throne in August of that year.

This first experiment in constitutional rule in the Ottoman Empire was short.³¹ A crisis in the Balkans led to another war with Russia and another embarrassing defeat, and the empire defaulted on its foreign debts. As a result, Abdülhamid suspended the constitution in early 1878

²⁸ This secret society was known as patriotic alliance (İttifak-ı Hamiyyet). For two of the canonical studies of the later Tanzimat, the growth of the Young Ottomans, see Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought; a Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962) and Roderic H Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963). For a more recent appraisal see Christiane Czygan, “Reflections on Justice: A Young Ottoman View of the Tanzimat,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 6 (2010): 943–56.

²⁹ Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought*, 10–80; Hanioglu, *The Late Ottoman Empire*, 103–8.

³⁰ Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 71–75.

³¹ The standard history of this brief period may be found in Robert Devereux, *The First Ottoman Constitutional Period: A Study of the Midhat Constitution and Parliament* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963). Though criticized for its occasionally immature and optimistic analysis, Devereux’s book is nonetheless a detailed description of the foundation and debates of the Ottoman parliament during its short period of existence.

and thenceforth ruled as an absolute monarch. While a large body of contemporary Western historical sources and historiography treats Abdülhamid II's reign as a conservative Islamic reaction against both the Westernizing tendencies of the Tanzimat and the liberal constitutional rule espoused by the Young Ottomans, recent scholarship has challenged these assumptions and tried to re-evaluate this final period of strong sultanic rule. Some scholars have argued that there are a number of continuities between the Tanzimat period and Abdülhamid II's reign—he continued the policy of strong central control over the peripheries of the empire, but did so through alternative means.³²

Though Abdülhamid legitimated his rule in strictly Islamic terms and reintroduced Islamic practices into many spheres of public life and official convention, he did so as a means of preserving the integrity of the central Ottoman state. He appropriated the symbols of Islam and reasserted his position as the caliph and the defender of Mecca and Medina in response to the continued decline of the Empire's international position. His pan-Islamist ideology was intended to guard against the destructive effects of ethnic nationalism and external territorial predation, twin forces which threatened to rend the empire apart.³³ The war with Russia bankrupted the Ottoman Empire and prompted the creation of a European-run Public Debt administration that oversaw the empire's finances, and precipitated the loss of more of the Balkan provinces. Abdülhamid reduced the power of the bureaucracy and suspended constitutional rule, but he presided over the continuation of existing modernization projects—the expansion of

³² Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 77–90.

³³ Selim Deringil, "Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State: The Reign of Abdulhamid II (1876-1909)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 3 (August 1, 1991): 345–59; Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire*, 90–99; Çetinsaya, "Ottoman View of British Presence in Iraq and the Gulf." Abdülhamid's domestic critics painted him as paranoid and obsessed with threats to his rule. One might say that this fear was not an unreasonable one—under his rule the empire lost huge swaths of territory and nearly 20 percent of its population.

communication networks and railways, the improvement of the education system, and the creation of new technocratic government offices such as the Bureau of Statistics. At the same time, he curtailed intellectual expression and the freedom of the burgeoning press, and suppressed political opposition. This proved to be his undoing, as he was unseated after a well-planned military coup organized by the Committee of Union and Progress—otherwise known as the Young Turks—in 1908.³⁴ Throughout the empire's last fifteen years, the CUP continued the previous currents of state centralization, now with Turkish nationalism as a unifying ideology. The Ottoman Empire came to its end after WWI, as the CUP went to war on the side of the Central Powers. It was stripped of its remaining Arab provinces and occupied by an allied coalition of Britain, France, Italy, and Greece. This action precipitated the Turkish War of Independence and led to the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923.

Ottoman Imperial Rule in Iraq in the 19th Century

Writing the history of the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire is a contentious process and an incomplete project. Many of the historical narratives of the early and mid-20th century tended to treat the Ottoman period in the Arab provinces as a dark age. In the case of Iraq, this is typified by the works of Stephen Longrigg, who portrayed Turkish rule there as a cavalcade of criminally inept mismanagement, during which time these provinces abjectly failed to modernize and could advance no further than the age of Süleyman the Magnificent.³⁵ Alternatively, mid-20th century Arab nationalists and scholars sympathetic to their cause portrayed the Ottoman period in Arab lands as one episode in a continuous series of occupations beginning with the

³⁴ Hanioglu, *The Late Ottoman Empire*, 109–49; Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, 77–90.

³⁵ Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 321–3. Longrigg was a member of British Administration in Iraq and later a manager of the Iraq Petroleum Company, and his writings must be seen in that light. He is particularly disdainful of Midhat Pasha, whom he treats as an utter failure before paradoxically describing the various successes that Midhat had in modernizing provincial administration.

Mongol conquests and lasting until the revolutions of the mid-20th century, during which the Arab peoples suffered under the yoke of foreign oppression.³⁶ In his recent social and cultural historical survey of the Arabs of the Ottoman Empire, Bruce Masters argues that far from being a dark age of subjugation, the Ottoman period in the Arab provinces saw high degrees of cooperation and collaboration between the Ottoman state and the Arab subject peoples, and that the tendency of twentieth-century Arab history to elide the importance of the Ottoman period came about as a result of the bitter taste left by the Turkification policies of the period under CUP rule.³⁷ He has noted that several decades of more recent historical writing have challenged this interpretation and have produced numerous richly detailed political, economic, social, cultural, and intellectual histories of the Arab provinces—especially in the areas that were closer to the center of the empire, such as Syria, the Levant, and Palestine. However, studying the Iraqi provinces of the empire presents its own unique challenges. Since the revolution of 1958, through the rule of the Ba’ath party, and into the current period of war and civil unrest, it has become progressively more difficult for scholars to actually conduct research in Iraq.³⁸ Local archives are inaccessible or have been destroyed. As a result, most of the available scholarship on Iraq in the Ottoman period is based on the materials held in the Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivleri and other Turkish or foreign government archives, which often limits the scope of

³⁶ Rifaat Ali Abou-el-Haj, “The Social Uses of the Past: Recent Arab Historiography of Ottoman Rule,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 14, no. 2 (May 1, 1982): 185–201.

³⁷ Bruce Alan Masters, *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire, 1516-1918 : A Social and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1–19.

³⁸ Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, “The Historiography of Modern Iraq,” *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 5 (1991): 1408–1421. This analysis focuses primarily on the historiography of post-WWI Iraq, however, scholars investigating earlier historical periods face the same sorts of difficulties. The challenges that Farouk-Sluglett and Sluglett describe have only increased since the U.S. invasion that ended Ba’ath Party rule.

research to the political concerns of imperial centers. Using sources such as Joseph Svoboda's diaries and Thomas Lynch's memoirs opens a perspective beyond official narratives.

Two recent monographs that draw on official archival sources have elaborated the political history of late Ottoman Iraq—Ebubekir Ceylan has studied reform and modernization in the era of the Tanzimat and Gökhan Çetinsaya has examined the administration of the provinces under Abdülhamid II. Ceylan's book primarily argues that the origins of the modern state of Iraq lie in the application of the Tanzimat reforms to the provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul, because during this period these three provinces began to be considered as a political unit that was at least linked, even if it was not entirely administratively unified. This is in contrast to a large body of historical scholarship that treats present-day Iraq as a delegitimized country that was artificially cobbled together from three entirely separate Ottoman provinces.³⁹ Çetinsaya attempts to address a number of issues in the historiography of late Ottoman Iraq, but he often becomes bogged down in his richly-detailed primary source work and does not always clearly articulate or effectively argue his points.⁴⁰ For Çetinsaya, the Ottoman administration in Iraq labored mightily to bring developmentalist policies to one of the most distant frontiers of the empire, but was faced with financial difficulties stemming from its ongoing debt crisis. According to Çetinsaya, for Abdülhamid and his administrators, development was the key to

³⁹ Ebubekir Ceylan, *The Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq: Political Reform, Modernization and Development in the Nineteenth Century Middle East*, Library of Ottoman Studies 22 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 219.

⁴⁰ While Çetinsaya has clearly done marvelous archival research, his arguments leave something to be desired. He usually takes his sources at their word, including generations of warnings from local officials that Iraq was in eminent danger of slipping through the Ottoman grasp. Perhaps this tells us as much about the advisors that the notoriously paranoid Abdülhamid chose to employ as it does about the actual state of security in Ottoman Iraq. Somehow, despite the constant foreboding predictions of local officials, the Iraqi provinces managed to remain an integral part of the empire from 1831 until the First World War. Çetinsaya's periodization is also a problem—his analysis often arbitrarily ends with the start of CUP rule despite the continuation of centralizing policies and the growth of the Arab nationalist public sphere.

attaining long-term security for that part of the empire. To them, Iraq was backwards and needed improvements in communications and agriculture, and the restive tribes needed to be settled in order to achieve that goal. Çetinsaya remarks that it is striking how little progress was made in these efforts until Abdülhamid's policy of dealing with the tribes shifted to a more conciliatory one.⁴¹

Iraq was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, but as in other provinces distant from Istanbul, the Ottoman state played a very small role in local administration. In Baghdad and Basra, a dynasty of Georgian Mamluk Pashas governed during the 18th and early 19th centuries. At the same time, Mosul was governed by the Jallili family.⁴² In the early 19th century, worried by the precedent set by Mehmet Ali in Egypt and the empire's long-term ability to maintain its territorial integrity, the Ottoman state embarked on a campaign to bring its outer periphery back under the direct rule of Istanbul. Istanbul looked askance at the Mamluk rulers of Iraq for a number of reasons—they refused to receive “alien pashas” sent from Istanbul, they showed little initiative in combatting the threats emerging from the Wahhabi state in Arabia or in protecting the border with Persia, and Ottoman authorities feared that a long-serving Mamluk ruler like Daud Pasha might replicate the modernizing and secessionist

⁴¹ Çetinsaya, *The Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 147–51.

⁴² For the earlier period of Mamluk rule in Basra see Thabit Abdullah, *Merchants, Mamluks, and Murder : The Political Economy of Trade in Eighteenth Century Basra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001); Tom Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society in Early Modern Iraq : Mamluk Pashas Tribal Shayks and Local Rule between 1802 and 1831* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982); Dina Rizk Khoury, “Violence and Spatial Politics between the Local and Imperial: Baghdad, 1778-1810,” in *The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life*, ed. Gyan Prakash and Kevin Michael Kruse (Princeton University Press, 2008); Dina Rizk Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire : Mosul, 1540-1834* (Cambridge ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Sarah D Shields, *Mosul before Iraq: Like Bees Making Five-Sided Cells* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000); Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*; Thabit Abdullah, *A Short History of Iraq: From 636 to the Present* (London: Pearson Longman, 2003); Charles Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

tendencies of Mehmet Ali.⁴³ The final straw seems to have come when Daud Pasha had *defterdâr* Sadık Efendi executed after he was sent from Istanbul. In response, in 1831 an army was dispatched under command of Ali Rıza Pasha, which took the plague and flood-weakened city from Mamluk control almost without bloodshed.⁴⁴ However, integrating Iraq into the centrally controlled empire was a slow process—intermittent military campaigns continued for decades and tensions along the eastern frontier with Persia remained high.

Ottoman state officials' relationship with the local tribes in Iraq became even more strained as administrators tried to play different tribal interests off one another in order to keep them all at bay, and the state's Sunni orthodoxy ran into frequent opposition from the growing Shi'a community.⁴⁵ Throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Shi'i holy cities of Najaf and Karbala had gradually come under the effective control of Shi'a 'ulema, a trend which accelerated after the Ottoman state began constructing new irrigation works that increased the area of cultivation around those cities.⁴⁶ After 1839, implementation of the Tanzimat reforms was a slow process, owing to the dearth of qualified and educated administrators locally. The Ottoman Sixth army was garrisoned at Baghdad, but it was manned by undertrained and ill-equipped local recruits. Yet, the establishment of this garrison, however inadequate it may have

⁴³ Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*, 250–76; Nieuwenhuis, *Politics and Society in Early Modern Iraq*, 169–83; Ceylan, *The Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq*, 42–5.

⁴⁴ Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*, 267–76; Charles Philip Issawi, *The Fertile Crescent, 1800-1914: A Documentary Economic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 101–4; Ceylan, *The Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq*, 44. For a lengthy description of the plague and flood that spelled the end of Daud Pasha's rule of Baghdad, see Anthony Norris Groves, *Journal of a Residence at Bagdad: During the Years 1830 and 1831* (London: J. Nisbet, 1832), 98–165.

⁴⁵ Ebubekir Ceylan, "Carrot or Stick? Ottoman Tribal Policy in Baghdad, 1831–1876," *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies* 3, no. 2 (November 2009): 169–86; Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Juan R. I. Cole and Moojan Momen, "Mafia, Mob and Shiism in Iraq: The Rebellion of Ottoman Karbala 1824–1843," *Past & Present*, no. 112 (August 1, 1986): 112–43.

⁴⁶ Nakash, *The Shi'is of Iraq*, 32.

been in comparison to the rest of the empire, took great strides in helping to pacify the provinces and improve provincial security.⁴⁷ There were a handful of missionary schools in Baghdad that emphasized modern education, but they generally disproportionately served the local Jewish and Christian communities.⁴⁸

The early process of Ottoman centralization was accompanied by increasing integration into the world economy. Of the European Great Powers, Britain had the greatest commercial and strategic interests in Iraq. Basra was an important center of Indian Ocean trade, and in British eyes Mesopotamia was a crucial link in the communication network to India. In the mid-19th century, the British sought a better mail route to India on the Euphrates and sent an expedition to explore the feasibility of running steamships in Iraq, later leading the entrepreneurial Lynch Brothers to establish their own shipping firm, a process which is described in greater detail below. Additionally, British interests provided technical and financial assistance in constructing the first telegraph network through the region, and the British and Indian government won a concession to operate part of the network.⁴⁹ By the end of the 19th century, a majority of Iraq's foreign commerce was with Britain and India, and British owned ships dominated the local transit trade.⁵⁰ In the later part of the 19th century, there was a large foreign diplomatic presence and expatriate community in Baghdad—including not only the British, but French, German, Russian, and American consuls.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ceylan, *The Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq*, 56–67.

⁴⁸ Abdullah, *A Short History of Iraq*, 97–100. Anthony Norris Groves established himself in Baghdad to operate a protestant missionary school. See Groves, *Journal of a Residence at Bagdad*, 1–6.

⁴⁹ Ceylan, *The Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq*, 187–9.

⁵⁰ Abdullah, *A Short History of Iraq*, 100–1; Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*, 278–96.

⁵¹ Çetinsaya, *The Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 23. A partial register of important foreign diplomatic personnel can be found in Cengiz Eroğlu, Murat Babuçoğlu, and Orhan Özdil,

Scholars generally agree that Midhat Pasha's administration in Baghdad province was instrumental in bringing the full implementation of the Tanzimat reforms to Iraq, although Ebubekir Ceylan sees the groundwork of Midhat Pasha's success as having been laid by his predecessors Reşit Pasha and Namık Pasha.⁵² Among the early modernization efforts in Baghdad was the establishment of the Ottoman-Oman Administration in 1855, a river shipping company that was to be the main competitor of the Lynches. After a number of administrative successes in the Balkans and Danube Province, Midhat brought a reformist zeal to local administration. He was crucial in attempting to put both the Land Code of 1858 and the Vilayet Law of 1864 into practice.⁵³ Among many public works projects, Midhat also established new secular technical schools.⁵⁴ Generally speaking the provinces of Iraq lagged behind the rest of the empire in the opening of schools, but literacy was slowly on the rise. Under Midhat Pasha the first permanent printing houses in Iraq opened—publishing the first official newspaper, the biweekly *Zewra* which featured articles in Ottoman Turkish and Arabic, in addition to a trickle of books and pamphlets on different subjects.⁵⁵ Fostering industrial growth was a key aim of Midhat's short tenure as governor of Baghdad, but there was little success in that area throughout the 19th century.⁵⁶

The twin processes of state centralization and integration into the world economy had a profound affect on everyday society in Iraq. Land reforms accelerated and deepened the divide

Osmanlı vilayet salnamelerinde Bağdat (Ankara: Global Strateji Enstitüsü, TİKV, 2006), 357–65.

⁵² Ceylan, *The Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq*, 220.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 152–72; Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 15.

⁵⁴ Ceylan, *The Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq*, 175–218. The public works projects undertaken in the Tanzimat era were quite numerous. In addition to the establishment of new schools, it included the improvement of the road network, harbors, and urban infrastructure; the building of new irrigation works; and the creation of public buildings and parks.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 215–7.

⁵⁶ Abdullah, *A Short History of Iraq*, 102–6; Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 15–20.

between classes as tribesmen were often reduced to the status of tenant farmers. At the same time, the shift to agriculture and the rise in the value of land enriched different segments of the population. The Tanzimat period in Iraq was short-lived—as in the rest of the empire, the reign of Abdülhamid II saw a shift in Ottoman policy in Iraq.⁵⁷ Abdülhamid was deeply mistrustful of officials in his government with Young Ottoman sympathies. After all, it was statesmen like Midhat Pasha who had led the constitutional revolution of 1876, and the independent bureaucracy posed a potential threat to his rule. Thus, after abrogating the constitution, Abdülhamid bypassed the bureaucratic institutions created by the Tanzimat and instead engaged with tribal shaykhs to implement his pan-Islamic policies in the provinces. This in turn fostered the resentment among the bureaucratic classes that helped give rise to the Young Turk movement that eventually deposed him in 1909.⁵⁸ In Iraq, the early part of Abdülhamid’s reign was characterized by the intense fear of British and Iranian encroachment as well as Wahhabist aggression from Arabia, and skepticism of any policy that could potentially lead to administrative decentralization.⁵⁹

Hamidian policy shifted in the early 1900s, and focused on mitigation of internal security concerns through conciliation with local tribal leaders. Selim Deringil, Gökhan Çetinsaya, and Karen Kern have all taken up the complex relations between the Ottoman state and the growing Shi’a minority of Iraq. It was seen as a potentially seditious element of society that would align itself with Iran in the event of international conflict.⁶⁰ Fear of Shi’i uprising in part led to the development of Abdülhamid’s pan-Islamic outlook, though the extent to which this was

⁵⁷ Çetinsaya, *The Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 10–19.

⁵⁸ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, 20–4.

⁵⁹ Çetinsaya, *The Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 148.

⁶⁰ Gökhan Çetinsaya, “The Caliph and Mujtahids: Ottoman Policy towards the Shiite Community of Iraq in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 4 (2005): 561–74.

successful in calming Shi'i unrest is debatable. There was a belief that Shi'is could be swayed from their superstitions if only they were exposed to proper Sunni theology. Abdülhamid sent properly trained Sunni ulema to Iraq to engage in propaganda and counterpropaganda campaigns to mitigate Shi'a influence.⁶¹ Furthermore, the Ottoman state prevented the marriage of Ottoman women to Persian Shi'a men, hoping to preserve a Sunni Ottoman national religious identity by blocking conversion to Shi'ism through marriage and birth.⁶²

The relationship between the central Ottoman state and the tribes of Iraq has received considerable scholarly attention—it forms a critical part of both Ceylan and Çetinsaya's books, and is the subject of a number of other studies. Samira Haj has attempted to dispel Orientalist assumptions of tribal socio-economic and political homogeneity. She examines tribe-town and tribe-state relations in 19th century Iraq and argues that it is fundamentally essentialist and ahistorical to treat tribes in Iraq as a primordial and unchanging whole that existed in opposition to settled populations, as they were economically integrated with urban populations and because different tribes' responses to the centralizing political and administrative reforms of Tanzimat varied greatly.⁶³ Along the same lines, Ceylan has argued that the relationship between the Ottoman state and the tribes of Iraq is more complicated than prior scholarship has allowed. On the one hand, the establishment of provincial councils with the adoption of the Provincial Law of 1864 allowed local people to participate in local politics, but also expanded Ottoman central authority over the tribes. On the other, tribal shaykhs were often given prominent positions in provincial administration, co-opting them into the central political structure as opposed to

⁶¹ Selim Deringil, "The Struggle against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq: A Study in Ottoman Counter-Propaganda," *Die Welt Des Islams* 30, no. 1/4 (January 1, 1990): 45–62, doi:10.2307/1571045.

⁶² Kern, *Imperial Citizen*, 1.

⁶³ Samira Haj, "The Problems of Tribalism: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Iraqi History," *Social History* 16, no. 1 (1991): 45–58.

alienating them. Some tribal aristocracies were fractured by new policies; others were incorporated into the political apparatus.⁶⁴

Most important for this study, there is a growing body of scholarly literature that has examined the ways in which the Ottoman center viewed its periphery as a colonial empire. Several authors have examined Iraq in its imperial context. Selim Deringil and Ussama Makdisi have described how the sultan and the state in the late Ottoman Empire internalized Orientalist and colonial discourses about its own subjects. It began to conceive of itself as superior to Arabs, Kurds, Armenians, and other ethnic and religious minorities, and embarked on an imperial project bring them into a new modernity by settling and civilizing them.⁶⁵ Christoph Herzog has surveyed Ottoman views of Baghdad from the perspective of the imperial center. He argues that there is no uniform discourse of the 19th century, but concludes that the views put to paper by Ottoman writers of the time could be described as colonial. The cliché of the common mind held that Baghdad was a splendid, exotic, and above all distant city, but the observations of visitors and appointed administrators reflect an attitude of arrogance and disdain towards its comparative underdevelopment.⁶⁶ Ceylan corroborates this view and argues that the significance of Baghdad in the Ottoman imperial imagination stemmed from both its history as the ancient capital of Islamic civilization, and as a frontier bulwark against the ever-present threat from Persia.⁶⁷

Though there was no open conflict between the Ottoman Empire and Britain during the reign of Abdülhamid II, Ottoman suspicions of British imperial designs in the Gulf and British

⁶⁴ Ceylan, *The Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq*, 221.

⁶⁵ Makdisi, "Ottoman Orientalism," 781–5; Deringil, "'They Live in a State of Nomadism and Savagery': The Late Ottoman Empire and the Post-Colonial Debate," 338–40.

⁶⁶ Christoph Herzog, "Nineteenth Century Baghdad Through Ottoman Eyes," in *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, ed. Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp, and Stefan Weber (Würzburg: Ergon in Kommission, 2002), 311–28.

⁶⁷ Ceylan, *The Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq*, 219.

suspicious over Germany's involvement in the construction of the Berlin-Baghdad railway fueled mutual distrust. Gökhan Çetinsaya identifies Abdülhamid's selection of his administrators in Iraq as key in shaping his regional policies—many of his decisions reflected their recommendations. One of his most famous policies—pan-Islamism—is plainly evident in Iraq as a means of uniting ruler and ruled.⁶⁸ Additionally, Çetinsaya has argued that Ottoman authorities in Istanbul recognized the increasing encroachment of the British into the Persian Gulf region beginning in the 1830s, but had few means to actively resist it.⁶⁹ British support of the Ottoman Empire waned considerably during the last quarter of the 19th century—William Gladstone's fiery denunciations of the evils of the Turk after massacres in Bulgaria and Armenia drove a wedge between the two empires. In the absence of the military strength, the Ottoman state had to rely on “small-scale, opportunistic” actions that deprived the British of further opportunities to advance in the region, without provoking a direct confrontation.⁷⁰ It is through these small actions that the Ottoman authorities sought to frustrate and impede the expansion of British commercial activity in Iraq.

British Interests in Iraq and the Lynch Company

Some records show that the British empire had a small commercial presence in Iraq in the form of an East India Company factory at Basra as early as 1639. This was not codified into a formal political presence until Sublime Porte granted consular privileges to the factory in 1764.⁷¹ This factory protected the interests of British merchants in Basra and was a link in the mail route

⁶⁸ Çetinsaya, *The Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 149–151.

⁶⁹ Çetinsaya, “Ottoman View of British Presence in Iraq and the Gulf,” 194.

⁷⁰ Çetinsaya, *The Ottoman Administration of Iraq*, 128.

⁷¹ C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, and Sunnuds Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, ed. A. C. Talbot, Reprint, vol. VII: The Treaties, &c., relating to Turkish Arabia, the Persian Gulf, Arabia, and Africa (Calcutta: The Foreign Office Press, 1876), 1, <https://archive.org/details/acollectiontrea00bellgoog>.

to India. At the behest of the home government the Company appointed a Resident at Baghdad in 1798, to counter any threat that Napoleon's invasion of Egypt might pose to the route to India.⁷² Later, the British ambassador at Istanbul secured a berat granting consular privileges to the Baghdad Residency in 1802. The Baghdad and Basra residencies were merged in 1810, and the Resident was granted the title of Political Agent in Turkish Arabia.⁷³ This residency was part of a vast network emanating from British India, which began as part of the commercial machine of the East India Company. The residency system's role became increasingly political beginning in the mid-18th century, as its agents became corps of trained bureaucrats that was eventually reorganized as the Indian Political Service—colonial administrators in territories that were formal parts of the empire, and diplomats in neighboring states. In 1844 the British Residency in Ottoman Iraq was reorganized as a consulate that reported both to the Indian Foreign Department and indirectly to the Foreign Office in London through the Ambassador in Istanbul. The Resident was given the formal title of Consul, and later Consul-General, for Turkish Arabia.⁷⁴ However, throughout the 19th century, different writers use different titles to refer to this office, including Resident and Political Agent, and “the Residency” continued to refer to the British diplomatic complex situated on the banks of the Tigris.

Seeking more efficient steam routes to India, Francis Rawdon Chesney's expedition on the Euphrates brought a permanent British steamship presence to the region, which eventually evolved into the Lynch Company.⁷⁵ In 1834 the Porte issued a ferman that stated: “we have and

⁷² M. E. Yapp, “The Establishment of the East India Company Residency at Baghdād, 1798-1806,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 30, no. 2 (January 1, 1967): 323–36.

⁷³ Aitchison, *Collection of Treaties*, VII: The Treaties, &c., relating to Turkish Arabia, the Persian Gulf, Arabia, and Africa:2.

⁷⁴ Onley, *The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj*, 11–5.

⁷⁵ Parry, “Steam Power and British Influence in Baghdad,” 148–9.

do permit two steam boats to navigate the Euphrates by turns, and this navigation is to continue as long as, conformably to what has been represented to us, it may prove useful to the two powers, and no inconvenience result there from.”⁷⁶ The resultant expedition was something of a disaster. Chesney’s men shipped the parts of the steamers overland to the upper Euphrates with the intention of following the river down its entire course and then attempting to steam back up it. Along the way one of the steamers sank with many men lost and it was decided that navigating on the Euphrates was more difficult than it was worth. Though it seemed the Red Sea route to India was preferable to the route through Iraq, the government in London kept the remaining steamer in Baghdad and supplemented it with three more from India, establishing a small flotilla under the command of Henry Blosse Lynch of the Indian Navy.⁷⁷

Henry Lynch’s brother Thomas eventually joined him in Baghdad to assist in undertaking several geographic surveys of the region. The flotilla under Henry Lynch’s command was later abolished, the Lynches returned to India, and only one steamer remained in Baghdad to operate the mail service.⁷⁸ In 1856 Henry Lynch retired from naval service, becoming a diplomat and moving to Paris.⁷⁹ In 1857 Thomas Lynch returned to London, where he learned that with the reorganization of the Indian Navy the British mail service in Iraq would be abolished. Sensing an opportunity, he engaged with the Foreign Office to assume the navigation rights of the ferman that had originally been granted for the Chesney expedition.⁸⁰ Thomas and Henry, along with another brother Stephen, established the Euphrates and Tigris Steam Navigation Company in

⁷⁶ Aitchison, *Collection of Treaties*, VII: The Treaties, &c., relating to Turkish Arabia, the Persian Gulf, Arabia, and Africa: 15.

⁷⁷ Parry, “Steam Power and British Influence in Baghdad,” 150–6.

⁷⁸ Thomas Kerr Lynch, *The Navigation of the Euphrates and Tigris and the Political Rights of England Thereon* (London: Strangeways and Sons, 1884), 167.

⁷⁹ Leslie Stephen, *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 34 (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1885), 333–4, <http://archive.org/details/dictionarynatio57stepgoog>.

⁸⁰ Lynch, *Navigation of the Euphrates and Tigris*, 168–9.

mid-1861 as a joint-stock company with a main offices in London and eighteen shareholders.⁸¹ With the launch of the *City of London* on a regular route between Baghdad and Basra, the Lynch Brothers began competing directly with the Ottoman steamship administration. Their business boomed, and the *London* was joined by the steamer *Dijleh* in 1865. The ferman limited the number of ships the company could run on the river simultaneously to two, but after 1880 they kept steamers in reserve in order to increase the frequency of shipping.⁸² The Lynch Company had an immediate opportunity to fill a void in steam navigation on the Tigris, as the state-run Ottoman administration carried passengers but no private cargo. In the latter half of the 19th century the Lynch Company seems to have come to dominate the shipping of the main exports of the Iraqi provinces—wool, dates, wheat, and barley.⁸³ Their firm was almost exclusively owned

⁸¹ Charles Barker, *The Joint Stock Companies Directory for 1867* (London: John King and Co., Limited, 1867), 459.

⁸² Joseph Mathia Svoboda, “Diary 04, May 1865 to August 1866,” ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 4, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=8834&REC=5>. Entry for June 10, 1865. The *Dijleh* sank in 1876 and was replaced by the *H. Blossie Lynch* the following year, which was joined by the *Khalifah* in 1880. For the sinking of the *Dijleh* and the launch of the *Blossie Lynch*, see Joseph Mathia Svoboda, “Diary 17, August 1876 to May 1877,” ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 14–8, 165–6, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=4787&REC=6>. Entries for September 8-10, 1876 and April 5, 1877. For the launch of the *Khalifah* see Joseph Mathia Svoboda, “Diary 21, June 1879 to April 1880,” ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 204–5, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=5637&REC=10>. Entry for March 12, 1880. The *City of London* sank in March 1881. See Joseph Mathia Svoboda, “Diary 23, January 1881 to November 1881,” ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 40, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=6101&REC=12>. Entry for March 8, 1881.

⁸³ Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914* (London: I. B. Taurus, 1993), 274–8.

and locally managed by Britons or other Europeans such as Svoboda, while their steamers were crewed primarily by Chaldean Christians from Mosul.⁸⁴ Throughout this period, the Ottoman state made numerous attempts to revoke or curtail the privileges that the Lynch Company claimed, most notably the number and types of vessels that they operated, and their right to navigate on the Tigris, which was not included in the original ferman that they had inherited.

Joseph Svoboda's Diaries

On February 12, 1862, Svoboda began working for the Lynch Company. He made his first journey from Baghdad to Basra when the company operated only the steamer *City of London*.⁸⁵ Joseph began keeping his diary during his first year working for the Lynches. He records the details of each journey up and down the Tigris in meticulous and often monotonous detail. Each time, he documents the same procession of landmarks, usually recording the timing of their passage within five minutes. He assiduously notes the time and place that they meet other vessels plying the waters of the Tigris—other Lynch steamers or those owned by the official Ottoman steamship company. He makes logs of the various types and quantities of cargo that they take on, and the number of passengers that embark and disembark at any given port, diligently logging any notable people or products aboard. In marginal notes, he takes down the temperature, notes the wind speed and direction, and records the level of the river and the draft of the steamer.

The usual journey from Baghdad would begin early in the morning, around 6 am. Generally, it would take about two days to make the trip downriver, and about three and a half

⁸⁴ Grattan Geary, *Through Asiatic Turkey: Narrative of a Journey from Bombay to the Bosphorus*, vol. 1 (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1878), 108.

⁸⁵ "Diary 36, December 1891 to August 1892," ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 84, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=8632&REC=4>. Entry for February 12, 1892.

for the return.⁸⁶ These times, of course, varied depending on the flow of the river, whether or not they had any mechanical issues, or if they ran aground on a shoal or in dreaded Devil's Elbow—an extremely acute bend in the river. To start they would pass the Diyala River, then the famous Arch of Ctesiphon, then the ruins Baghdadieh Fort, and the towns of Kut and Amara where the Lynch Company maintained fueling stations. Between Amara and the pilgrimage site of Ezra's Tomb, the Tigris entered a stretch called the Narrows, dwindling to a width of 50 yards and depth of barely three feet.⁸⁷ Beyond that, the river drains into the Shatt al-Arab at Qurna before arriving at Basra. A typical day's worth of diary entries on a down river journey might follow a similar pattern:

“At 6,,20 AM. proceeded Ship drawing 3 feet 6 Inches; no rise of the river yet; At 8,,45 passed Diala, it has risen this river about 2 feet; At 9 passed the SS. Phrat & Barge going up at Jaffer; At 9,,45 we anchored at Gusseiba & sent to sound, At 9,,55 the S.S. Khalifah came to pass up; [...] At 10,,15 we weighed and proceeded; the Khalifah had stopped further up, apparently repairing some thing in the Engines;~ At 11 passed Ctesiphon, Finished with the passenger Tickets; we have in all 139 ½ (4 in 1st Class, one is the Persian consul dismissed, going to Bushire Mirza Ali Khan, [...])~At 4,,50 P.M. passed Baghdadieh Fort;~Weather

⁸⁶ Joseph often records the time between each destination and landmark of the journey as marginal notes. By the late 19th century the steamer service was regular enough to have times published in travel guides. See Sir Charles William Wilson, ed., *Handbook for Travellers in Asia Minor, Transcaucasia, Persia, Etc* (London: John Murray, 1895), 313.

⁸⁷ Joseph often attests to the difficulty of navigating this stretch of the river. For the specific details of its width and depth, see Margaret Makiya, “The Svoboda Diaries,” *Baghdad College of Art Journal*, June 1969, 43.

clearing up & becoming fine, moon 4 days old;~At 5,,50 we touched at Rmelat & could not get passed we anchored for the night”⁸⁸

This is a quintessential passage that reflects the quotidian nature of most individual entries. However, in aggregate Svoboda’s diaries represent an extensive collection of primary source materials for research on the late 19th and early 20th century history of Ottoman Iraq. These diaries are quite voluminous—they comprise 61 volumes, each of which is several hundred pages. Joseph wrote in them nearly daily from 1863 to 1908, cataloguing almost every aspect of his everyday life. Biographically, they contain the sweep of the second two thirds of Joseph’s life, witnessing his transition from a hotheaded young man to a concerned father and loving grandfather in his later years. They contain innumerable facts of everyday life and business, from weather conditions to market prices of various goods; they contain his own accounting of his finances and his time, but also the matters of the company and its relations with its competitors; they contain the trials and joys of his personal life, and his observations of disease, death, and the geopolitical upheaval of the 19th century. Unfortunately, some of Svoboda’s diaries are missing and presumed lost, including the first three volumes, leaving us unsure of why he even began writing. Evidently, however, keeping a diary was an impulse that Joseph passed on to his only son, Alexander, who in 1897 kept a journal of his own, chronicling

⁸⁸ “Diary 48, August 1898 to February 1899,” 1899, 232–3, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=1223&REC=9>. Entry for November 18, 1898. This passage shows some of the peculiarities in written English that appear throughout the diaries. Because Joseph’s formal education in English was limited, he often uses non-traditional spellings, spells personal and place names inconsistently, and in order to save time he occasionally makes grammatical omissions and uses non-standard abbreviations. Generally, I have preserved these peculiarities of Svoboda’s writing without the use of [sic]. However, I have exercised judgment and used [sic] to indicate where I believe additional errors have been introduced into the text by Margaret Makiya during her transcription process.

his journey by land and sea from Baghdad to Paris in the colloquial Baghdadi Arabic of the time.⁸⁹

Joseph was born in Baghdad on October 17, 1840. His father, Antone Svoboda, was a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian empire who immigrated to Baghdad by way of Istanbul and established himself as a glass and crystal merchant.⁹⁰ Joseph's mother, Euphemie Muradjian, was a daughter of a prominent Chaldean Catholic Armenian merchant family.⁹¹ Antone was born in Osijek (in modern day Croatia) in 1796 and emigrated from Vienna to Istanbul, and ultimately to Baghdad.⁹² Antone and Euphemie married in Baghdad on February 12, 1825.⁹³ They lived in the Christian quarter of the city and formed part of a small but closely bound community of Ottoman and European Christians.⁹⁴ In addition to serving as representative of Austro-Hungarian political interests in Baghdad, Antone Svoboda maintained a *han* in Baghdad that served as a frequent stopping point for Europeans passing through.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ Alexander Svoboda, *From Bagdad to Paris: 1897: Journal of a Journey to Europe by Land via Damascus and Beirut*, ed. Walter Andrews, trans. Nowf Abdul-Majid Allawi, First Edition (Seattle: Newbook Digital Texts in the Humanities, 2013).

⁹⁰ Antone's nationality and ethnic background are difficult to classify. At various times, he is described by others as German, Hungarian, or Austrian. See Robert Cotton Money, *Journal of a Tour in Persia, During the Years 1824 & 1825* (London: Teape and Son, 1828), 234; Groves, *Journal of a Residence at Bagdad*, 176; Ida Pfeiffer, *A Woman's Journey Round the World, from Vienna to Brazil, Chili, Tahiti, China, Hindostan, Persia, and Asia Minor. An Unabridged Translation from the German of Ida Pfeiffer*, 4th ed. (London: Nathaniel Cooke, 1854), 250, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/yale.39002030977913>; W. H. Colvill, "Sanitary Report on Turkish Arabia," *Transactions of the Medical and Physical Society of Bombay*, 2nd Series, no. 11 (1871): 49.

⁹¹ Money, *Journal of a Tour in Persia*, 234–6.

⁹² Makiya, "The Svoboda Diaries," 38.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Various travelogues make consistent reference to the small size of the community of European expatriates in Baghdad. See for example Frederick Charles Webb, *Up the Tigris to Bagdad* (London: E & F. N. Spon, 1870), 34.

⁹⁵ Groves, *Journal of a Residence at Bagdad*, 176; Money, *Journal of a Tour in Persia*, 234–6; Pfeiffer, *A Woman's Journey Round the World*, 250–9.

Joseph was the seventh of Antone and Euphemie's eleven children, though only six of his siblings survived into adulthood. His elder brother Alexander achieved some fame as a painter and photographer, becoming famous for his photographic series of the Seven Churches of Asia.⁹⁶ Joseph's younger brother Henry also worked for the Lynch Company in Baghdad. Their sisters Sophie (Eliza), Emilia, Madeline (Medula), and Carolina married into the local community of Armenian and European Christians. As it stands, little is known of Joseph's childhood or his reasoning for writing the diaries. As early as 1855, a teenaged Joseph traveled from Baghdad to Bombay with his elder brother Alexander.⁹⁷ They stayed there for several years, in which time Joseph became conversant in Hindustani.⁹⁸ They returned to Baghdad in 1857, and Alexander moved to İzmir in 1858, where he married.⁹⁹ After returning from Baghdad, Joseph began learning English from his brother-in-law Richard Rogers between 1859 and 1862.¹⁰⁰ Thanks to this tutoring, Joseph was able to begin writing his English language diaries, though it is apparent from his later entries that he also spoke French, Italian, Arabic, and Persian. Presumably, based

⁹⁶ "Literary Gossip," *The Athenaeum*, May 10, 1879, 604.

⁹⁷ "Diary 20, September 1878 to June 1879," ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 34, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=5405&REC=9>. Entry for October 6, 1878.

⁹⁸ "Diary 09, October 1870 to July 1871," ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 17, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=8679&REC=1> Entry for March 15, 1871.

⁹⁹ "Diary 28, June 1885 to August 1886," ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 220-3, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=7061&REC=16>. Entry for May 25, 1886.

¹⁰⁰ "Diary 19, November 1877 to August 1878," ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 193, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=5191&REC=8>. Entry for July 14, 1878.

on his family heritage, he also knew at least some of the languages of the Austro-Hungarian empire, though this is not clear from the diaries that have so far been evaluated.

The Christian quarter of Baghdad was small.¹⁰¹ The Svoboda family had close ties with many other families in the community—European and native alike. Joseph had particularly close relations with the Marine family. Over the first several volumes of the diaries, he develops an intimate friendship with a woman named Eliza Marine. Eliza was a year Joseph’s senior and married with several children, but she lived in Baghdad while her husband Fathalla Sayegh and eldest son Jeboory ran a trade and construction business in Amara, some distance down the Tigris from Baghdad.. While Joseph maintained amicable relations with Eliza’s husband, brothers, and sons, he would frequently call on her. They would spend hours dining, talking, drinking tea, or playing backgammon. In his early diaries, Joseph often refers to her as “EM,” or simply uses an ellipsis.¹⁰²

Joseph and Eliza’s close friendship was the subject of controversy and local gossip. Once out furniture shopping, Joseph learned that someone had provided the local Ottoman authorities with a list of “public women...& also the Christian women of bad reputation” in Baghdad that implicated him for his frequent visits to Eliza’s home.¹⁰³ Nothing much seems to have come of these particular rumors, but the gossip was renewed when Eliza’s husband Fathalla passed away

¹⁰¹ Various censuses over the last quarter of the 19th and first years of the 20th century recorded roughly 1,200 to 2,000 Christian men of various denominations in the *kaza* (district) of Baghdad, constituting about 3% of the urban male population. See Eroğlu, Babuçoğlu, and Özdil, *Osmanlı vilayet salnamelerinde Bağdat*, 164–167; Shaw, “The Ottoman Census System and Population, 1831-1914”; Justin McCarthy, “The Population of Ottoman Syria and Iraq, 1878-1914,” *Asian and African Studies* 15, no. 1 (1981): 3–44.

¹⁰² See, for example, “Diary 18, May 1877 to November 1877,” ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 7, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=4958&REC=7>. Entry for May 15, 1877.

¹⁰³ “Diary 09,” 37–8. Entry for July 8, 1871.

unexpectedly at Amara on May 11, 1877.¹⁰⁴ On July 7, Joseph called on Eliza to discuss their future. Several of Eliza's friends and daughters were aware of the budding romance between them, and she had spoken with a priest who recommended that they quickly marry.¹⁰⁵ The following day he called on his sister Medula. He told her of his plans to marry, and before he mentioned that it was Eliza, Medula guessed it and told him that gossip of their affair had spread through the community. People had asked Medula about the matter, and she did not approve because Eliza was older than Joseph and had several grown children.¹⁰⁶ Eliza Marine's brothers Yousif and Antone similarly did not approve. Yousif suggested that it may be better for Joseph to marry one of Eliza's grown daughters instead, but Joseph replied that his heart was only with Eliza. While they did not sanction it, they ultimately told Joseph that Eliza was old enough to make her own decisions and that they would not interfere.¹⁰⁷

Over the next several weeks, opposition from both families mounted. In September, Joseph confided his plans to marry Eliza to his supervisor and brother-in-law Thomas Blockey, who later sent him a letter expressing apprehension about the marriage and advising him to wait.¹⁰⁸ It seems the content of this letter was made public, setting European society in Baghdad ablaze with gossip. Joseph surmised that one of his sisters, either Eliza or Carolina, was to blame.¹⁰⁹ The next day, Joseph brought the matter to his father Antone, who was scandalized by the gossip and told him in no uncertain terms that he did not support the marriage.¹¹⁰ Joseph

¹⁰⁴ "Diary 18," 5. Entry for May 13, 1877.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 56. Entry for July 7, 1877.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 57. Entry for July 8, 1877.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 78–80. Entry for August 4, 1877.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 123–5. Entries for September 24–25, 1877.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 133–4. Entry for October 7, 1877.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 136. Entry for October 8, 1877.

sought mediation from the French priest of the Latin Church, who would not perform the wedding without his father's blessing or confirmation from the church authorities.¹¹¹

The matter came to literal blows on October 11th. That day, Joseph returned to his family's home to find his father, his sisters Eliza and Medula, his brother Henry's wife Menoosha, and his sister Eliza's son Arteen. As he went to his room, his sister Eliza launched into a tirade of insults directed at him and Eliza Marine. Joseph writes: "I could not resist any longer and my temper got up so much that I ran downstairs and ceased Eliza and was going to knock her down, and abused her with everything I could say." His father knocked him down with his walking stick, and when Joseph wrested the stick from his father's hands, Eliza's son Arteen rushed to intervene. The situation rapidly descended into a melee with Joseph's sister Eliza wailing and shrieking, calling for help from passersby on the street. In the course of the struggle, Joseph seized a nargile and smashed it across his nephew Arteen's head. He recalls: "I ran upstairs to bring my gun and shoot them for I became unmanageable by this time." The frightened family members fled into the streets, and his sister-in-law Menoosha ultimately calmed him down.¹¹²

Following the altercation, Joseph went to the Latin Church and demanded the priest perform the marriage immediately and in secret lest he go to another church. Unable to perform the wedding under such circumstances, the priest turned Joseph away, but recommended that he and Eliza visit the Assyrian Bishop, who could marry them. Joseph went to Eliza and told her his plan, then rushed off to meet the Assyrian Bishop. They met, and Joseph arranged for the wedding to take place later that evening, October 11, 1877, after sunset. At 6:30 pm, the bishop arrived at the Marine home. The ceremony was intimate and brief. As they stood in the *iwana* of

¹¹¹ Ibid., 137–9. Entry for October 9, 1877.

¹¹² Ibid., 142–3. Entry for October 11, 1877.

the courtyard in the presence of Eliza's brother Antone Marine and their friend Rezook Tessy, Joseph presented Eliza, dressed in white linens, with the diamond ring given to him by his mother Euphemie twelve years earlier. Joseph recorded his relief at the deed being done.¹¹³ However, the early period of their marriage was a rocky one. They faced persistent gossip and disapproval.¹¹⁴ The rift between Joseph and his father was permanent. Though Joseph wrote him letters begging pardon and forgiveness, they never spoke again.¹¹⁵ Antone passed away in September 1878, leaving Joseph full of grief and remorse.¹¹⁶ He did not reconcile with his sisters until well after his father's funeral.

On July 7, 1878, Joseph and Eliza's only son was born. He was christened as Alexander Richard Svoboda, named for Joseph's older brother Alexander as well as Alexander the Great. His middle name, Richard, was the name of Joseph's late brother-in-law Richard Rogers.¹¹⁷ On August 24, 1884, Eliza gave birth to a second child, this time a daughter named Carolina.¹¹⁸ Joseph seems to have had a good, happy relationship with his children while they were young, often bringing Alexander with him on trips up and down the river. Tragedy struck in late 1887, when three-year-old Carolina contracted a dangerous combination of small-pox and typhoid fever.¹¹⁹ Joseph describes her symptoms in heartrending and agonizing detail.¹²⁰ After four

¹¹³ Ibid., 145. Entry for October 11, 1877.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 148–64. Entries for October 15 to November 6, 1877.

¹¹⁵ "Diary 19," 163–4. Entries for June 3–5, 1878.

¹¹⁶ "Diary 20," 8–14. Entry for September 8, 1878.

¹¹⁷ "Diary 19," 193. Entries for July 13–14, 1878.

¹¹⁸ After Carolina's death, Joseph notes that she was born August 24, 1884. See "Diary 31, November 1887 to May 1888," ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 20, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865–1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=7572&REC=19>. Entry for December 3, 1887.

¹¹⁹ "Diary 30, April 1887 to November 1887," ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 151, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865–1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content->

weeks of struggle and failed treatments, Carolina passed away from her illnesses December 3, 1887.¹²¹

The middle portion of the diaries reveal Joseph's deep concern for his son's well-being. From an early age, Joseph sought to provide Alexander with the best education that he could. He seemingly recognized the preeminent position of Britain in the world, raising Alexander as a native English speaker by speaking to him only in that language, and demanding that the French priests of the Latin church where Alexander went to school do the same.¹²² As a young man, Joseph sent Alexander to Europe to study in Paris in 1897.¹²³ Evidently, Alexander's time in Europe was quite vexing for Joseph. For the first several months Joseph was worried and frustrated by Alexander's constant overspending, but in his view the situation became catastrophic when Alexander took up with a young French woman named Marie Josephine Derisbourg.¹²⁴ Marie came from a respectable French family, and Alexander begged his father's

dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=7406&REC=18. Entry for November 6, 1887.

¹²⁰ Joseph writes: "I then went home and saw poor Carolina I was so struck and astonished at the appearance of her face which is litterally covered a very strong confluent small pox the postules are all mixed together and it had turned into crest and dark her hands are trembling close and full of postules the boddy, feet and calf of the feet all sore and healing off, poor girl she was ashamed to look at me...it made my hart break at the sight and I could not keep myself from the tears, her voice harsh and [could not] speak the eruption came out very severe on her and into her sitem in her throat and few on the lung, the postules are falling off from her body but not the face..." Ibid., 163–4. Entry for November 19, 1887.

¹²¹ "Diary 31," 20. Entry for December 3, 1887.

¹²² "Diary 26, June 1883 to May 1884," ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 254, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=6784&REC=15>. Entry for May 15, 1884.

¹²³ Svoboda, *From Bagdad to Paris*, 1–3. Alexander's journal covers the duration of his journey. However, the details of his time there are only within Joseph's diaries, filtered through various letters and telegrams home.

¹²⁴ "Diary 47, November 1897 to August 1898," 1898, 370–1, 380–85, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, [35](https://content-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

permission. However, Joseph refused and was furious when he heard through a friend that Marie had come with Alexander on a visit to Vienna and that she “lived with him as man & wife,” risking imprisonment for adultery. Joseph made multiple attempts to involve the Austrian authorities to end their relationship and have his son sent home to Baghdad.¹²⁵ Alexander and Marie continued their relationship, with Joseph believing that they had married in Paris. However, they evidently did not marry until they were in Beirut in the summer of 1900, having already left France to return to Baghdad.

Joseph resigned from the Lynch Company’s service in 1902 after four decades working the river, citing his failing health and frequent indigestion caused by an ulcer.¹²⁶ He lived out the rest of his days in a country home outside Baghdad, still diligently recording his social calls, his ailments, the weather, and the passing of ships down the river. Joseph became a grandfather on August 8, 1904 when Alexander’s daughter Cecile was born. However, he passed away just a few short years later, in January 1908. After, his death, the diary continues in Alexander’s hand, giving us the details of Joseph’s last few days, and writing: “After the unfortunate death of my father I should like to continue here in his diary book the most important events in our current life, thus following his desire of registering what occurs during our life.”¹²⁷ What, if any, records Alexander wrote after this are presently unknown.

dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=820&REC=8. Entries for July 25 and July 31, 1898.

¹²⁵ Svoboda, “Diary 48,” 77–80, 89–90, 112–7, 145–6, 154–7, 266–74. Entries for September 2–20, October 5–11, and December 11–13, 1898.

¹²⁶ Joseph Mathia Svoboda, “Diary 53, January 1902 to February 1903,” 1903, 53, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865–1908, University of Washington, Seattle. Joseph seems to have misremembered how long he had been working for the Lynch Company, writing thirty-nine years in his resignation letter, but recording in other diaries that he began his service in 1862.

¹²⁷ Joseph Mathia Svoboda, “Diary 61, December 1907 to January 1908,” 1908, 38–45, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865–1908, University of Washington, Seattle,

Throughout the diaries Svoboda gives us extensive catalogs of his everyday activities that preoccupied him. Aside from frequent calls on his family and friends, Joseph devoted most of his leisure time to sport shooting, photography, and amateur archaeology. He would hunt partridges to give to friends and family, snakes, foxes, and occasionally lions.¹²⁸ In one instance he and his brother shot four lions from the deck of the ship, including a nine-foot male, a feat virtually unheard of in Iraq at the time.¹²⁹ At another point in the diaries, Svoboda sold a collection of cylinder seals and coins that he had acquired to the famed Orientalist E. A. Wallis Budge of the British Museum for £130.¹³⁰

Most of his daily life is occupied by work and the affairs of the company. They contain extensive details about the type, quantities, and destinations of various cargos, usually measured in the common Ottoman measures of the time—okes, dirhams, manns, waznas, and taghars.¹³¹ He takes detailed notes of the weather—temperature, wind speed, cloud cover, and so forth—and other environmental factors such as famines and plagues of insects that could have an affect on

<https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=3360&REC=17>.

¹²⁸ “Diary 18,” 115–121. Entries for September 17-20, 1877; “Diary 04,” 108. Entry for May 12, 1866.

¹²⁹ “Diary 13, January 1874 to August 1874,” ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 56–67, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=4220&REC=3>. Entries for March 19-31, 1874.

¹³⁰ Joseph Mathia Svoboda, “Diary 35, July 1890 to April 1891,” ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 165–6, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=8382&REC=3>. Entries for February 4-6, 1891.

¹³¹ One of Midhat Pasha’s many reforms was to institute a standardized system of weights and measures. This system was roughly metric. An oke was equal to 400 dirhams, roughly 1.28 kg. There were 10 okes to a manns, 10 manns to a wazna, and 10 waznas to a taghar. However, prevailing customary weights for each of these units were also used, making it difficult to use Svoboda’s diaries to precisely determine the weight of the cargo that the Lynch company shipped. See Issawi, *The Fertile Crescent, 1800-1914*, 117.

the business. Occasionally, Svoboda becomes engrossed in petty workplace squabbles. At one point, the company adopted a policy of transshipping passengers and cargo from one vessel to another to get around a reed *sudd* (barrier) constructed in the river by restive tribesmen. Even after the *sudd* washed away, the local director of the Lynch Company, Thomas Blockey, maintained the policy—evidently out of some sort of enmity between himself and the commander of the *H. Blossé Lynch*, Captain Cowley. This meant that the crew of the *Blossé Lynch* was unable to return to their homes in Baghdad for weeks—this just a few months after Eliza had given birth to Alexander. This treatment by the Lynch Company management was so distressing for Svoboda that he threatened resignation from the company’s service.¹³² He even entertained the possibility of taking a position as manager of the Ottoman-Oman Administration, which was undergoing reorganization with foreign capital.¹³³

The diaries also engage with themes that students and scholars of late Ottoman history will find familiar. Svoboda bears witness to the complex process of negotiation and conflict that the Ottoman state engaged in with the Arab tribes of Iraq. Occasionally, the Lynch steamers were victims of attacks and raids during periods of tribal unrest, such as in the summer of 1880. In an attack perpetrated by members of the Albu Muhammad tribe, Captain Clements of the *Khalifah* and a passenger were wounded, and the ship’s steerman was killed. The company reported the incident to the Ottoman authorities at Amara, but Joseph lamented “the Turks are so weak now that they cannot do anything with the Arabs.” On the next trip the *Blossé Lynch* was given an escort of *zaptiyes*, but Joseph thought that the ship’s crew was better armed with new

¹³² Svoboda, “Diary 21,” 22–4, 112–3. This policy continued from July until November 1879, even though the way was clear. See entries for July 24 and November 9, 1879.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 145. Entry for December 22, 1879.

Sneider shotguns than the “miserable Zapteyehs...with their rusty muskets.”¹³⁴ In other entries, Svoboda witnessed Baghdad’s status as a staging ground for the empire’s attempt to exert force of arms over the Arabian peninsula, observing Midhat Pasha’s invasion of Hasa and other Ottoman imperial adventures in the Nejd. The later diaries show the ongoing implementation of the Tanzimat under Midhat and other statesmen, and the changes brought by the reign of Abdülhamid II.

We also get a sense of how Svoboda positioned himself in Baghdadi society. Though he was born there, was an Chaldean Christian on his mother’s side, and only ever visited Europe twice in his life, Joseph clearly shared an European identity in common with the small population of expatriates there. He always worked to stay up-to-date with news from Europe, frequently corresponding with friends and family, and following news of political changes and wars raging on the continent.¹³⁵ He even went so far as to ensure that his father and daughter were laid to rest with the Austrian flag draping their caskets.¹³⁶ While Svoboda’s diaries are ultimately the product of an individual man, they reveal the larger picture of how a man in his position comported himself in everyday life and within his larger society. His time in the employment of the Lynch Company reveals the manifold interactions and contestations between the Ottoman and British authorities over commercial and public health issues. They, along with consular documents, medical reports, and the memoirs of Thomas Lynch, show that the enactment and contestation of formal and informal empire in lower Iraq was a complicated

¹³⁴ Joseph Mathia Svoboda, “Diary 22, April 1880 to January 1881,” ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 63–71, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=5864&REC=11>. Entries for July 11-14, 1880.

¹³⁵ “Diary 04,” 122–4. Entries for June 21-28, 1866.

¹³⁶ “Diary 20,” 8–14. Entry for September 8, 1878; “Diary 31,” 20. Entry for December 3, 1887.

process that was not always reducible to British political support for commercial interests or small-scale Ottoman resistance to British encroachment. Instead it was expressed in multiple, occasionally contradictory ways, depending on the actors involved and the political climate of the time.

The Lynches' Barges and the Grain Trade in Iraq

Hala Fattah has noted that in the 19th century in lower Iraq there was an “ongoing struggle for control of the food supply between local forces...and British shippers.” Wheat and barley were the primary staples and incredibly important to the regional economy. The Ottoman government established state monopolies on the grain trade, and foreign and local merchants competed to ship it. British policy favored free trade and sought to repeal restrictions on the importation of grain from overseas. In the 1840s the Vali of Baghdad and a handful of select local merchants controlled the distribution of nearly the entire supply of barley and wheat in Iraq, much to the chagrin of local British merchants and political officials, who sought the elimination of local monopolies under the terms of the Balta Limani Treaty. Grain monopolies caused the collapse and emigration of the independent merchant class, and exacerbated hardships experienced by producing classes and rural people. By the 1860s, the order established by representatives of the Ottoman state and their allies was threatened by the growth of shipping firms such as the Lynches. According to Fattah, Ottoman authorities employed the notion of imminent “famine” as a means to control British involvement in the grain trade.¹³⁷ An examination of the sources shows that, while official representatives of the British government were quick to step in to protect the commercial interests of its citizens in Iraq on some occasions,

¹³⁷ Fattah, *Politics of Regional Trade*, 139–151.

on other occasions they were either content to leave them to their own devices or actively worked to thwart the expansion of some commercial activities.

In September 1877, ostensibly due to the shortage of peasant labor as the result of the Russo-Turkish War, the Ottoman authorities in Baghdad banned the exportation of wheat. On December 3, both Svoboda and the British traveler and editor of the *Times of India* Grattan Geary recorded that a mob of thousands of Muslim residents of Baghdad had gone to the Ottoman saray, to protest the near two-fold increase in the price of wheat and threatened to plunder local and foreign boats alike.¹³⁸ Because the local military detachment was involved in the war with Russia, the local government had no means to quell the riot, which quickly spread to the port where the protestors looted a number of local vessels loaded with grain.¹³⁹ Col. J. P. Nixon, the British consul at the time, recorded this as a more orderly affair that devolved into chaos, with the protestors first gaining an interview with the Vali before looting the wheat.¹⁴⁰ Later, Svoboda recorded attempts by the Lynches to contravene the ban and covertly export grain from Baghdad: "101,000 Okes of wheat, but this wheat cannot be the Governments, I think it belongs to Lynch and it has been done by a dodge so as to show the people that it does not belong to merchants as it is prohibited its exportation." This wheat was then transferred to the Ottoman granary at Basra through a German steamer, and Svoboda took in a receipt for only 93,000 okes.¹⁴¹ The ongoing wheat crisis in the winter of 1878 also seemed to stoke sectarian

¹³⁸ Geary, *Through Asiatic Turkey*, 1:136.

¹³⁹ Svoboda, "Diary 19," 20–1. Entry for December 3, 1877.

¹⁴⁰ Fattah, *Politics of Regional Trade*, 152–3.

¹⁴¹ Svoboda, "Diary 19," 35–42. Entries for December 27, 1877, and January 3, 1878. The Lynch that Svoboda is referring to here is likely Stephen Lynch, who owned vast tracts of land for cultivating dates as well as presses for exporting wool in Southern Iraq. See Geary, *Through Asiatic Turkey*, 1:89.

tensions, with some violent incidents between Muslims and Christians breaking out in the bazaars.¹⁴²

Another incident over the shipping of grain occurred in early 1878 that seems to have led to the dismissal of Akif Pasha, the Vali of Baghdad. However, the details of this incident are unclear from the available sources. Svoboda notes in his diary that Akif was dismissed from his office on February 16, 1878, writing “I suppose on account of the all these disturbance [sic] of the population regarding the exportation of wheat etc.”¹⁴³ He does not elaborate further, leaving it an open question precisely what precipitated this dismissal. A few entries earlier, Svoboda recorded an occurrence in January, in which an Arab Muslim merchant named Haji Abdulwahab bin Ismail Sheikhly attempted to ship 100 taghars of wheat to Basra aboard the *Blosse Lynch*. A mob caught word and came from the bazaar to the Custom House to prevent the wheat from being loaded onto the ship. Haji Abdulwahab apparently barricaded himself inside the Custom House to stay safe from the mob. Despite the relative lack of security, the mob was turned away from the Custom House, but the *Blosse Lynch* departed without taking the wheat.¹⁴⁴ Geary, who arrived in Baghdad several weeks later, recalled the incident secondhand, and gives a much different account. According to his memoir, in February an unnamed European merchant went around Baghdad buying large quantities of wheat as prices were falling, expecting that the ban on imports would be lifted. Geary writes that the company began loading this grain onto the *Blosse Lynch*, and that the unnamed merchant claimed he had permission from the Pasha to do so. Word quickly spread, and a mob stormed the Custom House to demand that the grain be offloaded lest they storm it, take it themselves, and sink the ship. The impoverished Ottoman

¹⁴² Svoboda, “Diary 19,” 65. Entry for February 2, 1878.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 73. Entry for February 16, 1878.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 57–8. Entry for January 24, 1878.

authorities did not have sufficient security forces to prevent them from doing so. According to Geary's story it seems that Col. Nixon put pressure on the company to offload the wheat, which they did.¹⁴⁵ Hala Fattah takes Geary's account as evidence that British shippers colluded with European merchants to circumvent Ottoman regulations in the face of "popular grievances [and] consular displeasure," but the reality of the situation is less clear-cut.¹⁴⁶

Svoboda's diaries record that the years 1879 and 1880 saw particularly extreme weather. The summer of 1879 was marked by an intense, deadly heat wave with near-record highs.¹⁴⁷ In lower Iraq, the winter of 1880 was drastically cold and dry. The Tigris had fallen far below its normal depth, and matters were much worse in the upper country. Svoboda had heard that the weather in Diyarbakır was so cold that people were able to walk across the frozen Tigris, and that an unheard of amount of snow had blocked the transport of goods to Mosul, sparking a famine and a rise in food prices. In Baghdad, livestock died, unable to graze.¹⁴⁸ Through midwinter, rainfall eased the fear of famine, though it persisted in other adjacent regions. British consular reports from throughout the Ottoman provinces of Asia showed that famine and bad weather had exacerbated the disruptions caused by the Russo-Turkish war in the provinces of eastern Anatolia, such as Beyazid, Van, Erzurum, and Diyarbakır, as well as areas to the south such as Mosul and Aleppo.¹⁴⁹ In February, Svoboda recorded: "I never saw and no one else has

¹⁴⁵ Geary, *Through Asiatic Turkey*, 1:137.

¹⁴⁶ Fattah, *Politics of Regional Trade*, 153.

¹⁴⁷ Svoboda, "Diary 21," 28. Entry for July 28, 1879. Joseph recorded noon temperatures as high as 121°F.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 174–5. Entry for January 31, 1880. Joseph notes that the price of wheat in Mosul was nearly double that of Baghdad, and that a trip to the bazaar in Mosul required the protection of an Ottoman *zaptiye*.

¹⁴⁹ David Gillard, Kenneth Bourne, and Donald Cameron Watt, eds., *British Documents on Foreign Affairs--Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print. Part I, From the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the First World War. Series B, The Near and Middle East, 1856-*

seen the state of this country to be in such suffer and scarcety as this year, even no vegetables can be obtained for none is cultivated but one. I should say one fifth of every year's harvest and the price is fabulous."¹⁵⁰

However, the ongoing famine and drought seemed to present the Lynch Company the opportunity to expand their shipping operations on the Tigris. The company had begun constructing steel barges at its dock in Maghil in 1879.¹⁵¹ With minimal draft, the barges could more easily navigate the unusually low level of the river. They launched shortly thereafter, primarily shipping imported grain from Karachi to bring food relief to the starving districts, according to Svoboda and Thomas Lynch. In April 1880 Thabet Pasha, the governor of Basra, ordered the Lynch Company to cease towing barges immediately.¹⁵² Several days later Svoboda reported that the Foreign Office had telegraphed to Istanbul on behalf of the Lynches to negotiate the resumption of barge service.¹⁵³ However, this intercession proved fruitless, and in September 1881 Thomas Lynch went to Istanbul to personally argue the company's case before the Porte. He met with the British Ambassador, and enlisted the help of the famed artist and intellectual Osman Hamdi Bey, who had spent several years living in Baghdad, to arrange meetings with the Ministers of Commerce and the Marine. These efforts too were fruitless—Lynch spent months in Istanbul only to leave empty-handed and with the distinct impression that the entire affair had been deliberately engineered by Sultan Abdülhamid II out of “commercial

1914, vol. 6, *The Ottoman Empire in Asia, 1860–80* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1984), 364–74.

¹⁵⁰ Svoboda, “Diary 21,” 191–2. Entry for February 23, 1880. Here Joseph includes an extensive table listing the market prices of various goods in Baghdad.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 98. Entry for October 24, 1879.

¹⁵² Lynch, *Navigation of the Euphrates and Tigris*, 174; Svoboda, “Diary 21,” 220. Entry for April 5, 1880.

¹⁵³ Svoboda, “Diary 22,” 2. Entry for April 10, 1880.

jealousy” and anti-British paranoia, and seeing a Turkish and Jewish conspiracy to take over the company’s operations in Iraq.¹⁵⁴

All Lynch shipping stopped in the summer of 1883. The steamers *Mejidieh* and *Khalifah* were forcibly stopped on the order of the Ottoman Minister of the Interior, on the logic that the ferman under which the Lynch Company claimed the right to navigate only applied to the Euphrates and not the Tigris. Col. Tweedie, the British consul, immediately telegraphed the embassy at Istanbul for further instructions, meanwhile the Custom House in Basra would not let the *Mejidieh* discharge her goods. Svoboda recorded that Tweedie met with the Vali of Baghdad Takiyuddin Pasha on June 17th, where the two had a heated argument over the stoppage. Evidently, the British Ambassador in Istanbul ordered Tweedie to ensure that the steamers kept running.¹⁵⁵ Svoboda viewed it as a move to drive business to the Lynches’ Ottoman competitor, seizing control of transport, shipping, and even the mail service: “There is great talk here [in Basra] about our steamers, and the people of the Turkish steamers...are trying everything against us, they are win [sic] forcing the passengers to go to their steamers, putting men at costum house to prevent them from coming to our steamers...they have today issued notification preventing all the people from posting their letters in the English Post Office that they are to take their letters to their Telegraph Office and there be packed in their mail etc.”¹⁵⁶

On returning to Baghdad, Svoboda recorded that the *Khalifah* had been forcibly prohibited from loading cargo and passengers by the Ottoman zaptiyes on the order of the Vali. The Custom House at Baghdad refused to accept any more passenger and cargo manifests. The next day, Col. Tweedie informed the company that the Ottoman man-of-war *Akka* had been

¹⁵⁴ Lynch, *Navigation of the Euphrates and Tigris*, 174–242.

¹⁵⁵ Svoboda, “Diary 26,” 10–11. Entries for June 16–17, 1883.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 15–16. Entry for June 24, 1883.

stationed at Qurna to prevent the passage of Lynch steamers to Basra, using force if necessary. However, without orders from his superiors at the British embassy in Istanbul, Tweedie resolved that they would do no such thing. Blockey and Col. Tweedie tried to enlist the support of the French consul in threatening dire consequences to the Ottoman authorities if the ban were to be enforced. Ottoman *zaptiyes* occupied the *Mejidieh* to prevent cargo from being loaded—Joseph even records that the officers stopped 5-year-old Alexander Svoboda from bringing his father some clothes. Nevertheless the *Mejidieh* launched without cargo the following day.¹⁵⁷

At Basra, the *Khalifah* defied the orders of Takiyuddin Pasha to remain at port there, and steamed back up to Baghdad. This came at a time when there was no Royal Navy presence at Basra to back up British actions. The *Mejidieh* also steamed past the man-of-war, only to be denied permission to land any passengers at Baghdad. Takiyuddin Pasha remained steadfast in his determination to put a stop to British shipping, and in London Lynch had successfully brought the matter before the British Parliament.¹⁵⁸ Svoboda recorded: “The matter is getting very serious and the English Government is now interfering in it. Perhaps its consequence will be a war between England and Turkey.”¹⁵⁹ Blockey was in constant communication with Lynch in London on the matter. The following day Col. Tweedie heard from Istanbul that the Ottoman council of ministers decided not to withdraw the order halting the steamers. Ottoman *zaptiyes* patrolled the docks and beaches in the city so as to prevent the company from reaching their boats by steam launch or *balam*. On July 24, the Royal Navy gunboat *Philomel* arrived at Basra.¹⁶⁰ Several days later, Istanbul ordered Takiyuddin Pasha to allow the Lynch steamers to resume shipping cargo, passengers, and mail, and to allow them access to their normal fueling

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 19–28. Entries for June 30 to July 6, 1883.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 28–35. Entries for July 7-14, 1883.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 36–7. Entry for July 15, 1883.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 39–44. Entries for July 18-24, 1883.

stations at Kut and Amara. The London office asked Blockey to prepare a bill of all of the losses incurred by the stoppage, apparently at the behest of the Foreign office. Svoboda wrote that Col. Tweedie intended to push hard for the dismissal of Takiyuddin Pasha and his top men over the affair.¹⁶¹ Following this there was another incident in which Ottoman zaptiyes unlawfully prevented the Lynch steamers from taking on coal at their usual station at Kut, without authorization from the local kaymakam. The zaptiyes involved were disciplined for their interference.¹⁶²

After the issue of the steamers themselves was sorted out, the barges were allowed to run again in a few, select emergency cases. Sometimes, they were requisitioned for use by the Ottoman government. In 1886, Thomas Lynch wrote: “The Turks, jealous of any foreign interference, and unable to undertake any work themselves, have viewed with disfavor these barges; which would increase the carrying capacity of the English Company.”¹⁶³ That winter he once again returned to Istanbul to press his case for towing barges, seeking to act without the involvement of the foreign office. This time, he arrived with a plan to form a new company, staffed and managed by local Turkish merchants and sailors, but funded primarily with British capital and with Lynch holding a monopolistic concession for towing barges in Iraq. He believed that the Vali of Basra was to blame for obstructing the company’s use of the barges. Lynch found his proposal coldly received by various Ottoman officials, who questioned his continued reliance on the Chesney ferman for navigating on the Tigris. Lynch countered that the Tigris and Euphrates should be conceived of as one river, because the Euphrates was not navigable for great stretches. Evidently the Minister of the Marine stepped in to quash the proposal before it reached

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 49–52. Entries for August 2-4, 1883.

¹⁶² Ibid., 57–8. Entry for August 10, 1883.

¹⁶³ Thomas Kerr Lynch, *Constantinople in 1887. Leaves From the Diary of T. K. Lynch.*, ed. Henry Blosse Lynch, 2010 Facsimile Reprint Edition (London: The British Library, 1887).

the Sultan, and Lynch left Istanbul believing his efforts had been derailed by Alfred Sandison, the head dragoman of the British Embassy. He also once again invoked the specter of Jewish interference from the British-Baghdadi Sassoon family.¹⁶⁴

The company received permission to begin towing barges again in the summer of 1899.¹⁶⁵ Though they were intended to make navigation easier, towing the barges was an unenviable task. Despite their low draft, they had to be lightened in the summer months to navigate the extremely shallow river. Svoboda records: “Cowley is in a great funk about towing the Barge in this low season.”¹⁶⁶ There was especially great difficulty navigating through the Devil’s Elbow, where the river was too narrow for both boat and barge.¹⁶⁷ A familiar process began in late August, when the Minister of Marine in Istanbul once again telegraphed the governor of Basra ordering the stoppage of the barges. However, this time it seems the order was without teeth—Svoboda makes a note that the Lynch’s Baghdad agent and the British consul had telegraphed Istanbul about the matter, and the company ultimately continued towing the barges throughout the autumn.¹⁶⁸ Into the early years of the 20th century the Lynch Company’s grip on shipping in Iraq weakened. In 1904, the Ottoman-Oman Steamship company purchased two new German-built steamers that were double the size of the Lynch steamers, and its administration was reorganized under Sassoon Eskill. This brought the total of Ottoman steamers on the river to six, four more than the Lynches could run at any time. The British Consul at Basra, F. E. Crow,

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 53–87.

¹⁶⁵ Joseph Mathia Svoboda, “Diary 49, February 1899 to October 1899,” 1899, 207, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=1658&REC=10>. Entry for June 18, 1899.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 298–9. Entry for August 3, 1899.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 301. Entry for August 4, 1899.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 348–58. Entries for August 28 and September 3, 1899.

noted that the new steamers of the Ottoman company were: “first-class modern boats and in every way superior to anything Messrs. Lynch Bros. have now on the river.”¹⁶⁹

The examples above complicate the notion that British informal empire existed mostly for the purposes of promoting British commercial interests. While there were certainly incidents in which British diplomatic officers and politicians exerted pressure to force the rollback of policies that were unfavorable to their continued commercial activity such as the stoppage of all Lynch shipping in 1883, other occasions show an unwillingness on the part of the same actors to forcefully protect commercial interests, such as the ongoing affair of the barges. At the same time, they demonstrate that the Ottoman authorities in Baghdad recognized and were reacting against the increased commercial competition presented by Britain, and adopted certain tactics to frustrate and obstruct British commerce, before eventually developing a greater shipping capacity. Such matters became further complicated when they involved the quarantine of British ships and merchants in response to disease epidemics, which I turn to in the following section.

Commerce and Quarantine

Before the 19th century, cholera had long been endemic in the densely-populated, low-lying Bengal region surrounding the Ganges River Delta.¹⁷⁰ Beginning in 1817, it began to spread along pilgrimage routes in India before reaching the port of Calcutta, whence it made its way throughout the Indian Ocean rim by following established trade routes. Throughout the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the disease spread worldwide in several distinct epidemics, abetted by advancements in steam transportation technology. As European doctors debated its epidemiology and observers the world over pondered whether it was divine

¹⁶⁹ Issawi, *The Fertile Crescent, 1800-1914*, 249–50. Crow to O’Conor, January 20, 1904, FO 78/5461.

¹⁷⁰ J. N. Hays, *Epidemics and Pandemics: Their Impacts on Human History* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 193.

retribution for some human sin, cholera came to be seen primarily as a disease of the poor. For much of the century, it was believed that the sickness arose and spread through the noxious, foul-smelling miasma that surrounded the lower classes. David Arnold has shown how the British colonial medical system in India internalized and reproduced Orientalist discourses, and blamed the spread of the disease on lack of civilization.¹⁷¹ In the Middle East, North Africa, and India, it was explicitly associated with destitute pilgrims traveling to and from Mecca.¹⁷² A representative example of this view may be found in the writings of John C. Sundberg, a physician by trade and later American Consul in Baghdad. Sundberg wrote: “During the month of Zil-Hijjah...vast hordes of bacteria of various denominations assembled at their annual rendezvous, Mecca, where while planning the ensuing year’s campaign, they indulge in unrestrained riot and feasting. Their doings are never reported and their victims are never counted; vultures and other carrion-eaters constituting the only efficient health board... Until the sanitation of Mecca shall be backed up by European military there is no betterment to be hoped for.”¹⁷³

A particularly deadly worldwide outbreak in 1865-66 killed 15,000 out of 90,000 pilgrims at Mecca before ravaging Egypt and spreading to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁷⁴ By that point, these recurring outbreaks had prompted various world governments to organize a series of International Sanitary Conventions, tasked with creating a regulatory scheme to

¹⁷¹ David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 58–60.

¹⁷² Asa Briggs, “Cholera and Society in the Nineteenth Century,” *Past & Present*, no. 19 (April 1, 1961): 76–96; Valeska Huber, “The Unification of the Globe by Disease? The International Sanitary Conferences on Cholera, 1851-1894,” *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 2 (2006): 453–76; Michael Christopher Low, “Empire and the Hajj: Pilgrims, Plagues, and Pan-Islam Under British Surveillance, 1865-1908,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40 (May 2008): 269–90.

¹⁷³ John C. Sundberg, “Letter From Switzerland on Asiatic Plague and Cholera Centers,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 29, no. 10 (September 4, 1897): 496–98.

¹⁷⁴ Hays, *Epidemics and Pandemics*, 267–8.

mitigate the spread of the disease.¹⁷⁵ While the results of the first two conferences held at Paris were inconclusive, the third convened at Istanbul early in 1866 and specifically addressed the spread of cholera through infected pilgrimage traffic.¹⁷⁶ A group of delegates that was tasked with studying the etiology and epidemiology of cholera found that it was endemic only in India—they had no evidence that it ever spontaneously generated at Mecca. Though the exact mode of transmission eluded the investigators, they concluded that it was consistently associated with human movement, and greatly abetted by steam transportation over rail and sea. In response to these findings, the Conference proposed three methods of prevention: first, hygienic measures consisting of clean air, water, and soil; second, chemical disinfection efforts targeted at the ships, clothing, buildings, and goods viewed to be the agents of the spread of cholera; third, restrictive measures that isolated the first known cholera patients, disrupted communications between infected districts either by land or by sea, and quarantine measures for individuals traveling by land or ships traveling at sea or on rivers. There were two varieties of quarantine the conference sought to have enforced: Observation and disinfection of the ship, or a stricter form of quarantine in which all goods and passengers were discharged into a permanent lazaretto for isolation and disinfection. Additionally it singled out the Ottoman Empire in recommending that it adopt a strict penal code “to prevent false declarations being made by captains of vessels on their arrival in a Turkish port.” The British delegation to the conference favored strict hygienic controls, “ordinary quarantine” for the Persian Gulf, and strict detention of pilgrim ships traveling to and from the Red Sea. The British delegation to the conference noted that the ten-day quarantine

¹⁷⁵ Huber, “The Unification of the Globe by Disease?,” 456–7.

¹⁷⁶ International Sanitary Conference, *Report to the International Sanitary Conference of a Commission from That Body, to Which Were Referred the Questions Relative to the Origin, Endemicity, Transmissibility and Propagation of Asiatic Cholera.*, trans. Samuel Abbot (Boston, MA: Alfred Mudge & Son, Printers, 1867); Huber, “The Unification of the Globe by Disease?,” 463–4; Low, “Empire and the Hajj,” 271.

would have only a minimal impact on ships making long ocean voyages, which would have days deducted from their quarantine time for the length of time spent at sea. However, it would have a disproportionate effect on ships making short voyages, such as the Lynch steamers in Baghdad, whose round-trip river journeys usually lasted only five days.¹⁷⁷ Subsequent international sanitary conferences on cholera continued to view pilgrim traffic as one of the primary vectors of transmission. Even as the Ottoman Empire worked to build up its own public health apparatus,¹⁷⁸ skepticism over the effectiveness of their quarantine measures remained.

In a pioneering study of medicine and power in 19th century Tunisia, Nancy Gallagher wrote that “the process of medical change revealed by the epidemics can only be studied meaningfully against the political, social, and economic realities of the times.”¹⁷⁹ Medical change and the implementation of public health measures in Baghdad and Basra must be considered against the regional geopolitical backdrop. In the Ottoman administration’s efforts to combat the spread of cholera we can see the development of a nascent public health infrastructure, part of the larger story of the Ottoman state’s various attempts at centralizing

¹⁷⁷ Gillard, Bourne, and Watt, *BDFFA*, 6, The Ottoman Empire in Asia, 1860–80:87–94. Report of the British Cholera Commissioners to Lord Stanley, October 3, 1866. Signed by Edward Goodeve and Edward Dickson.

¹⁷⁸ Huber, “The Unification of the Globe by Disease?,” 466–70; Nuran Yıldırım, “Sağlık: Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e Koruyucu Sağlık Uygulamaları,” ed. Murat Belge and Fahri Aral, *Tanzimat’tan Cumhuriyet’e Türkiye Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1985), 1326–7. In the 1950s Bedi Şehsuvaroğlu of the Istanbul University medical faculty undertook an extensive study of cholera in the Ottoman Empire and the development of quarantine as a countermeasure against it. See Bedi N. Şehsuvaroğlu, “Türkiye karantina tarihine bir bakış,” *Istanbul Tıp Fakültesi mecmuası* 14, no. 1 (1951): 107–10; Bedi N. Şehsuvaroğlu, “Tarihî kolera salgınları ve Osmanlı Türkleri,” *Istanbul Tıp Fakültesi* 17, no. 2 (1954); Bedi N. Şehsuvaroğlu, “Türkiye karantina tarihine giriş. I. Dünya karantina teşkilâtı,” *Istanbul Tıp Fakültesi mecmuası* 20, no. 3 (1957): 418–33; Bedi N. Şehsuvaroğlu, “Türkiye karantina tarihine giriş II. Türkiye’de karantina teşkilâtının kuruluşu,” *Istanbul Tıp Fakültesi mecmuası* 20, no. 4 (1957): 601–24; Bedi N. Şehsuvaroğlu, “Türkiye karantina tarihine giriş. III. Türkiye karantina teşkilâtini idare edenler,” *Istanbul Tıp Fakültesi mecmuası* 21, no. 1 (1958): 146–64.

¹⁷⁹ Nancy Elizabeth Gallagher, *Medicine and Power in Tunisia, 1780-1900* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

reform in the 19th century. Amongst others, David Arnold and Sheldon Watts have argued that medicine and public health can be used as instruments of imperialism.¹⁸⁰ In the context of India, Arnold has underlined the medical aspects of the colonizing process, arguing that colonial medicine created the body itself as a “site for the construction of its own authority, legitimacy, and control.”¹⁸¹

With respect to medicine and health, Birsen Bulmuş has argued that, concurrent with the early stages of reform that eventually coalesced as the Tanzimat, there was a movement in the Ottoman Empire to adopt a quarantine system in part as a means to resist European encroachment. This movement was spearheaded by Hamdan bin al-Merhum Osman, who had fled the French occupation of Algeria. Hamdan proposed a quarantine system for plague and cholera that had three main features: inspection and the issuing of Bills of Health, differing levels of quarantine based on point of origin, and a practice of isolating and fumigating personal effects. While seemingly based on European-practices of maritime quarantine, Bulmuş argues that this model was ultimately adopted by Mahmud II under the assumption that it could help thwart increasing foreign—namely British—control of commerce in empire.¹⁸² Here, Bulmuş is in part following the arguments of scholars such as Nancy Gallagher and LaVerne Kuhnke, who have argued that the adoption of European-style public health institutions was a means to resist colonization in Tunisia and Mehmet Ali’s Egypt, respectively.¹⁸³ Indeed, Bulmuş notes that it was the creation of an Ottoman quarantine system that ultimately prompted the establishment of

¹⁸⁰ Arnold, *Colonizing the Body*; S. J Watts, *Epidemics and History: Disease, Power, and Imperialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

¹⁸¹ Arnold, *Colonizing the Body*, 8.

¹⁸² Birsen Bulmuş, *Plague, Quarantines, and Geopolitics in the Ottoman Empire* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2012), 98–125.

¹⁸³ Gallagher, *Medicine and Power in Tunisia, 1780-1900*; LaVerne Kuhnke, *Lives at Risk: Public Health in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (University of California Press, 1990).

the *Conseil supérieur de santé de Constantinople* (Superior Health Council), assembled from the staff of European embassies, to add a layer of European oversight to the process.¹⁸⁴

Throughout the 19th century the imperial contest between the Ottomans and British in Iraq periodically came to a head over the issue of quarantine in response to outbreaks of plague and cholera. While it was often employed by European governments as a means to control the movements of their own colonial subjects, in the case of Ottoman Baghdad this typical positioning was reversed. The Ottoman state held the power to declare quarantines, and in doing so had a tool with which to control certain commercial activities of the British Empire and its representatives in Iraq. At the same time, these quarantine measures and emerging public health institutions more generally served as legitimation for the Ottoman Empire's colonial project in Iraq and as an outward projection of modernity. Responses to cholera and plague in Iraq in this period demonstrate the extent to which it was linked environmentally and commercially with British India. In the case of cholera, the disease was seen to spread to Iraq by way of India, either through direct commercial links or as the result of pilgrims passing through, to and from Mecca. Investigators at the 1866 Sanitary Conference in Istanbul found no instance in which it had spread by desert caravan, and regarded the desert as one of the most effective barriers to transmission.¹⁸⁵ In the case of plague, concern over the direction of transmission was reversed as demonstrated below, with British Officials in Iraq concerned that shipping from Basra could

¹⁸⁴ Bulmuş, *Plague, Quarantines, and Geopolitics in the Ottoman Empire*, 98–125. The *Conseil supérieur de santé de Constantinople* goes by many names in the primary and secondary source records—the General Board of Health, the Superior Health Council, the International Conference at Constantinople, and others.

¹⁸⁵ International Sanitary Conference, *Report to the International Sanitary Conference*, 58–9. They concluded: “The Great desert is the best of all obstacles to the propagation of cholera. It has [been] demonstrated that not only has such a space never been crossed at a bound by the disease, but even that a numerous caravan, leaving at a point where cholera is raging, gradually gets rid of it on its march across the desert, and arrives entirely purged of it, provided the journey lasts more than twenty days.”

bring the disease to India. In this light, quarantine and other public health measures were an arena in which imperial contestation unfolded.

On September 2nd, arriving at Baghdad from Basra aboard the steamer *Dijleh*, Svoboda noted that they were unable to finish unloading the ship's cargo because of a great fear in the city over the possibility of a cholera outbreak. He went on to record in his diary:

“they expect it here in a few days, it is raging at Damascus, Beyrout, and Aleppo and the Ports of the Mediterranean, as also at Constantinople, and it has come down as far as Dyarbeckr but slightly. I do not think it will visit Baghdad if coming from those Western parts, but if it crossed over to Persia we shall undoubtely have it, as the Pilgrims coming from Persia they will bring it, but there is talk of having a quarantine here if it has any truth of its coming here- The Population of Beyroot have fled out of town to Mount Lebano [sic], and this Epidemic is carrying every day about 60 or 70 lives at Damascus”¹⁸⁶

Before departing once again for Basra, he noted in his diary that he had heard news that there had been cholera there as well, but hoped that it was light.¹⁸⁷

Upon arriving at Basra, Svoboda discovered that the outbreak there was worse than feared—there had been dozens of fatal cases.¹⁸⁸ At the start of the return trip to Baghdad, he noted that they had taken on an unusually low number of passengers and that some of them were “only running away from Basreh for fear of the Cholera.”¹⁸⁹ Several days later, just after passing the famous Arch of Ctesiphon, the *Dijleh* was stopped by the Ottoman steamer *Baghdad*. The *Baghdad* brought a letter from Col. Arnold Kemball, the British consul, for Captain Holland of

¹⁸⁶ Svoboda, “Diary 04,” 23. Entry for September 2, 1865.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. Entry for September 6, 1865.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 24. Entry for September 8, 1865.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 26. Entry for September 17, 1865.

the *Dijleh*. The letter informed them that Namık Paşa, the Ottoman provincial governor, had ordered the establishment of a quarantine around the city and that British-flagged vessels would be provided with supplies and tents on shore for the duration of their detention.¹⁹⁰ After being held for several days near Ctesiphon with no signs of cholera on board, Svoboda and the *Dijleh* were allowed to carry on back to Baghdad, where he caught up on the news from the other corners of the empire. While the cholera outbreak at Istanbul had subsided, it still raged in the Iraqi provinces, though reports of its lethality varied from place to place:

“There has been about 200 cases at Amara but only about 80 of which terminated fatally. This malady had visited almost every place and districts around Basreh and Amara from Mahmerah upward it has travelled on to Howeza etc. In Basreh also great many deaths occurred they say up to 60 or 70 per day but I suppose it is an exaggeration there is very little present.”¹⁹¹

By November 6th, Svoboda duly reported that the outbreak had subsided and there were no more cases in Basra.¹⁹² This experience in quarantine was a common one for Svoboda in the early volumes of his diaries. At this point, there was no regular system of riverine quarantine established. They were called on the order of the Vali of Baghdad, and hastily established at any given place.

After the 1866 Sanitary Conference at Istanbul, the Ottoman sanitary authorities developed more regular procedures for the declaration and operation of quarantine, though this did not exempt the system from intense criticism from British observers. As a Western-trained physician and formal representative of the British Empire, Baghdad Residency Surgeon William

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 28. Entry for September 22, 1865.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 36. Entry for October 24, 1865.

¹⁹² Ibid., 38. Entry for November 6, 1865.

Colvill was extremely critical of quarantine practices in Iraq. According to Colvill, the sanitary staff of Turkish Arabia consisted of a chief Inspector and four officers. They were to look after the health of the towns in which they were placed. Local officers were stationed in Suleimaniyah, Khanikin, Mendalli, and Basra, and the sanitary headquarters was at Baghdad. There was a simultaneous European sanitary staff in place, dispatched from Istanbul by the *Conseil supérieur de santé*, with a head inspector in Baghdad and local officers in the same four towns. These officers would be dispatched to different parts of the province to observe sanitary conditions, but the stations had no permanent staff to carry out the details of sanitation, and instead relied on guards covered by local tax levies and fees charged to travellers in the quarantine.¹⁹³ Colvill laments that the Ottoman government in 1871 seemed to be contemplating liquidating its own staff and handing authority over to European inspectors: “It is a pity that, after having striven for so long, this Government is obliged to confess the incapacity of its own countrymen by discharging them and retaining the foreigners.”¹⁹⁴

In autumn 1870 Colvill spent ten days in quarantine at the border town of Khanikin while returning to Baghdad overland from England. He painted a grim picture of conditions there. Those in quarantine were given tents by the combined Ottoman and European authorities, but were then free to intermingle with one another in one large camp. Dead animals littered the ground. Because the regulations held that if a person in a given party were found dead from cholera, the whole party would have to restart its ten-day quarantine, friends hastily buried their

¹⁹³ W. H. Colvill, “Appendix 15: Short Report on Cholera, Epidemic in Turkish Arabia 1870-71,” *Transactions of the Medical and Physical Society of Bombay*, 2nd Series, no. 11 (1871): xxxix. Joseph Svoboda records that while in quarantine, passengers were charged a fee of 23 piasters. The steamer itself was charged a daily fee 8 beşliks. See *Diary* 9, April 12, 1871, page 29, trans. Margaret Makiya.

¹⁹⁴ W. H. Colvill, “Appendix 15: Short Report on Cholera, Epidemic in Turkish Arabia 1870-71,” *Transactions of the Medical and Physical Society of Bombay* no. 11, 2nd Series (1871): xlii.

own dead compatriots in order to move through more quickly. Colvill writes: “No account is kept of the arrivals, and no care whatever is taken of the travellers, but that is no fault of the sanitary officers, for they have not the means.” The small joint Ottoman-European sanitary staff were completely overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of the quarantine. Camps of nearly 5,000 waited outside the town of Khanikin, which was home to barely 2,000 residents. In Colvill’s estimation, the quarantine “was simply a hotbed of disease” that did more to foster the spread of sickness than to prevent it from entering Ottoman territories, and one that bred resentment and political disputes because of the exorbitant fees, lack of adequate provision, and seeming focus on foreign infection over internal transmission.¹⁹⁵

Svoboda’s experience in multiple quarantines during the 1871 outbreak serves to illustrate such frustrations with the sanitary process. On March 6, Svoboda records that a preemptive quarantine had been declared at Basra, and that ships en-route from India were avoiding Bushehr on the Persian coast, where cholera raged.¹⁹⁶ He notes in his diary on March 19 that this measure was not entirely effective, as cholera had once again been seen at Basra. Later, while embarking passengers for the return to Baghdad, it was discovered that one of them was sick with the disease. In response, the crew of the *Dijleh* sent him ashore immediately, where he died after about an hour. A British doctor promised to give the ship a clean bill of health after examining the crew and passengers, but before proceeding, they received a telegram from Blockey at the company’s offices in Baghdad, telling them to stop at Gherareh if there were any reported deaths aboard and await further instructions.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., xl–xlii.

¹⁹⁶ Svoboda, “Diary 09,” 17. Diary 9, March 6, 1871, page 17, trans. Margaret Makiya.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 18. Diary 9, March 19–22, 1871, page 18, trans. Margaret Makiya.

On March 26, 1871 they arrived at Gherareh, where they received orders from Colonel Herbert, the British Consul, telling them to drop anchor and allow the Ottoman authorities to inspect the ship in quarantine.¹⁹⁸ The following day, Svoboda complains of how the Ottoman sanitary authorities conducted their quarantine: “It is a very irregular way & contrary to Rules & Regulations by what they are doing with us here; yesterday they mixed themselves with us & then went in shore.” He records that the Chief Inspector Padovani came down from Baghdad, and informed them from the banks of the river that they were to remain four more days in quarantine. Captain Holland was apparently furious at this and “pitched into him in English but the brute made the deaf.” Svoboda joined in, complaining that the Turkish steamer Mossul had for some reason been able to bypass the quarantine. The Ottoman authorities also would not let them disembark their mail, because they were unable to fumigate it. In quarantine, they were left with tents but no food, and a guard of 6 police officers. Svoboda notes that the security provided by the Ottoman officers was lax, as he was able to send his non-fumigated mail to his family through an Arab friend from a nearby town. Inspector Padovani declared them free of cholera on March 30th and allowed them to proceed the following day.¹⁹⁹

The company’s displeasure with Ottoman quarantine regulations continued. It seems that they appealed to the Residency to allow British doctors to establish and conduct their own quarantines, bypassing the Ottoman quarantine process. The answer to this inquiry was a resounding and unequivocal “no.” Chief Inspector Padovani replied that the extent of British medical authority was limited to cargo and passenger inspections and the issuing of clean Bills of Health. If cholera was discovered, it was to be reported to the local *mudir* (director) of quarantine. The next week, while traveling to Basra, the *Dijleh* was once again detained, this

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 19. Diary 9, March 26, 1871, page 19, trans. Margaret Makiya.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 19–24. Entries for March 27-31, 1871.

time at Amara along with the Turkish steamer *Mosul*.²⁰⁰ Svoboda again complains of the lax observance of quarantine regulations. “The people of Amara such as military officers & other high functionaries are allowed free ingress into our sanitary station except the poors are very soon turned away & abused by the miserable guards dressed in the cavalry costume even the Kadi Hyder Effendi had the courage to come on board & demand for some grog.” Passengers from the *Dijleh* and the *Mosul* were allowed to freely mix on shore. Svoboda later laments the establishment of a quarantine at the town of Amara, for there had already been an outbreak at the town. Captain Holland telegraphed Baghdad asking permission to move down river and establish their own quarantine at another site, but Kolmar responded that it was not in his power to decide.²⁰¹

Quarantine was not just a frustrating experience for the crew of the steamers, who stood to lose valuable time and money, it greatly agitated the passengers as well. On Easter Sunday 1871, Svoboda noted that the Persian passengers of both the *Dijleh* and the *Mosul* attempted to overpower the quarantine guards, “for want of provision bread etc which there is none brought & if little is brought it is at an enormous price.” The brawl was broken up and additional guards were sent to maintain order. Quarantine taxation was also a subject of dispute. When the quarantine officers arrived to collect the fee of 23 piasters, the Persians aboard the *Dijleh* refused to disembark and pay. The authorities also demanded that Captain Holland pay a fee of eight beşliks per day for eight days that the ship had been under quarantine. Holland refused on the grounds that he had not been ordered by the consulate to do so. The Turkish authorities then replied that they would detain the ship and extract the taxes by force. Via telegraph, Holland

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 26. Entry for April 5-6, 1871.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 26–7. Entries for April 7-8, 1871.

arranged for the tax to be paid but lodged a protest with the acting *mutasarrif* of Amara. The *Dijleh* was ultimately released from quarantine on April 13.²⁰²

Plague was another frequent killer in Iraq. In the mid- to late 1870s, it came and went in several outbreaks, notably in the spring of 1876. Numerous reports of this period from British officials and observers indicted the effectiveness of the efforts that the Ottoman state took to control these outbreaks. On one occasion, despite being flagged by the quarantine commissioners to stop, the *Dijleh* steamed past and went directly from Baghdad to Basra without landing anywhere.²⁰³ Surgeon-Major Colvill, while evaluating the potential for a plague outbreak in southern Iraq, wrote to Col. Nixon that measures needed to be taken in order to prevent plague from spreading from Iraq to India, though he strongly objected to the possibility of a quarantine implemented by the local sanitary authorities and overseen by the Superior Health Council, which he still viewed as a “farce.”²⁰⁴ At the same time, Colvill and Nixon both saw unfettered commercial activity in the face of a plague outbreak as a potential threat to British India. Colvill recommended to Nixon that while the danger of plague existed the Lynches be prevented from packing and shipping wool, which by its nature could be a means of spreading the disease if it was not handled and disinfected properly. Blockey replied to this request that they were taking appropriate precautions, and would not stop exporting wool. Nixon then appealed to Ambassador Sir Henry Elliot in Istanbul, who said he could not order the Lynches to halt their exports, and

²⁰² Ibid., 28–31. Entries for April 8-13, 1871.

²⁰³ Joseph Mathia Svoboda, “Diary 15, April 1875 to February 1876,” ed. Margaret Makiya, 1969, 30, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=4585&REC=5>. Entry for May 21, 1875.

²⁰⁴ Gillard, Bourne, and Watt, *BDF A*, 6, The Ottoman Empire in Asia, 1860–80:208. Colvill to Nixon, June 5, 1875.

referred the matter to the local Ottoman authorities.²⁰⁵ At the same time, the local quarantine officials instituted a fee of 2 *beşliks* apiece to inspect and disinfect each package on every steamer of both the Lynches and the Ottoman-Oman Company.²⁰⁶ In 1876, Nixon recommended to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Edward Stanley, the Earl of Derby, that the British government take proactive steps to protect their interests in India, because he and Colvill had little faith that the Ottoman authorities could effectively contain the plague.²⁰⁷ Colvill noted that he had met with the Vali of Baghdad and implored him to apply some countermeasure other than quarantine, recording that “quarantine, as I know it in this province, is simply a collection of unwashed masses without any sanitary care.”

Quarantine continued to be the preferred method deployed by the Ottoman authorities to guard against infectious disease, despite ongoing British protestations about its ineffectiveness. Throughout the later volumes of his diaries, Svoboda shows it to be decidedly regular annoyance of maritime commerce. In contrast to earlier diaries, the operation of quarantine seems more regulated, and there was a system in place for detaining ocean steamers in the port of Basra. However, the laxity of the quarantine stations along the river remained a persistent issue. Once detained in 1881, Svoboda noted: “This place is getting worse and worse with the regard to strictness, every one is looking for bribery from headman, clerk and down to the common arab guardians communication with both parties is exercised with great freedom, people come on board and out as well as the quarantine people with liberty without being stopped.”²⁰⁸ Eighteen

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 6, *The Ottoman Empire in Asia, 1860–80*:212–4. Colvill to Nixon, June 5, 1875; Nixon to Messers. S. Lynch and Co., June 6, 1875; Thomas Blockey to Nixon, June 7, 1875; Nixon to Sir Henry Elliot, June 6, 1875; Elliot to Nixon, June 7, 1875.

²⁰⁶ Svoboda, “Diary 15,” 50–1. Entry for June 10, 1875.

²⁰⁷ Gillard, Bourne, and Watt, *BDF A*, 6, *The Ottoman Empire in Asia, 1860–80*:215. Nixon to Derby, May 31, 1876.

²⁰⁸ Svoboda, “Diary 22,” 66. Entry for April 6, 1881.

years later, during a mild cholera outbreak in 1899, he observed the same issue: "There is [no] strictness of quarantine rule at all we are allowed all Boots & Balams to come alongside of us give and take only no one is allowed to come on board but there is no quarantine officials or guards at all; to prevent this, the Zapties are away in their tents & do not interfere, the work is awfully slack, it seems that no one understands how to carry on their duty."²⁰⁹

Conclusions

Strategic considerations forced the opening of a frontier between the British Empire and the Ottoman Empire in Iraq in the early 19th century. With time, commercial considerations became increasingly involved, expanding the frontier and transforming Iraq into a site of imperial contestation that lasted into the early 20th century. This contestation found expression in incidents that occurred in a number of different intersecting spaces—political, commercial, and public health. Though this study has been narrowly focused on the activities of the Lynch Company, it is apparent that incidents of imperial interaction and interpenetration that surrounded it did not always unfold according to the paradigm of informal empire advanced by Gallagher and Robinson. Occasionally, British political representatives in Baghdad stepped in to support the commercial interests of their citizens, such as the case of the halting of Lynch shipping in 1883, where the consul and the company exerted enough political pressure to force the dismissal of the Ottoman administrators who were responsible. However, in less spectacular instances the British seemed willing to allow commercial disputes to run their course, as in the ongoing battle over the company's ability to tow barges on the river, even when the Lynch Company viewed such actions as an unjust attempt to undercut their business in favor of the

²⁰⁹ Joseph Mathia Svoboda, "Diary 50, October 1899 to June 1900," 1900, 32–3, Joseph Mathia Svoboda Diaries Collection, 1865-1908, University of Washington, Seattle, <https://content-dev.lib.washington.edu/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/iraqdiaries&CISOPTR=427&REC=11>. Entry for October 23, 1899.

Ottoman shipping company. In the realm of public health, it is shown that despite extreme dissatisfaction on the part of British representatives in Iraq, Ottoman quarantine procedures were largely adhered to during frequent epidemics of cholera. Such institutions served as an outward manifestation of the Ottoman imperial project in Iraq. In certain cases, British authorities took steps to curtail their own nationals' commercial activities when it was believed that shipping wool from plague infected Baghdad and Basra could pose a major public health threat to India. The ongoing buildup of British commercial interests in Ottoman Iraq, and Britain's outsized political influence in the affairs of the province set the stage for Iraq's occupation and ultimate incorporation into a more formal manifestation of the British Empire in the mandate period following the First World War.

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