

STUDIES ON OTTOMAN DIPLOMATIC HISTORY

I

edited by
Sinan KUNERALP

THE ISIS PRESS
ISTANBUL

©THE ISIS PRESS, 1987

This publication is copyright under the Berne Convention
No reproduction without permission. All rights reserved.

The Isis Press Ltd
Şemsibey Sok. 10
81210 Beylerbeyi - ISTANBUL

First published in 1987

John R. PERRY

THE MAMLUK PAŞALIK OF BAGHDAD AND
OTTOMAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS
IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

I

When an ambassador from Istanbul to Nadir Shah Afshâr of Iran was ingratiatingly congratulating himself on having seen the two greatest men in the world, i.e. the Sultan and Nadir, the latter replied, "No — there is yet a greater, the Pasha of Baghdad, who sets us both at defiance!"¹ The pasha he referred to was Ahmed, ruler of the province of Bagdad-Basra from 1723 to 1747 and effective founder of the quasi-autonomous Mamlûk dynasty (known later as the Al-Dâ'îd) which lasted until 1831. The aim of this study is to show how, if this remark was true in Nadir Shah's time, it was even more appropriate during the reigns of Ahmed's successors Süleyman (1749-1762), Ömer (1764-1776) and Süleyman II (1779-1802), contemporaneous with the Ottoman sultans Mustafa III and Abdülhamid I, and with the post-Nadir interregnum and the Zand period in Iran, notably the reign of Karim Khan (1751-79). This autonomous buffer zone exerted a quite disproportionate influence on the problems and policies both of its frustrated overlord, the

The following abbreviations are used to refer to British and Ottoman archival materials.

- FR: East India Company, *Persia and the Persian Gulf Records*, vols VI-XIII (Factory Records)
GD: East India Company, *Persia Gulf Records*, vols VI-XIII (*Gombroon Diary*)
SP: State Papers in the Public Record Office, London (*Series S.P. Foreign Turkey*)
HH: *Hatt-i Hümayûn (hülâsalar)* [Catalogues and summaries of Imperial Decrees and diplomatic correspondence]
NH: *Nâme-i Hümayûn* [Copies of diplomatic correspondence] The two last one to be found in the Başbakanlık Arşivi [Archives of the Prime Minister's Office], Istanbul.

¹ Sir Robert Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia, Armenia, Ancient Babylonia*, London, 1821-22, II, p. 248.

Ottoman government, and of its unstable neighbour, Iran, and was to usurp all meaningful diplomatic — and, by logical extension, military — contacts between them for half a century.

Strictly speaking, the dynasty was founded by Ahmed's father Hasan Pasha (governed 1704-1723), who won and maintained administrative autonomy from Istanbul, established a "school" for recruitment and training of Caucasian slaves as court functionaries, and bequeathed this establishment to his son.² Neither of them was a slave, but the son initiated the mode of slave-succession — by each previous pasha's hand-picked *kâhya* (deputy at Baghdad) and/or *mütesellim* (lieutenant-governor) of Basra — that was henceforth to characterize the dynasty. One of Hasan's Georgian, freedmen Süleyman Ağa, went not only to serve his son but in 1732 was married to Ahmed's daughter Adila Khatun, and as *Kâhya* for the next fifteen years became as respected by the Arab tribes and as popular in Baghdad city as his patron. His vigorous suppression of tribal disorders by lightning forays earned him the nickname of Abu Layla (the "Night Raider").³

It will be obvious from the gaps in the above sequence of regnal dates that the succession was rarely smooth and sure. Ahmed had been removed by the Porte in 1736, but returned two years later;⁴ and each of his successor's reigns is marked by a brief interlude of anarchy or of short-lived intervention by Istanbul. Thus in 1747, on the simultaneous death of Ahmed Pasha and of the greatest threat to the frontier, Nadir Shah, the Porte roused itself to reassert control over this region by appointing the former Vâli of Diyarbekir to Baghdad, and another loyal functionary to a separate pashalik of Basra. The Baghdad public, the unpaid Janissaries, and the Iraqi tribes were totally uncooperative: four successive appointees to Baghdad and the one in Basra failed to keep order. Finally Süleyman, who had been transferred to safely distant Adana, was appointed to Basra, where he immediately quelled the Muntafiq, Banu Lâ'm and Banu Ka'b Arabs and established a strong and popular rule. Tiryâki Mustafa Pasha of Baghdad met him in battle at Hilla and lost, Süleyman was welcomed into Baghdad and, like Ahmed and Hasan before him, included the provinces of Basra and Mardin under his sway. Again the Porte had to acquiesce by issuing a diploma in his name.

The "mamlük" nature of the administration and succession was compounded by the inordinate influence of Süleyman's snobbish and overbearing wife, Adila Khatun. Her freeborn status allowed her to dominate her husband's domestic life and establish a powerful political clique at court. More telling is Niebuhr's observation that neither she nor her sister A'isha,

² S. H. Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq*, Oxford, 1925, p. 184.

³ See Cevdet Paşa, *Tarih-i Cevdet*, Istanbul, 1309/1891-2, I, p. 339; Carsten Niebuhr, *Reisebeschreibungen nach Arabien und Anderen Umliegenden Ländern*, Copenhagen, 1774-78, II, p. 317; Beauchamp, General-Vicarius in Babylon, "Nachricht von einer Reise in Persien, im Jahre 1787", in *Minerva, ein Journal historischen und politischen Inhalts*, III, 1792, No. 14, p. 273.

⁴ Longrigg, p. 167.

wife of Ömer Pasha, allowed her husband any co-wife or concubine, and since neither had sons, the succession by slave-protégé was assured.⁵

Abu Layla died twelve years later, and Istanbul again attempted to appoint their own man — Sa'd ud-din Pasha, transferred from Raqqa. Again the popular support mustered by one of Süleyman's former *kâhyas*, Ali (now acting as *mütesellim* of Basra) proved too much for the "foreigner" and his troops — as did the leverage Ali apparently enjoyed at Istanbul, for according to Niebuhr he simply "bought" the pashalik.⁶ Known as al-'Ajami — "the Persian" — Ali had been born in Iran, and was evidently not a favorite son of the mamlûk establishment; he fell foul of Adila Khatun, who encouraged a mutiny of the Janissaries, which ousted him. He was murdered as he fled the palace in disguise. His successor Ömer, titular head of the rebellion, had also been *kâhya* to Abu Layla; he was "elected" by Adila Khatun's faction and confirmed by the sultan in summer of 1764.⁷ This time the Porte had no chance to intervene, and for the next twelve years the Baghdad pashalik was run by Ömer and the palace oligarchy, with Basra as a subordinate sanjaq. The *Mütesellim* there, Süleyman Ağa, was a Georgian Mamlûk of the Baghdad palace school, of a capacity and energy comparable to that of this namesake, Abu Layla. He remained in office until the fall of Basra to the Iranians in 1776, though dismissed and reinstated three times (in 1768, 1769-71 and 1773). He survived three years' captivity in Iran, and the dismissal and murder of Ömer Pasha (see below), not only to return and regain his post of Basra but to secure the vacant and hopelessly faction-ridden pashalik of Baghdad.⁸

II

Having sketched the almost monotonous regularity of a nevertheless quite intricate pattern of succession, let us turn to the internal structure of the Pashalik and its foreign relations. The Pasha's military and fiscal relationship with Istanbul is described by various contemporary visitors.⁹ His army totalled a theoretical 4,000 men, comprising some 1,500 personal cavalry, an 800-strong corps d'élite, 200 other guards under the *kâhya* and other high officials, 800 locally-levied infantry known as *beratlı* and 200 foot musketeers. Separate from this was an imperial garrison of 10,000 or more janissaries with artillery, most of them stationed in the city. Over these the

⁵ Longrigg, p. 169; Niebuhr, pp. 317, 322.

⁶ Niebuhr, p. 319.

⁷ GD XII, 6 August 1762; Cevdet I, p. 340

⁸ Al-Shaykh 'Uthmân b. Sind al-Basri, *Matâli ul-Su'ûd fî akhbâr a'lam il-wuzarâ wa-a'zamihim Dâûd* (MS in Iraq Museum Library, No. 233), pp. 82-83; SP 97/55, 259a.

⁹ See W. Eton, *A Survey of the Turkish Empire*, London, 1798, pp. 288-289; Niebuhr, 323ff; Guillaume-Antoine Olivier, *Voyage dans l'Empire Ottoman, l'Égypte et la Perse*, Paris, 1807, IV, pp. 339-340.

pasha technically had no authority; they answered to their own officers appointed by their *ağa* at Istanbul. However, their pay was so chronically in arrears that their mood alternated between lethargy and mutiny; they were thus totally useless as an imperial check to the Pasha's power — though as has been seen, they could be effectively manipulated by rival palace factions. Paradoxically, as an extra "praetorian guard," they helped perpetuate the mamlūk autonomy and succession.

Observers concur that the Pasha remitted no revenue to Istanbul. His accounts showed that his income was entirely swallowed by his army and by the upkeep of long-derelect fortresses, allegedly a necessary defense against Arab and Kurdish rebels and threats from Iran. Nor did he contribute troops for the Sultan's European wars, claiming that all local levies were needed at home — a pretense illustrated from time to time by sham wars staged in connivance with the Muntafiq Arabs. Whatever the truth of this opinion, it was so rooted in certain circles (perhaps only the cynical foreign and émigré merchant communities of Basra) that it was even rumoured at the outset of the siege in 1775 that the Pasha had bribed the Iranian ruler Karim Khan to mount a show of force in order to raise his prestige in the eyes of the Porte.¹⁰ They were soon to realise their error.

However, the Pasha — Ömer in particular — did base his precarious financial and territorial security on tacit agreements with his more unruly subjects, their frontier neighbours, and the rulers of Iran, though in more subtle ways. His pashalik, like its predecessor and successor states in Iraq, was a heterogeneous and unwieldy package. Outside the relatively docile peasantry of Iraq proper, his subjects consisted of nomadic Arab tribes whose territories overlapped Iran, Arabia, Syria and the Jazira; the Kurds of the principalities of Zuhab, Darna and Baban (Qara Chuwalân), bordering Iran; and a very large resident alien population, chiefly Iranian Shi'ites in the shrine towns and Iranian, Armenian, Indian and other traders and entrepreneurs at Basra. This latter population was swelled by political, religious and economic refugees from Iran during the troubled interregna of 1722-32 (the fall of the Safavid dynasty and the Afghan occupation) and 1747-1757 (from the assassination of Nadir Shah to the establishment in Shiraz of Karim Khan Zand). Added to this was the regular pilgrim traffic, both to Najaf and Kerbela and in transit to the Hijaz, involving at least 10,000 persons a year¹¹. These related questions proved the most constant source of friction between the Pashalik and Iran. Safe conduct for Iranian pilgrims and their exemption from tolls and dues had been stipulated in the as yet unratified treaty of 1746,¹² but the pilgrims continued, as always, to "make grievous complaints of the insults and oppressions of the Turks."¹³

¹⁰ Niebuhr, p. 323.

¹¹ Porter, p. 201.

¹² HH I, No. 2, article 5

¹³ George Forster, *A Journey from Bengal to England, through the Northern Part of India ... and Persia, and into Russia, by the Caspian Sea*, London, 1798, II, p. 146.

The Pasha derived no revenue from the wealthy shrine towns with their extensive *waqf* holdings and exclusively tax-exempt pilgrim traffic.¹⁴ The "pilgrims" in fact engaged in commerce, most presumably just to defray expenses in an age before travellers' checks, some certainly to take advantage of their duty-free status. It was Ömer's attempt to skim off some of this profit for himself by suddenly reimposing a frontier toll on pilgrims from Iran that brought outraged complaints by Karim Khan Zand to both Pasha and Porte in 1774. Iranian residents in Baghdad were likewise allegedly robbed, fined and deported in unprecedented numbers¹⁵. Finally, after the Baghdad plague of 1773, during which more than 700 Iranians died, Ömer confiscated their residue without redress to their heirs. An embassy from Shiraz received only evasive excuses.¹⁶ Humanitarian considerations aside, an enormous sum in Iranian specie (estimated in 1801 at 10 lakhs of rupees)¹⁷ regularly drained out via the pilgrim routes, and Karim Khan, who had attempted with some success to stem the specie drain through the Gulf ports by means of restrictive clauses in his agreements with the East India Company, was not prepared to see it siphoned off by the Pasha.

A parallel source of the Pasha's profit at Iran's expense was the concentration at Basra of émigré merchants and European trading companies — especially the East Indian Company, which in 1770 had abandoned Bushire, its last foothold on the Iranian shores of the Gulf, to trade exclusively at Basra. Direct appeals failed to persuade the Armenians or the British to return, or the Pasha to cooperate¹⁸. It was to force such concessions at both Baghdad and Basra that the Zands marched on Basra in 1775; in case the threat failed to produce results, they could conquer the Iraqi port directly and regain all the tangible and intangible wealth it had in their view stolen from Iran.

It will be obvious that the Pasha had little natural affinity with any of the local elements whose support he had to rely on. To the whole populace, he and his minions were alien "Turks"; most of the peasantry and immigrants, and some the tribes, were moreover Shi'ites, resentful of their subservience to a Sunni government; to the Porte and the neighbouring governors, the Mamlūk Pashas were insubordinate upstarts. Despite these handicaps, Süleyman and Ömer in particular managed to work out an entente

¹⁴ Cf. J. B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880*, Oxford, 1968, pp. 35-36.

¹⁵ Muhammed Rizâ Nasîrî, "Chand sanad-i târikhi," in *Bar-rasihyi Târikh* X 1354/1975-76, No. 1, p. 183; Sayyid Abdullah al-Husayni al-Shûshî, *Tazkira-yi Shûshî*, Calcutta, 1924, p. 165.

¹⁶ Nasîrî, pp. 183-184; Mirza Muhhamad Sâdiq Nâmi, *Târikh-i Giti-gusha*, ed. S. Nafisi, Tehran, 131/1938, p. 181; Sp 97/55, 37a-38b; Cevdet, II, p. 55.

¹⁷ G. R. G. Hambly, "An Introduction to the Economic Organization of Early Qajar Iran," in *Iran*, II, 1964, p. 78.

¹⁸ Haroutioun Hovhanyants, *Patmul'ivn Nor Jughayu* (History of New Julfa), New Julfa, 1880, I, pp. 311, 312, 315, 318; FR XVII, 1061, 1063, 1065, 1071, 1078; SP 97/49, 147b; Abraham Parsons, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, London, 1808, p. 185.

with these elements. The reins of government were virtually identical with the Pasha's purse-strings — everyone from the Pasha down paid some form of protection money to someone, sometimes via government channels, sometimes directly. Much of the province's revenue, as derived from taxes on produce and commerce — the same which, as Eton asserts, never reached Istanbul — was not so much eaten by the Pasha as actually plowed back to maintain security (as he claimed), but in the form of bribes and subsidies to local Arab and Kurdish governors and their tribesmen (as his detractors alleged). In many cases such revenue was left to be collected directly by the local ruler, in exchange for a nominal tribute: e.g., the Euphrates river-toll at 'Arja was the perquisite of the Al-Sâlih family of the Muntafig Arabs.¹⁹ It was not so much sham wars that required extra outlay from the treasury, but rather a sham peace, an untapped tourist traffic, and widespread tax-farming that minimized state revenue in the first place.

III

The Kurdish principalities of Zuhâb, Darna, and Qara Chuwalân were each governed by the current head of the ruling Lak or Kurd family. The most powerful, the Baban ruler of Qara (Qal'a) Chuwalân — who intermittently controlled Zuhâb and Kôy Sanjaq — bought his title of Pasha (of one tail) from the Pasha of Baghdad.²⁰ Geopolitically, these lands were the mirror-image of the Iranian-protected provinces of Kermanshah and Ardâlân, the latter being ruled for most of this period by Khusraw Khan, who rejoiced in the obsolescent Safavid title of Vâli, or hereditary march-warden. Ardâlân became tributary to the Zands as early as 1750. The death of Abu Layla and the interregnum at Baghdad during 1762-64, and the definitive establishment then of Zand power throughout the Zagros, was reflected in Kurdistan by a coup in Qara Chuwalân and an invasion by Khusraw Khan, who for the next decade exercised no small influence over the "Pasha's" province.²¹ In 1774 Ömer Pasha, alarmed at seeing a now strong Iranian government in complacent control of his closest frontier, resumed the "forward policy" that had been favored by Abu Layla. He sent a large force which reimposed his own protégés at Qara Chuwalân and Kôy Sanjaq.²² This in turn provoked Khusraw Khan and his Zand overlord to set about restoring the balance of power in their favour and the war of 1774-77 began on the Kurdish front.

A similar situation obtained on the Pasha's southernmost frontier with Iran, that of the Shatt ul-'Arab under the jurisdiction of the

¹⁹ Niebuhr, p. 249.

²⁰ Niebuhr, pp. 330-331.

²¹ Nâmi, p. 188; Cevdet, I, 344ff; Longrigg, pp. 188-189.

²² Nâmi, pp. 178, 182.

Mütesellim of Basra. Here the Banu Ka'b Arabs straddled the ill-defined frontier of marshes and creeks, vaguely acknowledging Iranian suzerainty but refusing tribute to either power while exacting tolls and raiding their neighbours by land and water. In 1764 the newly-appointed Ömer himself proposed to Karim Khan a joint punitive campaign against the Ka'b. The Iranians performed their task of flushing the tribesmen out of Khuzistan, but the *Mütesellim*, either through a logistical failure or deliberately, out of fear of the proximity of such a large Iranian force, not only failed to intercept the Ka'b but even withheld the boats and supplies he was supposed to send the Zand army.²³ This too was held against the Pasha in Karim Khan's complaints to Istanbul.

The Zand Khan likewise alleged that Ömer had lent aid to the Imam of Oman, at war with the Zands (who on the basis of Nadir Shah's brief occupation of Muscat regarded the "Kharijite" Omanis as rebels when they refused tribute).²⁴

The Pasha's adventurism in another field was more blatant and risky, though not apparently held against him by Karim Khan. Twice Abu Layla had given refuge and aid to Azād Khan Afghan, the Zands' most dangerous opponent during 1753-58 — with the full consent, if not actual instigation, of Adila Khatun.²⁵ As early as 1751 he had also supported Mustafa Quli Khan (Nadir's envoy to the Porte, delayed in Baghdad since his master's death) and Ali Mardān Khan Bakhtyāri, Karim Khan's immediate rival for power, in an unsuccessful attempt to march on Kermashah and place a Safavid pretender on the Iranian throne.²⁶ By siding with an Afsharid ambassador against the *de facto* ruler of western Iran, the Pasha was here usurping a major foreign policy initiative of Istanbul.

IV

This brings us to the question of diplomatic relations between Iran and the Ottoman empire between 1747 and 1797. For both sides there was a choice to make. Which of the two Irans was the Sultan to recognise — the "legitimate" successor state of the Afsharids at Mashhad, or the growing power of the Zands, closer at hand in the Zagros? Which Ottoman government was (Zand) Iran to deal with — the distant and temporarily weak "Sublime Porte" or the contiguous and covertly aggressive pashalik of Baghdad-Basra?

On Nadir Shah's assassination in June 1747 there was at first a far

²³ Nāmi, pp. 131-133; Niebuhr, pp. 228-229.

²⁴ See Nasiri, p. 185.

²⁵ Mirzā Abū'l-Hasan Ghaffāri, *Gulshan-i Murād* (British Library MS Or, 3592), pp. 68-69.

²⁶ GD VI, 12 July 1751.

smoother continuity in diplomatic relations between the two powers than in the internal recovery of the Iranian state. Nadir's ambassadors to the Porte, Mustafa Quli Khan, Bigdili Shâmlu and the court chronicler, Mirza Mehdi Astarâbâdi, heard the news at Baghdad on their way toward Istanbul, and remained there as guests of the Pasha until they could be sure which way the wind would blow. Mustafa Quli sent the Shah's presents ahead to Istanbul, and was soon authorized by Nadir's nephew, who had ascended the throne as Adil Shah, to proceed with negotiations.²⁷ Adil Shah, Ibrâhim Shah, Shâhrukh Shah and their officers in rapid succession wrote to assure the Porte and the Pasha of their eagerness to ratify the territorial provisions of the treaty signed with Nadir Shah in 1747 (the vexed religious question was for the moment skirted) and their desire for peace and friendship, and received cautious replies in kind.²⁸ The very rapidity of their succession, however, plainly revealed the still unstable situation in Iran. Nervous and cautious, both Istanbul and Baghdad at first withheld their own envoys and set about mobilizing frontier troops. A personal envoy from Mustafa Quli Khan to Istanbul reassured them of the peaceful intentions of the Afsharid successor — whoever he might eventually be — and an envoy was ordered to Iran.²⁹ But other factors were to resolve the immediate problems. The continued internecine strife at Mashhad resulted by early 1750 in a bankrupt puppet monarchy manipulated by a military junta, with Khorasan under the shadow of Ahmed Shah Durrâni's new Afghan empire; the Afsharids had failed to reoccupy Isfahan, which together with the rest of western Iran was still disputed by at least four tribal leaders with only one Safavid pretender between them. By then, too, Süleyman Pasha had re-established Mamlûk autonomy in Baghdad. The Porte, thus doubly insulated against Iran, was content to forget about diplomatic contacts for the next quarter century.

By 1774 the situation had changed considerably. The Ottoman empire was chastened by the outcome of the war with Russia and the Treaty of Küçük Qaynarja. A strong and aggressive state had established itself in western Iran, with its roots in the tribes of the Kurdish foothills and Shiraz, its capital, virtually overlooking the Shatt ul-'Arab. The Georgian Kingdom, too, nominally still a vassal of Iran, had won a hegemony over the whole of the south-western Caucasus bordering the pashalik of Çıldır, and had contracted an alliance with Russia that was tested with some success against Ottoman forces in the war of 1768-74. The linchpin of the empire's eastern defenses, the pashalik of Baghdad, had now antagonized the Zand ruler and even bested him in the first clash in Kurdistan.³⁰ If this dyke were to give way, the weak government of the newly-ascended Abdülhamid I might find its eastern provinces suddenly engulfed in the wake of its Black Sea shores.

²⁷ HH I, pp. 138, 148, 150, 175.

²⁸ NH III, No. 3, pp. 52-84.

²⁹ SP 97/33, pp. 209a, 342b.

³⁰ SP 97/51, p. 46a; HH I, pp. 135, 348a; Nâmi, pp. 178-179.

This was undoubtedly the specter confronting the minds in the war room at the Topkapi Saray, as evidenced by the tenor of the reports and letters that sped between Istanbul and the frontier *seraskers* in 1774-75; Karim Khan, who intended merely to hold Basra hostage if he could take it, would have been flattered and amused had he known. Apart from orders to mobilize, the Porte despatched presents and circulars to the khans of the Azerbaijan and South Caucasus provinces of Khoy, Marâgha, Ardabil, Nakhchivân, Ganja, Darband, Qarabagh, Shirvân, etc. to secure their allegiance, or at least neutrality, in the event of an assault on the Ottoman frontiers by Erekle of Georgia or Karim Khan. All replied, doubtless truthfully, that they had no intention of obeying Karim Khan and would welcome an opportunity to be rid of Erekle; Erekle himself even declared, tongue in cheek, that in the absence of a shah on the Iranian throne, he considered himself a loyal subject of the Sultan.³¹

With peace concluded and his Russian allies no longer interested in cooperating, Erekle's guarantee of neutrality could probably be trusted. As he and the Muslim Khans of the region knew, Karim Khan had insufficient authority north of Tabriz to involve them even in diversionary operations. Karim, equally aware of this, created his diversion in Shahrizur on the disputed Baban frontier — whence the Porte evidently expected the main assault to materialize.

Next came the first direct diplomatic tentative: Sünbülzâde Vehbi Efendi was sent to open negotiations with what the Porte was at last constrained to acknowledge as the effective government of Iran. He left Istanbul in January 1775 and reached Shiraz in April; his journey thus coincided ironically with Sâdiq Khan Zand's march on Basra. His interview with Karim Khan was overshadowed by the onset of the siege, a move for which, incredibly, the Porte appeared unprepared. His mission was ostensibly confined to a polite official notification of the accession of Abdülhamid. Any oral concessions he might have added, regarding the treatment of Iranian pilgrims or the Kurdish problem, were evidently insufficient, for he returned to Istanbul that September "in disgrace," bearing a reiteration of Karim's complaints against the Pasha.³² The Zand envoy, Abdullah Khan Kalhur, reciprocated post-haste, in advance of Vehbi's return, with copies of the Zand ruler's letters to the Sultan, the Grand Vizier and the Shaykh ul-Islam.³³

The seal was set on Vehbi's disgrace in Baghdad. Ömer Pasha, determined to undermine this initiative of the Porte in what had been his own preserve, and doubtless fearing that the envoy's report would confirm Zand

³¹ HH I, pp. 58a-68, 69, 79, 97; Nasiri in *Bar-rasihâ-yi Târikhi*, X, 1354/1975-76, No. 6, pp. 144-153; Cevdet, II, p. 62.

³² SP 97/51, pp. 21a, 68, 87, 89b, 106; Ghaffârî, p. 190.

³³ HH I, pp. 2, 5, 174a, 202, 218, 219; partly published by Nasiri in *Bar-rasihâ-yi Târikhi*, X, No. 1, pp. 175-194 and No. 6, pp. 133-41. For the military progress of the campaigns in Kurdistan and the siege and occupation of Basra, see John R. Perry, *Karim Khan Zand*, Chicago, 1979, Chapters 11 and 12.

complaints and invite imperial retribution, denounced him to Abdülhamid as having improperly conducted his mission. The Sultan ordered his execution, but Vehbi returned incognito and remained in hiding in Üsküdar; here, in order to refute Ömer's charge, he wrote an amusing *qaside* in which aspects of Iran and the Zand court are scathingly compared with their Ottoman counterparts. He was later pardoned and appointed Qadi of Rhodes.³⁴

Ömer, apparently sharing Istanbul's misapprehension that the real threat was to Baghdad, sent only 200 Janissaries to augment the Basra garrison at the outset of the siege, and towards the end of the year despatched a token relief force which was routed at Hilla by the Zands' Arab allies of the Banu Khazâ'il.³⁵ The Porte was now reduced to finding scapegoats. The first was Vehbi Efendi. Later, in January 1777, the Grand Vizier Dervish Mehmed Pasha was deposed and banished, charged with misappropriating funds "destined for the prosecution of the Persian war."³⁶

Unlike the conflicts of Safavid and early Afsharid times, this was not in fact a war between Iran and the Ottoman state. No imperial troops (except perhaps the 200 Janissaries at Basra) fought the Zand armies, and it was not until early in 1779 — three years after the fall of Basra and 18 months after the cessation of hostilities in Kurdistan — that the Porte sought a *fatwâ* to make war on the Iranians and issued a circular to "all the khans and notables of Iran" declaring the Sultan's intention to teach their arrogant and duplicitous ruler a lesson.³⁷ By the time this was delivered, Karim Khan would be dead, Iran (and Iraq) plunged into civil war, Basra a derelict shadow of its former prosperity, and the course of Ottoman-Iranian relations set back to 1747.

Unable in fact to mount an Iranian campaign, the Sultan had meantime turned his armies against Baghdad. Early in 1776 Ömer was dismissed from office and Ispanakçı-zâde Hâfız Mustafa Pasha of Raqqa was sent, backed by the governors of Diyarbekir and Shahrizur, to take over Baghdad. Ömer was to be transferred to Diyarbekir, and began to go quietly, taking his household and treasury with him. But Mustafa, either on secret orders from Istanbul or because he coveted Ömer's wealth, attacked at night and massacred the ex-governor and his retinue. Ömer's head arrived at Istanbul in March, to undisguised satisfaction at the Topkapı Saray.³⁸

This made no difference to the course of the war. The Zand army under Nazar Ali Khan was unexpectedly withdrawn from Kermashah late in 1776, and an army of Kirkuk and Mosul levies under the Pasha of Mardin

³⁴ See Faik Reşit Unet, *Osmanlı Sefirleri ve Sefaretnameleri* pp. 134-136; SP 97/51, p. 116; Sünbülzade Vehbi Efendi, *Divan*, Bulaq, 1253/1837, pp. 12-17.

³⁵ Parsons, pp. 165, 170-171; Nâmi, pp. 201-202.

³⁶ SP 97/53, p. 19a.

³⁷ NH IX, p. 90; Cevdet, II, pp. 58, 305.

³⁸ SP 97/51, p. 70b; 97/52, pp. 8a, 11a, 21b; Cevdet, II, pp. 56, 59; Longrigg, p. 181.

decisively defeated Khusraw Khan of Ardalan the following spring, without any help from Baghdad.³⁹ Basra, however, fell to the Zands only a month after Ömer's dismissal; the Porte kept this news secret for some weeks, and then feigned indifference.⁴⁰ Inevitably, the new pasha did not remain long in office. Having injudiciously kept Ömer's possessions for himself, he was in turn made the scapegoat for his predecessor's death, as a sop to popular resentment in Baghdad, and replaced by one Abdi Pasha. He reigned a week before he was in turn ousted by Ömer's former *kâhya* Abdullah. The Porte was of course constrained to acknowledge the inevitable and again shelve its schemes for direct control of Baghdad.⁴¹ In 1777 negotiations with Shiraz were resumed, but from Baghdad, not Istanbul: Muhammad Beg al-Shawi apparently made some progress towards a settlement, and returned accompanied by Haydar Khan Zangana as the Zand envoy. But they were met at the frontier by the news of Abdullah Pasha's death. The ensuing contest for power erupted in street-fighting in Baghdad and renewed anarchy in the Kurdish sanjaqs.⁴² The standard pattern of succession was completed late in 1779, when Süleyman, the former *mütessellim* of Basra, returned from captivity in Iran to take over the whole pashalik. History had repeated itself just 50 years later, even to the name of its favorite.

V

The rise and persistence of autonomous dynastic governorates on the fringes of the Ottoman empire in the late 18th century is of course a recognized phenomenon. The Jalilis of Mosul are a less extreme example,⁴³ and there are many similar cases in the Balkans.⁴⁴ The scope of this analogy might well be broadened to include a whole range of regional dynasties flourishing in the interstices of the crumbling Mughal, Safavid and Ottoman empire. They came in different sizes, from regionally and ethnically homogeneous principalities like that of the Kurds of Ardalan or the Banu Ka'b Arabs,⁴⁵ through heterogeneous mini-empires such as those of Erekle II of Georgia and Fath Ali Khan of Qubba (Darband),⁴⁶ and the Baghdad

³⁹ SP 97/53, pp. 68, 126, 131b, 150a, 159b; Nasiri, in *Bar-rasihâ-yi Târikhi*, X, No. 6, p. 140; Ghaffârî, pp. 208-209.

⁴⁰ SP 97/52, p. 59a.

⁴¹ SP 97/52, pp. 74b, 75a; Cevdet, II, p. 58; Longrigg, p. 182.

⁴² Evers, 51; Cevdet II, III, 113; Longrigg, 184-5.

⁴³ See Robert W. Olson, *The Siege of Mosul and Ottoman-Perisian Relations 1718-1743*, Bloomington, 1975.

⁴⁴ See Dennis N. Skiotis, "From Bandit to Pasha: First Steps in the Rise to Power of Ali of Tepedelen, 1750-1784", in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2:3 (July 1971), pp. 219-220.

⁴⁵ See J. R. Perry, "The Banu Ka'b : An Amphibious Brigand State in Khuzistan", in *Le monde iranien et l'Islam*, I (1971), pp. 131-152.

⁴⁶ See J. R. Perry, "Iran, Russia and the Caucasus 1747-1779", in *Actes du XXIXe*

pashalik, up to larger fragments of former empires in Ahmed Shah's Afghanistan and Karim Khan's western Iran. All of these tended to accept their limitations, and generally co-existed as smaller units of an outmoded empire rather than competing to restore one. As such they are in part responsible for many of the political frontiers of the Middle East up until today.

Among these "lesser great men" of history, the Mamlûk Pashas of Baghdad remain a special case. They resisted repeated attempts by Iranian neighbours to bite off strategically or commercially valuable corners, and by Istanbul to assert more than nominal suzerainty. They conducted military and diplomatic battles with Iran nominally on behalf of the Porte, and repeatedly prevented either power from bypassing them, either to establish meaningful treaties with the central government or to pose a direct threat to the other. They were at once a curse and a blessing to both powers, who — as Nadir Shah reportedly recognized — were resigned to maintaining the pashalik while they deplored its arrogance and intransigence.