

The Empire in the City

Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire

Jens Hanssen
Thomas Philipp
Stefan Weber



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edited by

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ABBREVIATIONS OF PERIODICALS AND PUBLISHERS

AAS: Asian and African Studies

AHA: Annales d'Histoire et Archéologie

AHR: American History Review

AHROS: Arab Historical Review for Ottoman Studies

AO: Archivum Ottomanicum

BJMES: British Journal of Middle East Studies

CSSH: Comparative Studies in Society and History

EI: Encyclopaedia of Islam

IHR: International History Review

IJMES: International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies

IJTS: International Journal for Turkish Studies

JAOS: Journal of the American Oriental Society

JESHO: Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient

JUH: Journal for Urban History

MEJ: Middle East Journal

MES: Middle East Studies

NLR: New Left Review

NPT: New Perspectives on Turkey

REMMM: Revue des Etudes du Monde Musulman et Méditerranéen

ST: Studia Islamica

WI: Die Welt des Islams

ZDPV: Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palestina Verein

NINETEENTH CENTURY BAGHDAD THROUGH OTTOMAN EYES

CHRISTOPH HERZOG

Posing the question of how Baghdad was seen by the Ottomans is methodologically related to the analysis of Ottoman history writing. More generally speaking it is a matter of second-order-historiography dealing not with how things were, but with how things were seen. It should be noted, however, that this second-order-perspective does not enjoy any epistemological privileges over ordinary historiography. If we accept that Ranke's option to describe "how things really were" ("wie es eigentlich gewesen ist") is *not* one that can be possibly accomplished because the very notion of historiography bears in itself the oxymoron of history and writing, i.e. of reality and discourse (as Michel de Certeau has pointed out),¹ then this has to apply in the same way to the historiography of historiography. In other words: the reconstruction of "how things were seen" is not, and cannot possibly be, closer to reality than the reconstruction of "how things were". This applies regardless of the additional differentiation of history-writing into positivist narration and the construction of analytical frameworks.

Yet, I believe that the question of how Baghdad was seen by the Ottomans is important in at least two respects:

First of all, it may be regarded as a first step preceding the analysis of "how things were" as it focuses on the sources themselves rather than trying to assume them to be a mere looking glass which provides historical factuality. By carving out narrative structures and cultural bias inherent in these texts it may be possible to achieve a more precise view of historical facts by making a more critical use of the sources.

Second, it may contribute to a better understanding of the nature of Ottoman government in Iraq. More specifically it may provide arguments to the question if or in how far the Ottoman government in Baghdad (and by implication elsewhere in the Arab world) may be meaningfully interpreted as a colonial one. Much of the outcome of this second issue, of course, depends on the conception of colonialism. Without going too much into

¹ Michel de Certeau, *Das Schreiben der Geschichte*, Frankfurt 1991, 9.

detail I would like to refer to the definition of colonialism given by the German historian Jürgen Osterhammel:

Colonialism is a relationship of domination between an indigenous (or forcibly) imported majority and a minority of foreign invaders. The fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant metropolis. Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and of their ordained mandate to rule.²

While the Ottoman province of Baghdad (*Bağdad vilayeti*) was surely a colony according to the most general definition given by Osterhammel it is a much more complex question whether one can meaningfully describe the Ottoman rule in Iraq as colonial in the sense proposed by him in terms of illegitimate rule, cultural difference of *rulers* and *ruled* and formation of a colonialist consciousness or ideology as important parameters.³ While the questions of cultural difference and colonial consciousness or ideology may well be approached on the basis of Ottoman source material, the question of legitimacy or illegitimacy of Ottoman rule in Baghdad must remain excluded from the present consideration.

There is, however, an additional question that has to be touched on before delving into the matter: How do I use the term 'Ottoman' in the present context? Was Baghdad in the nineteenth century Ottoman? The answer can only be that 'Ottoman' here means the perspective from the imperial center to the periphery as represented in the genuine Ottoman terms of *Derseadet* vs. *taşra*. It does not involve any ethnic definition nor does it preclude, as will be seen, the possibility that an offspring of a local family and native of Baghdad could have taken that perspective. In other words the notion of "Ottoman" I employ here describes a cultural cluster whose boundaries necessarily must remain ill defined. This is, however, not to say that the Ottomans themselves, Istanbulis or else, did not perceive Baghdad as belonging to the well-protected domains of the Empire and thereby as being Ottoman.

² Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism. A Theoretical Overview. Translated from German by Shelly L. Fritsch*, Princeton 1997, 16. The German original quotation in idem, *Kolonialismus. Geschichte, Formen, Folgen*, München 1995, 21.

³ *Ibid.*, 19f. Osterhammel in fact seems to deny the colonialist character of Ottoman rule in the Arab provinces of the Empire; cf. *ibid.* 19 and 42. This view is contradicted, however, by John Ruedy in his review of the English translation of Osterhammel's study in question in *IJMES* 30 (1998), 588-590.

Proverbial Epistemologies

Before I will present several writings on Baghdad and Mesopotamia by Ottoman authors dating from the second half of the nineteenth to the first decade of the twentieth centuries, I want to draw attention to the astonishing fact that Turkish proverbs seem to mention Baghdad more often than any other city including Mekka.⁴ Baghdad is used mainly as a metaphor for distance or a distant place as in “to the lover, Baghdad is not far off”.⁵ However, there is another usage in which Baghdad figures as a metaphor of value like in “oppression ruins even Baghdad” or “there is no love like a mother’s, and no city like Baghdad”. It is interesting to note, that the same combination of remoteness and the vague notion of greatness, importance or value appears – less frequently – in the case of Egypt.⁶ Although it is true that these proverbs do not take as their theme the city of Baghdad as such but merely use it as an exchangeable metaphor⁷, the very fact that they mention Baghdad so frequently indicates a strong presence of that city as a cliché in the common mind. It is, of course, impossible to tell exactly whose common mind we are talking about, i.e. who knew and used these proverbs but I can find no reasonable objection to the assumption that they were known in the urban milieu of nineteenth century Istanbul thus forming some kind of popular Ottoman notion of Baghdad or rather a popular connotation which, even if not evoked, may have been stored in the memories of those reading or writing in the Ottoman Turkish language on that latter city.⁸

⁴ Cf. Mustafa Nihat Özön, *Ata Sözleri*, Istanbul 1956, index of places on 320f. He lists 13 proverbs which make mention of Baghdad, Mekka has only 10, Egypt 7, Istanbul 4. This tendency is confirmed by another collection: Metin Yurtbaşı, *Türkisches Sprichwörterlexikon*, Ankara 1993. Baghdad here occurs in 14 proverbs, Mekka in five, Egypt in 3 and Istanbul in two. There are, of course, other places mentioned, but their frequency ranges below Baghdad and Mekka.

⁵ This has been already observed by Longrigg. Cf. Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social, And Economic History*, Oxford 1953, 1.

⁶ E.g.: “Venedik’ten tiryak gelinceye kadar Mısır’da adamı yılan helâk eder” and “Sev seni seveni yer ile yeksan ise – Sevme seni sevmeyen: Mısır’a sultan ise,” cf. Özön, *Ata sözleri*, Nos. 7966 and 7171.

⁷ There are variations in which Baghdad is replaced by some other place, e.g. “You need only to have honey then the flees come from Baghdad” (*Balın olsun tek, sinek Bağdad’dan gelir*) or “If you have honey in your pot the bees come from Yemen” (*Çanakta balın olsun, Yemen’den arı gelir*). Yurtbaşı, *Sprichwörterlexikon*, 273.

⁸ Many of the proverbs listed by Özön were originally collected by nineteenth century Ottoman intellectuals, e.g. by Şinasi and Ahmed Vefik Paşa. Cf. Özön, *Ata Sözleri*, vff.

Encyclopedic Knowledge

In his six-volume *Ḳāmūs al-a'lām* the famous lexicographer Şemseddin Sami Fraşeri, (1850-1904)⁹ reserved four columns of information on the city of Baghdad.¹⁰ According to him, Baghdad was one of the most famous and one of the biggest cities of Ottoman Asia (*Asya-yı osmaniye*). He estimated the number of its inhabitants between 125.000 and 130.000, mostly Muslim, half of them Sunni the others Shiites. From the ethnical point of view, he described them as being of the Arab, Turkish, Persian and Kurdish race (*cinsiyet*). The local language, he claimed, was in the first instance Turkish and in the second Arabic. As it is hard to believe that the majority of the population of Baghdad actually spoke Turkish as their main language, Şemseddin's statement must be seen as reflecting the claim to prevalence of the official Ottoman language over the local idiom.

The general impression of the city especially along the shores of the Tigris was a beautiful one and the houses made of clay brick were pretty, he wrote, although, as they were mostly surrounded by walls and situated in gardens, their beauty was not visible from outside. He criticized, however, the narrow and dirty streets of Baghdad, which were not a welcome sight. After mentioning the multitude of mosques and listing some the many mausoleums of Islamic Sheikhs and imams Şemseddin Sami did not fail to declare that the palace of the government (*hükümet konağı*) was "among the largest and most beautiful buildings of the city" and to list the achievements of Ottoman modernization in Baghdad: a dock for building ships and a reformatory (*ıslahane*), the "Oman-Ottoman" governmental steamboat company with its twelve ships, the horse-tramway to Kazimayn built by Midhat Pasha, a printing office, several military and civil schools and a hospital. "A large school opened by a rich Jewish merchant" is mentioned, while the ones maintained by Christian missionaries are passed over with silence. Baghdad, wrote Sami, was one of the Ottoman cities that were "most active in commercial matters" with a local production of textiles and metal ware and continuous (*daimi*) connections with India (via Basra), Iran, Mosul, Diyarbekir, Aleppo and Damascus.

⁹ For his biography cf. Ağâh Sırrı Levend, *Çemsettin Sami*, Ankara 1969.

¹⁰ Ş. Sami, *Ḳāmūs ül-a'lām. Tārîh ve coğrafya lûgatını ve tabir-i essahla kâffe-i esmâ-i hassayı câmi'dir*, vol. 2, Istanbul 1307, 1324-1328. As a comparison, the article on Istanbul in the same volume comprises almost 16, that on Bursa ("one of the biggest and most beautiful cities in Anatolia", *ibid.* p. 1294) somewhat less than four columns.

The Omniscient Ottoman Travel-Writers

Everyone did not share this bright vision of Baghdad as a basically picturesque, modern and industrious Ottoman city. There are striking examples of a marked Ottoman dislike for Baghdad and a sharp criticism of its population. Baghdad, to be sure, was not among the favorite provincial places an Ottoman official was likely to be sent to.¹¹ In 1862 the *Seyahatname-i hudud* by Mehmed Hurşid (d. 1879) was lithographed in Istanbul.¹² Hurşid had been accompanying Derviş Pasha, who was sent to the Ottoman-Iranian border as the Ottoman commissioner according to the stipulations of the Treaty of Erzurum (1847). He had been instructed by the Ottoman government to collect as much information on the region as possible. The *Seyahatname-i hudud* was a result of this four-year field research and was written down after 1851.¹³ It contains detailed information on the regions of Basra, Baghdad, Şehrızor, Mosul, Van and Bayezid.

In a chapter on the population of Baghdad Hurşid Efendi distinguished four classes (*sunûf*): (1) the 'ulamā', (2) the notables and the remaining Mamluks, (3) the merchants and craftsmen and (4) those living of casual work (*aylakçılık*). While he had not much to say about the merchants and craftsmen (to which he added the peasants) except that they were pursuing their work, and not much more on the notables and Mamluks he did not spare some critical remarks on the 'ulamā' and the casual workers. The 'ulamā' of Baghdad, according to him, generally lacked religious knowledge and professional seriousness¹⁴ (but he made some exceptions among them the author of the *tafsîr rûh al-ma'ânî*, Abū-l-Thanā' Maḥmūd al-

¹¹ Cf. Yusuf Fehmi, *Paris'te Türkler. Casusluk ve karşıcasusluk*. Yayıma Hazırlayan: Ergun Hiçyılmaz. İstanbul, n.y., 11. and Longrigg, *Iraq, 1900 to 1950*, 2.

¹² Mehmed Hurşid Efendi, *Seyahatname-i hudud*, İstanbul 1862. A transliteration by Alâattin Esser (İstanbul 1997); a Russian translation by M.A. Gamazov, *Siyachetname-i chudud. Opisanie putešestvija po tureckoj-persidskoj granice sostovi' Churşid-Efendi*, Petersburg 1877. The work was extensively used by 'Abbās al-'Azzāwī in the seventh volume of his *Tārîh al-'Irāq bayn iḥtilālayn*. Cf. *ibid.*, 5 for some biographical information of Mehmed Hurşid. A translation into Arabic was printed in Bagdad 1953; *ibid.*, 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴ "[...] bu kısmın hoş sohbetleri çok ve ulema diyecek yokdur." Hurşid, *Seyahatname*, 77.

Ālūsī (1802-1854)¹⁵ while the casual workers, he said, were wasting their lifetimes gambling in the coffee houses.¹⁶

The *Seyahatname-i hudūd* was a rather official report drawn up on governmental instruction and destined for governmental use. But the time for European-style Ottoman travel literature composed for a broader readership in Istanbul was soon to come.

Ottoman Journalism and Imperial Narratives of Development

Ahmed Midhat Efendi (1844-1913), the famous Ottoman writer and intellectual, stayed in Baghdad for more than two years from 1869 while his patron Midhat Pasha was governor of the province. He edited the official provincial newspaper *Zevra*, which was the first newspaper to be printed in Iraq. In his autobiographical book *Menfa* (Exile) he later described Baghdad as a mousetrap for many an Ottoman official:

If the river Tigris brings the Baghdad-bound voyagers easily down to that place. As it does not so in the opposite direction, Baghdad, in my view, resembles the fisherman's net or the mouse trap, where it is easy to get in but hard to get out. This, my comparison is very apt to reality. Because there have been quite a lot of men who came to Baghdad on behalf of Ottoman affairs or by appointment to a [provincial] position [there] and have been unable to rescue themselves [from there].¹⁷

After Ahmed Midhat managed to escape this "mouse trap" and to return to the capital he published a series of articles on Baghdad in the important Istanbul newspaper *Basiret*.¹⁸ After a description of his journey to Baghdad¹⁹ he offered his readers some basic information on the city. The part of Baghdad on the right of the river bank, he told them, was called Rusafe (Ruṣāfa) the part on the left bank Kerh (Karkh), the nearby towns of A'zamiye (A'zamiyya) and Kazimiye (Kāzimiyya), he assured them, were

¹⁵ For him s. *El²*, "al-Ālūsī" (H. Péres), 425. More details offers Muḥammad Bahġat al-Atharī, *A'lām al-'Irāq*, Cairo 1345, 21-43.

¹⁶ Hurşid, *Seyahatname*, 77 and 79.

¹⁷ Ahmed Midhat, *Menfa*, ed. İsmail Cüneyt Kut, Istanbul 1988; first ed. Istanbul 1293 A.H.], 43.

¹⁸ For *Basiret* cf. İlhan Yerlikaya, *XIX. Yüzyıl Osmanlı Siyasi Hayatında Basiret Gazetesi ve Pancermenizm - Panislamizm - Panslavizm - Osmanlılık Fikirleri*, Van 1994. (Yüzüncü Yıl Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Yayınları 14).

¹⁹ Ahmed Midhat, "Baġdad'dan avdet", *Basiret* No. 345 (1871).

considered as quarters (*mahalle*) of Baghdad.²⁰ He added some information on the number of the city's inhabitants (comprising 18.407 *hane*'s and amounting to 63.272 male persons). He pointed out that the city was far less spacious than the number of inhabitants suggested. As the houses were small and close to one another and the streets quite narrow the area of Baghdad did not exceed that of provincial towns in Rumelia as for example Rusçuk (Ruşe) or Vidin. As for the aesthetic impression of the city, he remarked that while the gardens of Baghdad were magnificent the houses looked like buildings spared by a fire because, according to his words, "the people did not quite enjoy the pleasures of civilization and prosperity".²¹

In the next issue of *Basiret*²² Ahmed Midhat delved deeper into the characterization of the population of Baghdad. His perspective on the Baghdadis was divided into three points of interest: knowledge (*maarif*), craft (*sanat*) "which lie at the origin of economic activity (*ticaret*) and agriculture (*ziraat*)" and morals (*ahlak*). "It is known by everybody that Baghdad was the source of many arts", he declares. But today there was no trace of all this knowledge left, so he contends, nor did the population of Baghdad show any enthusiasm for learning. They regarded "it almost a humiliation to stoop so low as to study" he muses. According to Ahmed Midhat the Baghdadis did not only lack knowledge but also skills in craft (*sanat*). No knowledge no crafts; one could resume his opinion on the reasons hereof. Interestingly he adds another reason: As there were so many industrious (*çalışkan*) Iranians in Baghdad, there was hardly opportunity for the populace of Baghdad to engage in crafts. If now the Baghdadis possessed neither knowledge nor skills in crafts, he continues, one would expect them to starve because, as commonly known, most people lived on knowledge and crafts as well as on commerce and agriculture, the latter two being the fruits of the former two. In fact, he assures, the Baghdadis practiced some kind of agriculture but they did so only as contractors of public revenues (*mültezim*). The farmers as the ones actually working were content, he claims, if they were allowed to keep at least ten percent of the harvest. Ahmed Midhat sees the Baghdadis' occupation with the business of *iltizam* as the main reason why they were but little inclined to study or practice the crafts.

On the morals or manners of the population of Baghdad he tells his readers as follows:

²⁰ Ahmed Midhat, "Bağdad seyahatnamesinden maba'd numero 345. Bağdad'da ikamet", *Basiret*, No. 348 (1871).

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Ahmed Midhat, "Bağdad seyahatnamesinden maba'd numero 348. Bağdad'da ikamet", *Basiret* 349 (16 Nisan 1287 / 8 Safer 1288) [=29.4.1871]).

What concerns the general morals of the Baghdadis [...] I must say that I do not know about it. This my word shall not arouse surprise and displeasure. I tell the truth. It is very difficult to know the common morals in Bagdad. I shall give only one example: In the common decency of our lands there is something called modesty (*tevâzu'*) and is held in esteem. Thus, if someone who knows how to behave goes somewhere and finds the upper seats (i.e. the seats reserved for persons in high position) [partly] occupied by others, he contents himself with one of the lower places. And if the ones sitting [in the higher places] as friendly people do not regard the place he has taken adequate to his position and by the words "Sir, please come over here" propose him that he might sit down on a more prestigious place the person will articulate that he is satisfied with the place he has taken. This person's behaviour is not artificial, but by nature his mind is in harmony with the way he behaves.

Instead of this our modesty you will find a completely different tradition in Bagdad. If in Bagdad a man goes somewhere and finds the place that is adequate to his grandeur or a place that is even more prestigious occupied by someone else then he says 'I have this or that position' (*faziletliüyüm*) or 'I am from this or that family' (*falan zadeyim*) and almost forces those sitting there to stand up and he sits down himself. When once a member of the council of the province realized somebody sitting on a seat reserved for a person of high position and the one sitting there did not accept his being told to stand up he immediately came over and sat himself down on the other person's lap so that a major incident was arising.²³

This depiction of the Baghdadis as people who do not know how to behave is seemingly taken back by Ahmed Midhat with the concluding remark that it would be too difficult to explain the obvious differences in manners. However, it can be easily imagined what his Ottoman readers in Istanbul were thinking of these differences. After his return from Bagdad (at the beginning of 1871), Ahmed Midhat tried to make use of his professional achievements as an editor of two official Ottoman provincial newspapers (*Tuna* in Bulgaria and *Zevra* in Bagdad) in order to establish himself as a successful journalist in the Ottoman capital. It is obvious that his depiction of Bagdad and the peculiarities of its inhabitants were done in a style that today would be termed "edutainment" and was to be taken *cum grano salis* to say the least. However, his verdict of 1871 against the Baghdadis was repeated almost forty years later by a native son of this city, who after

²³ *Ibid.*

graduating from the *Mülkiye* school with considerable success embarked on a political career in Istanbul, Babanzade İsmail Hakkı (1876-1913).²⁴

The Trope of Return

İsmail Hakkı, descendant from a noble family of Kurdish origin, member of the Ottoman parliament (representing Baghdad) and for a short time minister of public instruction in the cabinet of Hakkı Paşa, came back to Baghdad during a journey from Aleppo to Basra at the beginning of November 1909 after having been away for twenty two years. He wrote on this journey in his "Letters from Iraq" (*Irak mektubları*) that were serialized in an Ottoman newspaper, in parts translated into French²⁵ and also published as a book.²⁶

Coming from Aleppo, İsmail Hakkı, entered Baghdad by horse cart. He describes how the golden dome of Kazimiyya was shining in the bright sunlight like a second sun and how the domes and minarets of hundreds of mosques of this city, which, as he does not fail to mention, was for many centuries the seat of the caliphate, induced religious feelings. While those parts of Karkh situated further off from the river bank with their gardens and huts made of mud resembled an Arab village, the parts of the quarter being closer to the river bank looked much more urban. At the head of the bridge connecting Karkh and Ruşāfa the passengers had to descend the horse cart and continue on foot as the pontoon bridge was not fit for being crossed by carts – a fact that is hardly acceptable to the Ottoman politician İsmail Hakkı.²⁷ He also criticizes that the streets of Baghdad were generally too narrow to allow the use of carts and sometimes even for pack animals, and he emphasizes the necessity of broadening the streets regardless of the Baghdadis' complaints against such measures. Assuring that such measures would have to remain strictly within the limits of legal provisions, he depicts a vision of nineteenth century European urbanity applied to Baghdad:

One may say what one wishes, but it has by now become a most urgent duty (*farzül'ayn*) to syringe air and oxygen meaning life and health, to the

²⁴ For his biography cf. *Yeni Mülkiye Tarihi*, vol 2, p. 996 and Sabine Prätör, *Der arabische Faktor in der jungtürkischen Politik. Eine Studie zum osmanischen Parlament der II. Konstitution (1908-1918)*, Berlin 1993, 264.

²⁵ "De Stamboul à Bagdad. Notes d'un homme d'état turc," *Revue du Monde Muselman* 14 (1911), 185-296. This translation does not give the entire text of the Ottoman original.

²⁶ Babanzade İsmail Hakkı, *Irak mektubları*, Istanbul, 1329.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 109f.

two hundred thousand inhabitants of Baghdad, who in these narrow streets suffer without knowing it from a state of continuous suffocation, by the means of wide, clean streets under shadowy trees, embellished here and there by water basins, fountains and parks.²⁸

It is noteworthy that the memories of his childhood spent in Baghdad, although important enough for him to deserve mention in his description of the city, do not seem to involve the sort of personal nostalgia that would make him express the wish to preserve the city as it was. The idea of progress is prevalent with him. It is also remarkable that his Baghdadi roots do not prevent him from publicly expressing sharp criticism of the city's populace. One of their main social activities was to gather in cafés. "In no place in the world," he declares, "are the cafés as crowded as in Baghdad. As a matter of fact, the whole of Baghdad is one huge café."²⁹ The only activity of the Baghdadis, he goes on, was to sit in cafés or to pay and receive visits. But in contrast to the *mecālis* in Abbasid times these gatherings were not, according to İsmail Hakkı, , dedicated to the discussion of literature and science but to evil minded gossip and idle talk.

In this ancient city that used to be the home of knowledge and arts you cannot hear today any talk on crafts, or commerce, or literature. Because there is no commerce, no craft and no knowledge. Because the population from its highest to its lowest member is idle and ignorant (*boş*). Because they have absolutely no idea of the value of what is called time.³⁰

Although İsmail Hakkı's characterization of the Baghdadi population seems hardly less critical than the one given by Ahmed Midhat there is an important difference. Contrary to Ahmed Midhat, İsmail Hakkı, in his representation of the Baghdadis does not exploit any "cultural" difference for the amusement of his readers. It would appear far-fetched to attribute this difference exclusively to assumed inside or outside positions of the two authors vis-à-vis the Baghdadis. But it nevertheless seems important to keep this difference in mind. It is important to note that the chapter on Baghdad and its population is missing in the French translation published in the *Revue du Monde Musulman* and authorized by İsmail Hakkı. One may well speculate that he deemed his utterances on this topic not suitable

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 111f. This theme is elaborated in the following chapter "*Bağdad'ın kabiliyet-i umraniyesi*" (*ibid.*, pp. 119-129) which is also available in the French translation as "*Bagdad et ses possibilités d'avenir*" (pp. 217-222).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 115f.

for a European audience. Even so he met with sharp criticism in the Istanbul-based opposition newspaper *Teminat* that saw him unfit to represent Baghdad as a member of the Ottoman parliament.³¹

The existence of different stories for different audiences is a phenomenon often observed with Middle Eastern authors (but of course by no means limited exclusively to them).³² One may assume that more often than not this was an unconscious process of shifting emphasis rather than a deliberate forging of the story. An interesting example may be found in the different versions Ali Haydar Midhat Bey had published of his father's biography, the famous Ottoman reformer and politician Midhat Pasha. As the history of these texts ("Textgeschichte") is somewhat complicated, I will summarize the explanation given by Ali Haydar: While in exile and under surveillance in Taif, Midhat Pasha clandestinely wrote his memoirs. A part of them he secretly sent to his family, which was then banished to Izmir. When his son Ali Haydar much later (after having escaped to England) published the book *The Life of Midhat Pasha* (London 1903) he made use of this manuscript but adding to it further information from other sources. Midhat Pasha, unable to receive confirmation of whether the copy had duly arrived at its destination, had the other parts of it copied twice while keeping the original. When Sultan Abdülhamid II had him strangled, this text fell into the hands of his executioners and was most probably sent to the Yıldız palace. One of the two copies was lost, the other, however, survived and was removed from its hiding place after the restoration of the constitution in July 1908. Ali Haydar used parts of it in his two-volume Turkish version on *Midhat Pasha*.³³ In addition in 1908 a French version of the biography of Midhat was published.³⁴ The text given in the three books, however, differs considerably. Thus the story of Midhat's governorship in Baghdad (1869-1873) was treated much more briefly in the English and French versions than in the Ottoman. But this is not the only

³¹ Präter, *Faktor*, 17.

³² Cf. Fazlur Rahman, "Islamic Modernism: Its Scope, Method and Alternatives," *IJMES* 1 (1970), 317-333.

³³ Cf. the introduction "Bir kaç söz" of Ali Haydar Midhat, *Midhat Paşa. Hayat-i siyasiyesi, hidematı, menfa hayatı*, vol. 1, Istanbul: Helal Matbaası, 1325. There are even more versions. Cf. Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire 1856-1876*, Princeton 1963, 449 and EI², "Midhat Pasha" (R.H. Davison).

³⁴ Ali Haydar Midhat Bey, *Midhat Pacha. Sa vie - son oeuvre*. Préface de Monsieur J.-L. de Lanessan, ancien ministre de la marine. Paris 1908.

difference. In the English version (the French one being practically identical here)³⁵ one reads:

(47) Hardly the new Vali [i.e. Midhat Pasha (C.H.)] reached his post, when he found himself confronted with some difficult problems of quite a different order from those he had dealt with on the Danube, but of a not less serious description. The question of recruiting was the most urgent, and called for immediate solution. The Arab tribes, turbulent and independent by nature, had always shown themselves refractory (48) to enlistment, and were now in open revolt against its enforcement. One of the difficulties of the situation consisted in the fact that the military authority in the province was separated from the civil, and was in the hands of the commander of the 6th Army Corps, Samih Pasha, whereas the situation required all authority, military as well as civil, to be concentrated in the hands of a single strong central authority. Midhat did not hesitate at such a crisis to assume the full responsibility of this concentration, and took immediate military steps to suppress the insurrection by force. He ordered the city of Bagdad to be surrounded by cavalry, and sent infantry and artillery to protect the foreign Mission Houses and the non-Mussulman quarters from the fanaticism of the Arabs. At the same time he ordered the bridge over the Tigris to be cut, so as to prevent intercommunication among the rebels; and when these energetic measures had rather intimidated the Arabs, he offered them a general amnesty on condition of immediate surrender. These conditions were now accepted, and the insurrection suddenly collapsed, and no further resistance was offered to the recruiting.³⁶

It is remarkable that the offenders are characterized not only as "Arabs" but that hardly any difference is made between the inhabitants of Baghddad and the Arab tribes. While this may be partly justified by the fact that many of the Baghddadis in the nineteenth century were indeed of tribal origin, the argument in the given contexts nevertheless lacks differentiation to the degree that not only the difference between urban and rural but as well between settled and nomadic Arabs is ignored. This means that Baghddad in this depiction is not admitted a genuine urban character. To be sure, Ali Haydar does not deny the great past of the country. When he discusses the measures of his father regarding the restoration of the irrigation system he explicitly mentions that they were designed

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 16. In general the French text is much closer to the English version than to the Ottoman.

³⁶ Ali Haydar Midhat Bey: *The Life of Midhat Pasha. A Record of His Services, Political Reforms, Banishment, and Judicial Murder Derived From Private Documents and Reminiscences*. London 1903 [reprint: New York 1973], 47f.

with a view to gradually restoring the system introduced by the first Arab conquerors, which had converted this country into the Garden of the East, and rendered the Caliphate of Bagdad proverbial for its wealth and prosperity.³⁷

The view of the glorious Arabs of the past on one side and the “refractory Arab tribes”, as opposed to the “Turkish authorities”³⁸ of the present times, on the other were two stereotypes co-existing independently from each other in Ottoman as well as in contemporary European minds of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century at a time when the question of Arab and Turkish nationalism was well under way. It is remarkable, however, that the Ottoman version of the story completely avoids any reference to “Arabs” not to speak of “Arab tribes”. Instead it is stated that the Turkish regiments that until now had formed the sixth army corps were to be exchanged and should be quite naturally replaced by people from the Iraq. It is further mentioned that it had been not possible until now to recruit soldiers (by casting of lots: *kur'a*) in Baghdad proper and its surroundings.³⁹ The leaders of the revolt against the recruitment are simply called “leaders of the rebellion” (*erbab-i ihtilal*) while the cause of the revolt is admitted to have been the fact that the recruitment was against the wishes of the people and that enforcing it created widespread dissatisfaction.⁴⁰

Even if the story described is roughly the same the connotations conveyed by the two texts are completely different. Again it is purely speculative but not entirely meaningless to assume that Ali Haydar while writing in a European language for a European audience used ethnonyms like “Turk” and “Arab” just as a concession to presumed European categories. It is also possible that in the Ottoman version he relied on formulations of his father while those of the English version were his own or that of an English aide. In any case in 1909 when the Turkish version of *Midhat's Life* was published there existed an Arab-Turkish question, which had not been publicly debated during the times of Abdülhamid II. İsmail Hakkı, in his “Letters from Iraq” of that same year, dedicated a whole chapter to the refutation of the authenticity of

³⁷ *Ibid*, 51. Here again the French version is identical. Cf. Ali Haydar Midhat Bey, *Midhat-Pacha*, 17.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 52.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 67.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 68.

the said question, representing the official Ottoman point of view in claiming that it was a mere invention of irresponsible elements.⁴¹ Things however, were not that simple.

Imperial Discourses of Civilization

Osman Hamdi (1842-1910),⁴² the famous Ottoman archeologist, painter and museologist, son of the important Ottoman modernizer Edhem Pasha, was called in 1869 by Midhat Pasha from Paris to Iraq, where he was supposed to study law but in fact had dedicated himself to the fine arts, in order to serve as the vilayet's director of foreign affairs (*vilayet umur-i ecnebiyye müdiri*). Osman Hamdi accepted and, together with a group that included Ahmed Midhat, travelled via Diyarbekir to Baghdad.⁴³ From Baghdad he wrote several letters to his father, nine of which were edited by Edhem Eldem.⁴⁴ The language he used in his letters was French. An admirer of Midhat Pasha and, to all appearances, seriously dedicated to his job he nevertheless seems to have disliked the city⁴⁵ and he was highly critical of its people. In his letter dated 29th August 1869 he wrote:

Plus calme que la semaine dernière, je vais tâcher aujourd'hui, d'être moins chaleureux et vous faire voir l'affaire sous son vrai jour en essayant de vous décrire d'abord ce peuple arabe, vous initier en un mot à son caractère et à son degré de civilisation : S'il en a une!

Il ne faut nullement nous occuper des habitants des grandes villes d'ici et principalement de ceux de Bagdad : ceux-là, quoique préférables d'apparence aux peuplades du désert puisqu'ils n'habitent plus la tente et qu'ils ont un cachet quelconque d'homme du XIXe siècle, ceux-là, dis-je, sont mille fois en réalité au dessous du bédouin car si celui-ci mène une vie primitive et patriarcale l'autre en mène une corrompue et infame à tel point que dans tout Bagdad et principalement parmi ceux qui servent le gouvernement vous ne trouverez pas un homme honnête! Quant aux

⁴¹ İsmail Hakkı, *Irak mektubları*, 47ff.

⁴² For his biography cf. Mustafa Cezar, *Sanatta Batı'ya Açılış ve Osman Hamdi*, Istanbul 1971.

⁴³ Ahmed Midhat, *Menfa*, 33.

⁴⁴ Edhem Eldem, "Quelques lettres d'Osman Hamdi Bey à son père lors de son séjour en Iraq (1869-1870)," *Anatolia Moderna* 1 (1991), 115-136.

⁴⁵ Thus he applied for a governmental position in Bombay where he hoped to be better off: "Bombay est aujourd'hui une ville Européen[n]e. [...] Ma position sera là plus indépendante mieux payé, et j'y vivrai [sic!] mieux que dans ce diable de Bagdad." Emphasis is mine, letter dated 20th April 1870; *ibid.*, 134f.

négociants : celui réputé le plus honorable et le plus honnête serait, en France, [envoyé] tout droit aux galères.⁴⁶

The message is clear – and not very different from what could be expected from contemporary Europeans: A fundamental alterity between observer and indigenes is constructed by dividing the latter into two classes: the (relatively) noble savages and the morally corrupted townspeople. The former are uncivilized because they are “primitive” and the latter because they, despite their outwardly civilized appearance, fail to meet the moral standards to which civilization is implicitly connected. The urban Arabs thus lack authenticity. The real Arab is the Bedouin. For Osman Hamdi – as for Ahmed Midhat⁴⁷ – it is the task of the Ottoman government to civilize him. It proves the progressist stance of Osman Hamdi that he frankly admits the failure of the Ottoman provincial administration before Midhat Pasha:

Cette population donc presque nomade et pour ainsi dire vierge encore n’a le défaut que d’avoir été continuellement persécutée et écrasée par tous les membres du gouvernement depuis le plus grand jusqu’au plus petit des fonctionnaires. Elle est intelligente, probe courageuse et vaillante. Croyez-vous que l’Arabe ait fait un pas vers la civilisation et le progrès? Non! Car jusqu’ici tous les gouverneurs à la exception de Rechid Pacha n’ont pensé qu’à augmenter les revenus du trésor non pas en développant l’industrie et le commerce ou bien en portant ici une bonne administration et des institutions capables d’enrichir la population [...].⁴⁸

At the same time this criticism of the Ottoman administration is an expression of the intermediate position of the *mission civilisatrice ottomane*. The standards of civilization that were to be applied in the province of Baghdad were not homegrown ones. The ultimate measure was the European metropolis and Osman Hamdi, newly arrived from Paris, must have been acutely aware of that. He even explicitly acknowledged it: the above-mentioned “honest” merchants of Baghdad were in reality dishonest according to the standards of Paris – not of Istanbul.

By education and personality Osman Hamdi may be considered an extraordinary case. Nevertheless his example makes it clear that Muslim Ottoman “ethnic” categorizing vis-à-vis the Arab provinces was not a late

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 129f.

⁴⁷ Cf. eg. his article “Irak’ın esbab-i tedennisi ve vesail-i terakkisi”, *Zevra* 3 (Salı 19 Rebiülevvel 1287), 5f.

⁴⁸ Edhem, *Quelques lettres*, 130.

product of the beginning twentieth century. Yet it may be argued that since he used the French language he automatically used ethnic categories alien to Muslim Ottoman thinking. There is, however, ample evidence that these categories were present in the Middle Eastern discourse since pre-modern times.⁴⁹ This does not preclude that they may have changed their significance. In fact they have. When the Ottoman army officer Mehmed Emin [Yurdakul] in 1917 published his poems celebrating the war in Mesopotamia and the Turkish-Arabic brotherhood he spoke of the two different races of Turks and Arabs in a definitely modern way that was unthinkable before the nineteenth century but would possibly not even have met with approval from Ahmed Midhat, Osman Hamdi or İsmail Hakkı Babanzade.⁵⁰

In any case, Baghdad and Mesopotamia remained some kind of unknown and exotic place for most Istanbuli Ottomans of the nineteenth century which fact in turn formed an excellent reason for those having seen it to write about their experiences.

Domesticating the Exotic

Ali Bey (1844-1899),⁵¹ a writer and official of the "Dette Publique" who traveled from Istanbul via Mesopotamia to India in 1884/88 published an illustrated description of the lands he had visited – notably of Iraq and India. In a short notice at the beginning of his book he remarked that:

The contents of this report consist only of what has been seen. If it has any value it lies in the fact that it gives a concise idea of the circumstances and the customs of far off countries like Iraq and especially of some cities of India which are unknown here.

Places that were only seen as panoramas while passing and of those that may be assumed to be known by everyone, of course, were deemed sufficient to be mentioned only by name.⁵²

⁴⁹ Cf. eg. Ulrich W. Haarmann, "Ideology and History, Identity and Alternity. The Arab Image of the Turk From the Abbasids to Modern Egypt," *IJMES* 20 (1988), 175-196. Of course it is not intended here to pre-date nationalism before the nineteenth century.

⁵⁰ Mehmed Emin, *Dicle önünde*, Istanbul 1332. Not only the text but also the illustrations of this booklet are instructive. Among other things they show Turkish soldiers in modern uniforms and Arab warriors in traditional garment.

⁵¹ For him cf. *Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Ansiklopedisi*, vol. 1, Istanbul 1977, 109f.

⁵² Ali Bey, *Seyahat journalı. İstanbul'dan Bağdad'a ve Hindistan'a min sene 1300 ilâ sene 1304*, Istanbul, 1314h, 2.

Obviously Baghdad was not counted by Ali Bey among those places known by everyone as he treated it extensively while for example Izmir and Aleppo were accorded just about one page respectively – roughly the same amount of text that he dedicated to the small town Tikrit on the Tigris.⁵³

The fact that Ali Bey traveled to a land unknown and exotic to most of his Istanbuli readers should not lead us to ignore that a kind of Muslim solidarity which easily transgressed ethnic and linguistic borders and contributed to the relatively high spatial mobility of pre-modern Muslim societies was still existent in the nineteenth century: Like İsmail Hakkı three decades later Ali Bey too made his entrance to Baghdad coming from Aleppo. When he reached A'zamīyya, named after Abū Ḥanīfa whose tomb is situated there, it was time for the Friday prayer in which he intended to participate. He describes that he was received hospitably, served with a meal and all means of comfort by the trustee of the *waqf* of the tomb of Abū Ḥanīfa, Numan Efendi, who – as Ali Bey particularly emphasizes – did not even know his name.⁵⁴

Conclusion

It is of course impossible to undertake a reconstruction of the Ottoman discourse on Baghdad on the basis of merely a few texts. Even so, however, it would appear that a monolithic discourse simply did not exist.⁵⁵ It is interesting, however, that, by and large, Shi'ism remained excluded from that discourse and that the Ottomans seem to have ignored the fact that a substantial proportion of the population of Baghdad belonged to the Shii community. Thus, İsmail Hakkı did mention the dome of the shrine in Kāzımāyn but did not add any comments on the connection of this building with the Shiite creed although, already in the times of Abdülhamid II, the Ottoman government had begun to show some concern on the spread-

⁵³ Parts of Ali Bey's description of Baghdad was put into modern Turkish by Şemseddin Kutlu and published as "Bağdad'ın Eski Günleri" in *Tarih Mecmuası* 10.2 (Şubat 1974), 26-33.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 61f.

⁵⁵ This is much in line with the Dennis Porter's criticism of Edward Said's concept of a monolithic *orientalism* pervading all of Western thought on "the Orient". Cf. Dennis Porter, "Orientalism and its Problems," *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory. A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, New York 1993, 150-161.

ing of Shi'ism in the province.⁵⁶ But apparently this did not make its way into public discourse.

Baghdad was styled as a successful example of Ottoman modernization but at roughly the same time it served the appetites of an Istanbul readership for exotic worlds. The Ottoman criticism of its inhabitants reflected as much metropolitan arrogance as it indicated the comparative underdevelopment of a provincial capital. Its arguments were, at least partly, informed by the basic social problems of Iraq.⁵⁷ But they included patterns that clearly may be termed colonial – if one does not decide to reserve the term “colonialism” exclusively to the European expansion⁵⁸ – such as the insistence on the ignorance of the Baghdadis. Not surprisingly this colonialist attitude becomes much more tangible vis-à-vis the tribal population of Iraq.⁵⁹ The Ottoman *mission civilisatrice* of the nineteenth century was an intermediate one. It received its standards from Europe but creatively modified their symbolism in accordance with its own needs.⁶⁰ The Ottoman perception of Baghdad even if deeply influenced by European concepts remained therefore distinctively Ottoman.

⁵⁶ Cf. Yitzhak Nakash, “The Conversion of Iraq’s Tribes to Shi’ism,” *IJMES* 26 (1994), 443-463 and Selim Deringil, “The Struggle Against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq. A Study in Ottoman Counter-Propaganda,” *WI* 30 (1990), 45-62; Gökhan Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq, 1890-1908*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Manchester 1995.

⁵⁷ For a recent analysis cf. Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq 1900-1963. Capital, Power and Ideology*, Albany 1997.

⁵⁸ A point of view that has been criticized as “one of the more prominent symptoms of the persistence of Western-centrism”. Cf. Michael Adas, “Imperialism and Colonialism in Comparative Perspective,” *IHR* 20.2 (June 1998), 371.

⁵⁹ A good example is in Ahmed Midhat, “Bağdad seyahatnamesinden maba’d numero 349. Gelelim Irak’ın ahval-i umumiyesine,” *Basiret* No. 355 (1871).

⁶⁰ For a comprehensive account of this process cf. Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains. Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire 1876-1909*, London etc. 1998 and idem, “The Invention of Tradition as Public Image in the Late Ottoman Empire, 1808-1908,” *CSSH* 35.1 (Jan. 1993), 3-29.