



THE OTTOMAN ORIGINS OF MODERN IRAQ

POLITICAL REFORM, MODERNIZATION
AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE
NINETEENTH-CENTURY MIDDLE EAST

EBUBEKİR CEYLAN

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To my beloved parents
Zahide and Nazım Ceylan

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.MKT. MHM.	Sadaret Mektubî-i Mühimme Kalemi Evrakı
A.MKT. UM.	Sadaret Mektubî
BOA.	Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi
C. ML	Cevdet Maliye
DİA	Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi
EI ¹	Encyclopedia of Islam, first edition
EI ²	Encyclopedia of Islam, second edition
FO	Foreign Office
HR.SYS.	Hariciye Nezareti Siyasi Kısım
IJMES	International Journal of Middle East Studies
IOR	India Office Records
İA	İslam Ansiklopedisi
İ.DAH	İrâde-i Dâhiliye
İ.HAR.	İrâde-i Hâriciye
İ. MVL.	İrâde-i Meclis-i Vâlâ
İ. MMAH.	İrâde-i Meclis-i Mahsûs
İ.MMH.	İrâde-i Mesâil-i Mühimme
İ. ŞD.	İrâde-i Şûrâ-yı Devlet
İÜEF	İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi
MES	Middle Eastern Studies
MIT-EJMES	The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies
TALİD	Türkiye Araştırmaları Literatür Dergisi
TNA	The National Archives
TTK	Türk Tarih Kurumu
M	Muharrem

S	Safer
Ra	Rebûlevvel
R	Rebûlâhir
Ca	Cemâziyelevvel
C	Cemâziyelâhir
B	Receb
Ş	Şaban
N	Ramazan
L	Şevval
Za	Zilkâde
Z	Zilhicce

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INTRODUCTION

I mention Baghdad first of all because it is the heart of Iraq, and with no equal on earth either in the Orient or the Occident, it is the most extensive city in area, in importance, in prosperity, in abundance of water, and in healthful climate ... People emigrate to it from all countries, both near and far, and everywhere there are men who have preferred it to their own country.

*Al-Yakubi**

Baghdad, being one of the most important cities of the Eastern world, has long had a special image in the minds of both Muslims and non-Muslims. Quite apart from the significance of Baghdad in the Muslim world as one of the first cities established in Islamic civilization, it has had fundamental importance for the Turks as well. Turks were quite active in Baghdad and Samarra during the whole of the ninth century, even before Turkish rule had been established in Anatolia. The region was not only the home of Ali Baba and the Sinbad tales, or the capital of Caliph Mansur and Harun Al-Rashid, but it was like the 'red apple' (*kızılelma*) for many outstanding rulers like Tughrul Bey, Timur, Shah İsmail, Selim I, Süleyman the Lawgiver (Kanuni), and Murat IV.¹ The region is frequently credited as being one of the most important religious sites, as the location of tombs of many religious figures, such as the fourth Caliph Ali, Hussain (grandchild of the Prophet Muhammad), Imam Azam (the founder of the Hanafi

* Ahmad ibn Abi Ya'kub ibn Ja'fer ibn Wadih al-Abbasi, known simply as al-Yakubi, was born in the first decades of the ninth century and died in Egypt in 284/897.

school of thought), Abdulkadir Geylânî, Suhrawardi and many others; however, it was also the homeland of many Ottoman intellectuals such as Fuzûlî, Ruhî, Ahmed Vâsîf, Babanzâde Ahmet Naim and Ahmet Haşim, just to name a few.² Baghdad had thus long been a center of many cultural and scientific activities.

Apart from its importance in rhetoric and narrative, there is no doubt that Iraq, both in the past and present, represents a 'miniature of the Middle East'. As will be presented in detail in this book, almost all of the principal ethnic elements (Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Persians and Armenians) co-existed in the province of Baghdad and perhaps the most authentic sects/religions (Sunnis, Shi'is, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Jacobites etc.) also lived there. And this peaceful co-existence had given Iraq a unique character.

Despite its rich historical and cultural background, the number of academic studies on Iraq is insufficient and there is no doubt that Ottoman rule in Iraq, when compared to other Arab provinces, needs more scholarly attention. The scope of this study is the history of Ottoman Iraq, namely the Iraqi provinces of Baghdad, Mosul, Basra and Shahrizor, during a period which can roughly be referred to as the *Tanzimat* period. Therefore, in this book, I prefer to use 'the province of Baghdad' so as to include all of these Iraqi provinces.

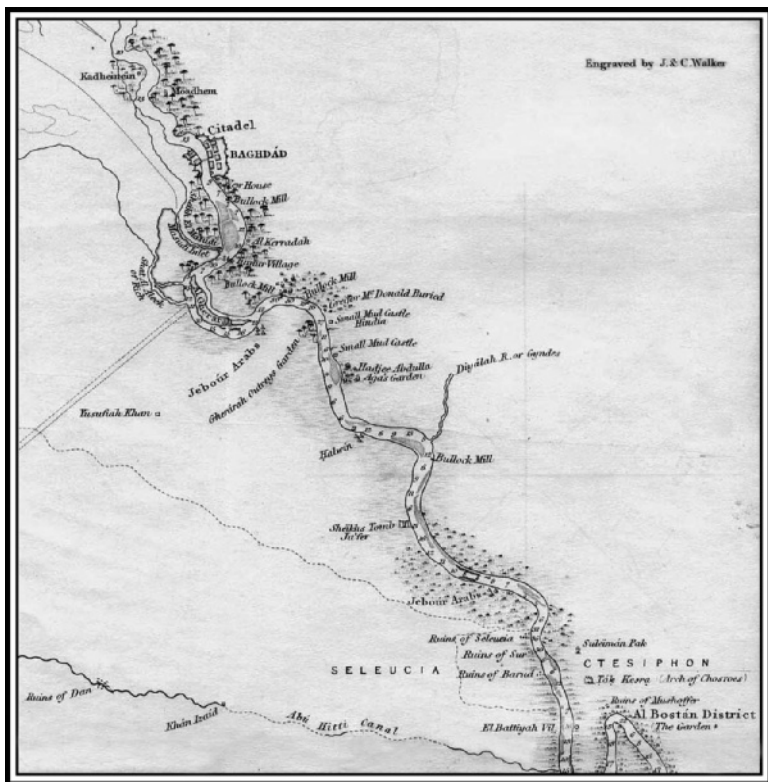
One of the basic concerns of this study is to reveal the process of Ottoman centralization and modernization in the province of Baghdad, which was in the easternmost periphery of the empire. The dissolution of decentralist/autonomous structures and the extension of Ottoman central power at the expense of tribal dominions will be emphasized. The processes of modernization and centralization were closely related and this study clearly underlines the Ottoman origins of modern Iraq.

On the other hand, the implementation of basic *Tanzimat* reforms in a province that was very different, in terms of its geography, demography and societal structure, from the provinces in the heartlands of the empire, is another concern of this study. Some of the *Tanzimat* reforms, such as the Land Code of 1858, clashed with the realities of the region, and I believe that an examination of the responses to the application of *Tanzimat* reforms will contribute significantly to the

literature on the subject. In this context, this book will attempt to reveal how *Tanzimat* was perceived from Baghdad. It is for this reason that this study focuses heavily on administrative and political history; in any event, an examination of every aspect of nineteenth-century Iraqi history would be impossible for reasons of length and resources.

Ottoman rule in Iraq is generally divided into five periods. The first period starts with the conquest of Süleyman (Kanuni) in 1534 and continues until the entry of the Safavids into Baghdad in 1623. The second period covers the era between 1638 and 1749, which signifies Baghdad's re-conquest by Murad IV and the beginning of Mamluk rule in Baghdad. The third period, between 1749 and 1831, is generally known as the Mamluk period. The fourth period starts with the fall of Mamluk rule and ends with the governorship of Midhat Pasha in 1869. The fifth and final period ends in 1917, when Baghdad was occupied by British forces.³ This study will focus mainly on the fourth period of Ottoman rule; that is to say from 1831 to 1872. Midhat Pasha's governorship (1869–72) is usually considered to be the beginning of the final period of Ottoman rule in Baghdad. However, unlike Cemil Musa Neccar, I prefer to include Midhat Pasha's governorship into the fourth period, because it represented the culmination of the *Tanzimat* governorship in the province of Baghdad.

Needless to say, the 1830s were testing times not only for the imperial center but also for its Middle Eastern provinces: the incursion of Muhammad Ali's forces into Syria, European economic and military encroachments and uncertainty in the modernization project were major challenges, to name but a few. In view of these developments, this study takes the year 1831 as the beginning point, because this year is not only an important turning point in the whole history of Ottoman Iraq, but it also represents the transition of Iraq from a medieval to an international structure.⁴ Salman, for example, regarded the end of Mamluk rule as the end of the 'feudal social order' and the beginning of the modern age.⁵ The year 1831 also marked the end of decentralized rule and the beginnings of a centralized Ottoman administration. The period under study also falls into the third period of Albert Hourani's periodization of Ottoman history, during which time the beginnings of modernization were witnessed.⁶ Therefore, this



Map 1 Baghdad in 1849

study focuses heavily on the modernization of the Ottoman province of Baghdad.

This book aims to reveal the dynamics of Ottoman rule in the province of Baghdad. In order to test the data, comparisons have been made with other Ottoman provinces. Damascus is seen to bear a significant resemblance to Baghdad, because, like Baghdad, it was also a center of the Ottoman army, housing the Fifth Army.

This study is divided into six chapters. After a short introduction on approaches on Arab provincial capitals, and key concepts (such as *Tanzimat* reforms, centralization, modernization and Ottomanism), Chapter 1 contains a general introduction on the geography, people,

and history of Ottoman Iraq. In Chapter 2, an attempt is made to analyze the decline and fall of the decentralist structures such as the Jalilis and Kurdish emirates. Parallel to the disintegration of the autonomous entities, the growing presence of the Ottoman State is emphasized. Chapter 3 examines the authority of the provincial governor in relation to the centralist and de-centralist forces. The increasing Ottoman state control and the improvements in the general security of the province will be mentioned here. Chapters 4 and 5 seek to consider the extent to which the *Tanzimat* reforms were carried out in Ottoman Iraq. Special attention will be given to the establishment of provincial administrative councils and the implementation of two significant laws, namely the Provincial Law of 1864 and Ottoman Land Code of 1858, in the region. The tribal structure of the region and the Ottoman politics of tribe will also be discussed here. Finally, Chapter 6 analyzes the modernization of various aspects of life in Baghdad. Emphasis will be placed on the new means of communication (the introduction of steam navigation, railroads and the beginning of telegraph communication) and the improvement of schooling and printing.

It is well known to students of the history of the Middle East that academic studies on the later history of Ottoman rule in Baghdad are quite limited. Most of the works on Baghdad are either on the heyday of the Abbasid period, or on the contemporary history of Iraq; that is, the post-Gulf War era. When compared with other Middle Eastern cities such as Aleppo, Damascus, Yemen and Jerusalem, it becomes quite clear that Ottoman Baghdad has long been neglected by the academe.

There are many works on the foundation of the 'round city' and the caliphate period. The Abbasid Empire, with its powerful rulers such as Caliph Al-Mansur and Harun al-Rashid, the *Dar al-Hikmah* as the center of scientific activities, and the 'one thousand and one nights' tales, have attracted the attention of many people. And this interest is well reflected in the literature. However, as far as Ottoman rule in the Arab world is concerned, it is generally regarded in the Arab historiography as 'the dark ages', because it was (and to some extent still is) thought that in this period the Arab people were subjugated by the Ottomans and this was perceived as a kind of imperialism.⁷

This nationalist historiography, influenced by colonial historiography, is the leading reason for such a pessimistic approach to Ottoman/Turkish rule in the region.⁸ One should also not ignore the effects of the Ottoman decline paradigm, as it assumes that the increasing weakness of the imperial center necessarily meant the decline of the periphery.

Moreover, until recently there was (and to some extent still is) a 'chronic reluctance of scholars working on Arab cities to explore Ottoman documentation'. Some Arab scholars find Arabic sources sufficient for the study of Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire and even argue that the 'scholarship drawn from such sources is somehow more authentic and faithful to the so-called indigenous Arab population of these lands than history drawn from Ottoman sources'.⁹ As a result of these narrowminded approaches, the Ottoman period in the Arab historiography is either skipped or summarized very briefly. In the words of Ehud R. Toledano, 'the nationalist narratives had either written the Ottomans out of Arab histories, or relegated them to the role of villains, responsible for the sorry state the Arabs found themselves in after the First World War'.¹⁰ No doubt the historiography on Ottoman Baghdad has its share of this negligence and it is quite astonishing that studies with grand titles such as *The Making of Modern Iraq* or *Iraq: from Sumer to Saddam* allocate only four or five pages, or a short chapter at most, to the whole of the Saljukid, Mongol and Ottoman periods.¹¹ However, after the 1980s, a considerable number of monographs appeared that have significantly revised these nationalist narratives and brought about the 're-attachment' of the nineteenth century to the Ottoman era in Middle Eastern and North African history.¹²

Two factors have been particularly influential in the proliferation of academic works on Iraq. The first factor was the emergence of archeology as a science, which was unknown before the nineteenth century. A century ago, antiquity and archeology were the only interests that attracted visitors from the West to Iraq. And it is not surprising that many European diplomats and travelers were greatly interested in the archeological characteristics of the region.¹³ The second factor was the rise of oil as a vital source of energy. There is no doubt that oil, as a

new source of energy, attracted the interest of the Great Powers in the region. Needless to say, the resulting rivalry and wars for oil since the last quarter of the twentieth century paved the way for a dramatic increase in the publications on Iraq. In short, archeology and oil opened a new age in the history of Iraq.¹⁴ The fruits of this proliferation in publications have been especially visible in the last three decades. However, although the number of studies on Iraq proliferated, few were of a high academic standard or were based on rigorous archival research.

S.H. Longrigg's *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* remains the pioneering study in the field.¹⁵ As for nineteenth-century Ottoman Iraq, a considerable part of the studies focus on Mosul. Dina Rizk Khoury's *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul 1534–1834* and Sarah D. Shield's *Mosul Before Iraq* presented detailed accounts of Ottoman rule in Mosul. While the former spotlights the linkage between provincial and imperial politics over three centuries, and emphasizes the provincial elite and its relations to the state and economy with regard to the processes of war-making and tax-farming, the latter attempts to present the economic history of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Mosul. On the other hand, Hala Fattah's *Politics of Regional Trade in Iraq, Arabia and the Gulf 1745–1900* analyzes the region through the complex dynamics that made up the 'regional market'. The trade patterns, commercial axis between cities, and the implications of Wahhabi ideology are skilfully highlighted in a trans-regional perspective.¹⁶ Among the Arabic literature on the subject, Abd al-Aziz Sulayman Nawwar's *Târîh al-Irak al-Hadis min Nibâyeti Hükmî Davud Paşa ilâ nibâyeti Hükmî Midhat Paşa* and Cemil Musa Neccar's *Al-Idâra al-Osmânî fî Vilâyati Bağdâd* are at the forefront, but their use of Ottoman sources is limited to state and provincial yearbooks (*sâlnâmes*).¹⁷

Studying Arab provincial capitals

Many approaches have been used in explaining various aspects of the Ottoman Arab provinces. Perhaps the richest of these approaches have been those employed in the urban history of the Ottoman Arab

provinces.¹⁸ Starting from the early decades of the last century, scholars of urban history produced a vast literature on the Arab provincial capitals. Cities like Cairo, Aleppo, Damascus, Jerusalem, Tunis and Algiers were the most studied urban centers. The Iraqi provinces have until recently been ignored. Even in the studies of Andre Raymond they were only slightly touched on.¹⁹ Perhaps Mosul, out of all Iraqi provinces, has drawn the most attention; recent studies have shed considerable light on its history.

There have been long debates on whether the 'Islamic City' was a proper explanatory framework for Middle Eastern cities, and many urban categories such as 'port cities', 'large cities', 'medium cities', or 'dyad or triad cities' have been used in the literature.²⁰ Since this study is more of a political and administrative history, it will not delve into these debates, but a brief description of the urban history of Ottoman Iraq will be given in Chapter 6. The modernization that the Iraqi provinces underwent and the transformation of Basra into a 'port city' in the second half of the nineteenth century have been given considerable attention.²¹

In the mid-1960s Albert Hourani put forward a ground-breaking approach in the history of the modern Middle East and emphasized the vital role played by the local Arab elite (tribal sheikhs, *ulema*, merchants, etc.) who acted as intermediaries between the provincial government and the local populace. Since then, the 'politics of notables' and factionalism among local forces have been a dominant explanation, and this explanatory framework cannot be said to have been overthrown.²² As far as Ottoman Iraq is concerned, the patterns of local notables and *ayan* influences were distinctive not only due to the strategic position of Iraq as frontier province, but also because its social structure was dominated by strong tribal confederations. The Jalilis and Umaris in Mosul were good examples of great local families. In Baghdad, on the other hand, in the absence of local families with a tradition of leadership, the Mamluk (*Kölemen*) household could provide the needed '*asabiyya*'.²³ In this context, it was the Mamluk household rather than the 'civilian' elites that dominated Baghdad.²⁴

The fall of the Mamluks in Baghdad in 1831 changed the local dynamics of the province, and the local elites began to increase their

influence. The province of Baghdad in the *Tanzimat* period had religious and secular notables. While the former consisted of a provincial learned class (*qadi*, *nakîbü'l-ʿesrâf*, *na'ibs* and *müftis*) the latter was dominated by tribal leaders. The *ulema* had a substantial role in everyday life in Baghdad, but, as Hourani noted, their social power must have been limited by the hold of Shi'is and Bedouins over the countryside.²⁵ Merchants, *emîrs* and *aghas* were also among the secular notables in the province, who derived their wealth mostly from land and trade. Towards the end of the *Tanzimat* era, the merchants in Iraq increased their volume of trade and wealth; in this context, the Jewish merchants of Baghdad came to occupy a significant place among the secular notables of the city. The elected members of the provincial administrative council overlapped significantly with the local notables. Hence, as will be analyzed in the third chapter, the minutes (*mazbata*) of the provincial administrative council give us an important idea about the local notables.

The 'politics of notables' was, to a great extent, used for urban/provincial factionalism. There were cases in which tribal leaders and urban notables formed coalitions against Ottoman rule in Baghdad. To take an example, the disaffected Kurdish chief, Bedir Han, formed alliances with the discontented urban notables of Mosul.²⁶ As the Ottoman government began to deconstruct the tribal structure of the country, the influence of the secular notables in Baghdad decreased in time. With the re-assertion of Ottoman direct rule, the governor-general gradually restored his influence and authority, and the urban notables were overwhelmed by his power.²⁷

The issue of internal and external forces as explanations of the history of the modern Middle East has been debated for a long time. Hourani warns us to be aware of two interlocking rhythms of change:

that which reforming governments and thinkers and external forces tried to impose upon society, and that which a great stable society with a long and continuous tradition of thought and of life in common was producing from within itself, partly by its own internal movement, and partly in reaction to forces coming from outside.²⁸

Many scholars advocate the idea that 'social and economic changes in modern Middle Eastern societies like Iraq are Western-induced'.²⁹ As noted by Haj, by ascribing the social change to external forces this approach overlooked the importance of internal forces in shaping domestic development.³⁰ For the late history of Iraq, there appears a similar tendency which ascribed the change to the East India Company, which made alliance with the Mamluk regime in Baghdad.³¹ With regard to nineteenth-century Iraq, external forces alone cannot account for change and modernization. Instead, both internal and external (Ottoman-Arab and European) forces were influential in the process of reform and modernization; however, the latter had only an auxiliary role *per se*. As will be detailed in this study, while the *Tanzimat* reforms were imposed by the Sublime Porte through the governors in Baghdad, the influence of the European powers cannot be denied. As far as the internal dynamics are concerned, the local sources have become the most salient sources for historians. Perhaps the most significant of these sources are court registrations, namely the *sijills*. Unfortunately, there is no single monograph based on the Baghdad *sijills*.³² The ongoing warfare in the region and the resulting destruction of historical places and sources made it almost impossible to use these sources.

Until the 1990s, most historians did not question the process of incorporation of periphery economies into the world market, preferring instead to dwell on the after-effects of the Western impact on the developing societies of the Middle East, Africa and Latin America. Their interest was confined to explaining the rapid transformation of these economies after the impingement of an industrializing West in search of raw materials, a free supply of labor, and cheap markets.³³ However, since the 1990s, a considerable number of works have attempted to analyze the history of the modern Middle East through the perspectives of 'underdevelopment' and 'dependency'. Scholars, following the world-system theory, tried to answer questions like: to what extent was the nineteenth-century Levant/Middle East incorporated into the world economy? What were the effects of the first wave of globalization on Middle Eastern societies?³⁴ The economic history of a particular Arab provincial capital, the effects of the *Tanzimat*, the implementation of the Anglo-Ottoman Commercial Treaty of 1838,

regional and international trade networks and regional integration are the main issues addressed in these works.³⁵ In this regard, it is safe to argue that in the second half of the nineteenth century, Ottoman Baghdad experienced quite a significant transformation. This period witnessed the incorporation of the region into the rest of the empire, and into the world economy. The introduction of the telegraph as well as the improvement of the steamship service on the twin rivers of Mesopotamia certainly strengthened Baghdad's ties with the central lands of the empire. Furthermore, the pacification and elimination of Kurdish principalities in northern Iraq and semi-autonomous hereditary governors in Mosul, and the settlement of nomadic tribes, gave the region the stability it had needed for so long.

There is no doubt that by the early 1870s, Ottoman Iraq was more connected to international networks. The two outlets of Iraq, namely Basra as the port city in the south of the region and the twin rivers in the north, played a significant role in this. The opening of the Suez Canal was perhaps one of the most important turning points in terms of the commercial development of Ottoman Baghdad. Within a few years there was an enormous increase in the export of agricultural goods, especially cereals.³⁶ The Suez Canal brought the port of Ottoman Iraq, namely Basra, much nearer to the Mediterranean. All these regional developments contributed to the process of de-tribalization and led to a trend of sedentarization.

Sedentarization was actually something the governors had been trying to achieve for a long time. Some of the governors, especially Midhat Pasha, took advantage of conjunctural developments to break the tribal structure of the region. Export-oriented agricultural production made land more valuable than ever before, and it increasingly became the source of the sheikhdom's power. The commercialization of agriculture led the tribal sheikhs to give priority to rich estates, rather than their tribesmen. Land replaced manliness, courage, superior strength, and warrior prowess as the central ideal of sheikhly/tribal culture. However, almost all of these developments started towards the end of the period studied in this work. Although the world-system approach can provide a significant framework for explaining the economic as well as political processes in Ottoman Iraq, to do this one

would have to analyze a longer time period – perhaps up to the First World War – which exceeds the limits of this study.

Another group of studies analyzes Ottoman rule in the Arab provinces in the framework of imperial practices and discourses, which came to be labeled as Ottoman imperialism or colonialism.³⁷ Through a literal interpretation of the imperial discourse as narrated in the archival documents, they argued that Ottoman rule in the Arab provinces was characterized by oriental and imperial practices. In fact, earlier, some of the Arab scholars (mostly nationalists and socialists) had made similar arguments that the Arab provinces were indeed colonized by foreign, Turkish rule. One of the recurrent themes emphasized in these arguments was the transfer of the provincial economic resources to the imperial center.³⁸ It is true that the Ottoman use of imperial discourse, which was not infrequently derogatory towards nomadic cultures, can be found both in the state archives and private letters.³⁹ Yet one should also note that this imperial discourse was not limited to a certain ethnicity, the Arab people in this case, but it can also be seen as directed towards the nomadic Turks in Anatolia as well.⁴⁰ The question of whether the Ottoman administration in Baghdad was a form of colonial rule will be excluded from this work.⁴¹ Suffice it to say that the imperial discourse of the Ottoman rulers in Baghdad was part of the centralization, modernization and Ottomanism projects.

From the center to the periphery: *Tanzimat* centralization, Modernization and Ottomanism

The tension between the provincial forces and the central government has been identified as one of the most critical problems of Ottoman history in the post-classical period.⁴² In particular, the eighteenth century is very abundant in terms of decentralizing structures; it is for this reason that this century is usually referred to as the 'Age of the *Ayan*'.⁴³ This issue attracted the attention of many scholars who sought to use center-periphery relations as a key explanatory framework for Ottoman studies.⁴⁴ While some scholars assumed a confrontation between the center and the periphery, some others made an implicit

correlation between decline and decentralization, which is inherently assumed to be 'bad', as opposed to 'good' centralization.⁴⁵ However, revisionist historians have increasingly refused to think in such polarized terms and begun to reconsider the 'zero-sum game' structure of the center-periphery relations in the Ottoman Empire. They propose to 'reframe the Ottoman Empire as a polity whose administration went through cycles of greater and lesser centralization as a result of rational strategic and economic choices on the part of various segments of Ottoman society'.⁴⁶

It was the *ayan* (provincial notables) and local dynasties who did mostly rise in prominence, preparing the ground for decentralization. When we look at the Arab provinces, the Karamanids (in Tripoli), al-Husainiyyah (in Tunisia), the Ma'ns and the Shihabî *emîrs* (in Lebanon) Zâhir al-Umar (in Palestine), al-Azms and Ahmad al-Jazzâr (in Syria and Palestine), the Suuds (in Necd), the Kurdish beys (in southeastern Anatolia and Kurdistan), the Jalîlîs (in Mosul), and the Mamluks (in Baghdad) were among the leading families and/or quasi-independent regimes. The Ottoman center could no longer tolerate autonomous notables and dynasties as intermediates between the sultan and his people, and Mahmud II made decisive attempts to end this situation after 1812. Mahmud II's aim was to restore the centralized government system. Therefore, imperial centralization had started long before the Gülhane Edict of 1839.

When we take a closer look at the province of Baghdad, it becomes clear that despite its importance, it remained, from its conquest in 1534 until the mid-nineteenth century, on the periphery of the Ottoman Empire.⁴⁷ It was never as thoroughly integrated into the empire or as directly administered by the Ottomans as was the western half of the Fertile Crescent. Mamluk rule (1749–1831) was the apex of quasi-independent rule in the province. Perhaps the most striking sign of this was that the governors appointed by the Sublime Porte were considered to be 'alien pashas'.

When the Sublime Porte decided to put an end to Mamluk rule in Baghdad in 1831, the Mamluks ended the internal rivalry among themselves and united against the newly appointed governor, Ali Rıza Pasha. It is true that the imperial center could not appoint its own

governors; or more correctly, the governors appointed by the central administration could not establish their authority and therefore they were soon withdrawn.⁴⁸ The imperial center could, instead, elect one of the Mamluk candidates for the provincial governorship. However, this does not mean that it was a mere spectator to the provincial politics in Baghdad. At least four Mamluk governors were dismissed with the intervention of Sublime Porte.⁴⁹

The international situation also played a role in the inability of Ottoman central government to intervene against local rulers. The wars with Russia in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, in particular, prevented the Sublime Porte from allocating the necessary military forces to the Arab provinces. In view of this, local rule in the easternmost periphery of the empire was particularly vulnerable to foreign influence and intervention, which the Ottoman central administration could not accept. It is quite interesting that Ottoman attempts at centralization and extension of direct rule in Baghdad and Mosul were eased by natural disasters. First, the plague of 1831 seriously weakened the Mamluk armies and decimated the capital. Then came a violent spring flood. The two disasters enabled the easy takeover of the city in the end. On the other hand, the locust invasion in Mosul in 1824–25, which devastated the Mosuli countryside and led to famine, exacerbated the political crisis in the city; consequently Jalili rule came to an end.⁵⁰

This study takes the year 1831 as the beginning point, because this year is not only an important turning point in the overall history of Ottoman Iraq, but it also represents the watershed between the periods of 'local rule' and the period of restored Ottoman centralization.⁵¹ The trends of decentralization and provincial autonomy in Baghdad were reversed in the nineteenth century when administrative centralization and re-organization, undertaken by the Ottoman government as part of a comprehensive reform and modernization program, were extended to Iraq.

The Mamluk period of Baghdad is usually referred to as the '*Pashalik* of Baghdad'. Literally, *pashalik* meant the place ruled by a Pasha; however, it seems that this term came to be used for the provincial periphery, where local forces had considerable strength. In Ottoman Iraq, both the introduction of Ottoman direct rule and later the *Tanzimat*

reforms put an end to the old system of *ṣasḥalīk* which in the past had in fact encouraged decentralization.⁵²

The taxation system in the provinces was strongly affected by the center-periphery relations. As distance increased from the imperial center, the *mîrî* system became less common. For example, while Mosul had the traditional *mîrî* system, Baghdad, Basra and Al-Ahsa were farmed out to tax-farmers.⁵³ It is well known that the change (in fact corruption) of the traditional *timar* system and the emerging system of life-tenure tax-farm (*malikane*) played a significant role in the strengthening of the local *ayan*.⁵⁴ In this regard, the *Tanzimat* reforms were intended to centralize the system of tax collection. Hence, *muhassils*, who were sent to the provinces, were to collect the provincial revenues in the name of the central treasury. Similarly, in Baghdad, changes in the taxation system came before the *Tanzimat*. It was in 1831 that the re-integration of Iraq into the Ottoman central government resulted in a change in the tax-farming methods. In the pre-1831 period, the Mamluks of Baghdad employed a system of lifetime tax-farming, which was a practice peculiar to the eighteenth century. After the establishment of Ottoman direct rule in Baghdad, the new governor, Ali Rıza Pasha, tightened the conditions of the contract and changed it 'from lifetime contracts to a shorter period of from one to three years, under direct supervision of the imperial treasury in İstanbul'.⁵⁵ In short, this change in the tax-farming system was in fact a reflection of imperial centralization.

The imperial incentive for centralization in Baghdad was also strengthened by the fragility of the periphery. The Mamluk regime was not only fragile in its loyalty to the Sublime Porte, but also brittle in its relations with foreign powers. On the one hand, there were the Wahhabi forces that increasingly threatened Ottoman Iraq. Despite repeated orders from İstanbul, the Mamluks were reluctant to tackle this menace. On the other hand, the growing presence of Britain and France, both in İstanbul and Baghdad, enabled these powers to intervene in the appointments of governors in Baghdad.⁵⁶ They lobbied overtly for certain governors in the province. Moreover, it is also well known that Britain and Iran were quite influential in inciting the Kurdish tribes within the province.