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A Regional World: 1745–1900

Historically, the region encompassing southern Iraq, Kuwait, eastern and central Arabia, and Arabistan (Khuzistan) was interlinked by a number of distinct and sometimes contradictory impulses. On the one hand, it was home to a number of different ethnic, religious, and sectarian communities, most of whose inhabitants had developed broad ties of trade and exchange with each other, which allowed them to cross and re-cross each other's space in order to pursue their business. On the other hand, it was host to frequent social, economic and political tensions, emanating from the very configuration of settlement patterns, religious attitudes, and economic activities that characterized the region as a whole.

Any examination of these contrary, but not mutually exclusive, impulses must begin with a proper appreciation of the principal features of the period, the overwhelming dynamic that gave the region its coherence in spite of the many vicissitudes that periodically threatened to tear it apart. In the case of societies in Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf, that dynamic sprang out of the realities of the shifting frontier. The notion of a frontier society connotes fluidity, permeability, access and acculturation—all characteristics that permeated the region at one level or another. It also suggests flux and impermanency, the natural by-product of societies constantly in the throes of formation, making and remaking themselves to suit the particular circumstances of the moment.

Although the region in question possessed no real frontiers or borders in a modern, jurisdictional sense, frontiers certainly existed in Arabia, Iraq, and the Gulf. Unlike the early Islamic period,[1] however, the concepts of *thughūr* or *ʿawaṣim* (which Arab geographers used to connote frontiers in the period of the first Islamic conquests) were rarely used in the historiography of the eighteenth century, even though by the mid-nineteenth century the term, *ḥudūd* (frontiers) had begun to make a comeback in the literature of Ottoman Iraq.[2] Nevertheless, even while the terminology of frontiers may have been in temporary abeyance in the eighteenth century, regional shaikhs, merchants, and commanders continued to draw and re-draw the contours of regional society by creating physical frontiers across a large area. It is quite possible, therefore, that the concept of frontiers was articulated in a different manner than in the earlier centuries, and focused more on creating new facts on the ground than on erecting ideologically-generated barriers between *dār al-ḥarb* (the realm of war) and *dār al-Islām* (the realm of Islam).[3] For instance, merchants throughout Arabia and the Gulf carved out economic zones defended by tribal irregulars, and obliged all but their allies to pay imposts to use their facilities; *ʿulamāʾ* (scholar) warriors such as the second generation of leaders of the Saūd family in Arabia forced submission on defeated tribes by making them pay the *zakāt* (alms tax); and Mamluk military commanders in eighteenth-century Iraq widened their revenue net by confiscating horses or grain from tribesmen in undemarcated no-man's-land between Ottoman Iraq and Safavid Persia. In each of these instances, frontiers were created that had to be defended at all costs; whether they were labelled as such may ultimately not be that significant an issue.

How was the dynamic of frontier-making played out in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? What were the circumstances that impelled certain merchant families, religious leaders, or military commanders to overturn existing frontier arrangements and create their own territorial order? What were the resource bases of these new frontiers-in-the-making, and what religious or moral sanction legitimized these undertakings? Since there is no real methodology of frontiers or regions in either the secondary or primary Arabic materials, perhaps the best way to substantiate, and contextualize the notion of an Iraqī/Gulf region is to draw on the ideas and insights of an earlier generation of American and European historians whose contributions to the literature on frontiers and regions occupy pride of place in the historiography on space, nation-formation and state-building. This historiography can be divided into two trends. On the one hand, William H. McNeill's pioneering studies on the European and American frontier[4] propounded the idea of a global, shifting frontier based on the spread of trade or cultivation, the scarcity of labor in the frontier areas, the development of slavery or peonage as a consequence of the frontiersman's urge to exploit his patch of wilderness, and the resulting stratification of society into the propertied few and the landless majority. On the other hand, another tradition exists, largely central to European historiography, of frontiers delimiting amor-

phous, protonationalist entities such as France or middle Europe. Authors such as Peter Sahlins and R. J. W. Evans have traced the various permutations in the ideology of the frontier from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the twentieth century, and have concluded that the idea of the frontier in Europe shifted radically in response to political, economic, and demographic factors.[5]

FRONTIERS, BORDERS, AND BOUNDARIES: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Sahlins believes that the evolution of the concept of natural frontiers was tied as much to the exigencies of French state policy (especially in its expansionist seventeenth-century phase) as to an officially-sponsored "idea" of France. Natural frontiers were those delimited by mountain ranges, indented trees, streams or even stones. Even though a consensus existed on what the concept meant in certain periods of French history, at other times its meaning shifted dramatically, especially from the seventeenth century onwards. To begin with, there was a linguistic differentiation between the term, "frontiers" and that of *limites* (boundaries); the first dated from the thirteenth century when

> the French monarchy began to take account of the "frontier" of the Kingdom as distinct from the jurisdictional boundaries of its suzerainity. The frontier was that which, etymologically and politically, "stood face to" an enemy. This military frontier, implying bellicose expansion and a zonal defense, stood opposed to the linear boundary or line of demarcation—the *limites* of jurisdictions or territories.

While an earlier generation had viewed natural frontiers as a limiting force, enclosing French space within distinct and defensible markers such as streams, trees or even trenches, with the advent of French expansionist policy in the seventeenth century, the philosophy of natural boundaries changed. As a result, rivers or mountains were no longer viewed as insurmountable barriers but as

> obstacles to be conquered—and passageways to be controlled—by establishing strongholds beyond them. As such, the idea of natural frontiers helped determine short and long-term policy decisions. . . . Natural frontiers were important to the French crown not as boundaries but as passages, and it was the plenipotentiaries of the empire who insisted on the Rhine as marking the separation of France from the empire.[7]

Eventually, the principle of natural frontiers was recognized by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1714 and took on all the appurtenances of law. By the end of

the eighteenth century, a line of fortresses was established, separating France from Germany, and marking the first attempt at creating a linear frontier between the two countries. Even though France's "national" borders had not yet been completely demarcated by that period (for the provinces of Lorraine and Savoy had yet to be annexed to the rest of the country), the creation of France's first defensive border pushed the country onto the next stage of frontier-making, that of internal consolidation. Because of the competition between local powers and the embryonic French state, France's frontiers were "riddled with enclaves, exclaves, overlapping and contested jurisdictions, and other administrative nightmares."[8] The centralizing state had to reorder its internal frontiers before it could even think of outward expansion. With state interest supporting their venture, cartographers now came into their own, and mapmaking became an arm of French policy, as a result of which France was finally thrust into the position of demarcating its national frontiers. Although these territorial frontiers were to be challenged in the last decade of the eighteenth century (with the French Revolution adopting a "minimalist" position on state expansion), by the middle of the nineteenth century, the ideology of France's natural frontiers had become "a given," an unquestioned and absolute fact which was taught to French school children as if it required no excuse or explanation.

Adding definition to Sahlins' argument, and basing himself on the history of central Europe, R. J. W. Evans contrasts the meaning of the term "frontier" with that of "border" and "boundary." According to him

> A frontier is, etymologically, what "fronts" on another territory, or on the wilderness, with the strong implication in present-day parlance of a major, national, inter-state demarcation. But the meaning subsumes lesser, more localized meanings, and the whole terminology of the subject is correspondingly overlapping and imprecise. . . . Whatever the term used, the idea of a border was at once fluid and firm. On the one hand, the frontier was a vague and perhaps shifting no-man's-land, essentially imprecise, and frequently associated with topographical barriers of mountain, forest, or swamp. On the other hand, it was physically bound, from the large-scale *limes,* dyke, or row of prominent stones, to small and inconspicuous local markers. . . .[9]

Frontiers may have initially developed out of ecclesiastical concerns (such as "those French dioceses which derived from provincial organization in Roman Gaul"[10]) or out of legal, social or cultural matters (such as village law-codes or jurisdictions). Most of all, the author believes that they took shape because of economic factors such as agricultural patterns or aspects of production and trade. Even though "state" frontiers possessed a certain flexibility, at times subsuming "lesser borders" while at other times changing radically because of "war, inheritance, or exchange"

> local boundaries and lesser jurisdictions usually remained intact. . . . We can think of the whole development as a palimpsest of civil and ecclesiastical borders, whose lowest layers were almost always long-standing and broadly accepted (even when fiercely disputed in detail). . . .[11]

Evans echoes Sahlins' point by asserting that as European authorities developed a more centralized, military frontier, and sought to strengthen their hand against local potentates throughout their realm, natural frontiers gave way to artificial frontiers. The act of drawing arbitrary lines on a map, instead of following the contours of a rocky slope, solved a number of problems for centralizing governments, rationalizing state operations by doing away with the shibboleths and obsolete traditions that were behind most of frontier ideology in seventeenth-century Europe, and acting as strategic depth for military campaigns.[12] In fact, the military-strategic factor became an important issue, and figured prominently in the Treaty of Carlowitz between Ottoman Turkey and the Hapsburg Empire in 1699. As a result of the treaty, a whole new frontier was created and adapted to military requirements and

> The entire area along and behind the inter-state demarcation on the Austrian side became an official *Militargrenze,* directly subordinated to the needs of the army and ignoring the social and administrative structure of the customary manorial system; and it really meant business, enforcing strict quarantine for travellers from Turkey. . . . Here was the most formidable frontier which Central Europe had probably ever seen, at least since the days of the Romans, and one organized on novel principles, with strong central control . . . most of the arrangements endured, with further modifications, until the 1870s. . . .[13]

During the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era, two concurrent developments took place: the internal reorganization of France's domestic boundaries (the *départements)* on rational lines, and the mapping out of France's external frontiers.[14] This was finally followed in 1848, with the emergence of the "ethnic frontier." Whereas prior to the nineteenth century, ethnicity had never been significant in frontier-making, the rise of "linguistic identity" reshaped the European frontier as nothing else before.[15] Ethnic identity and language became the principles which undergirded the emergence of the nation-state in late nineteenth century Europe and, for that reason, became the all-consuming passion of the period after the First World War. One important difference remained, however. Evans points out that even as it functioned as the ideology of nation-states throughout Europe, and eventually the rest of the world, ethnicity remained *only* an ideology that states paid lip service to in times of national crisis; it was ultimately disregarded in favor of the more concrete military and strategic principles that were the true shapers of the early twentieth-century European frontier.

While Sahlins and Evans clearly trace the many permutations of the idea of "the frontier" in European history, the main problem of this genre of frontier studies is that it is too narrowly focused on the rise of the modern nation-state. As a result of this concentration, the whole issue of frontiers is ineluctably viewed through the prism of state-centered history. Nowhere is there an appreciation of the almost seasonal contention over pasturelands or agricultural districts that characterized most of the pre-industrial frontier-making of an earlier age. This last development is considered almost vestigial, and an anachronism that naturally gave way to the overwhelming superiority of the national frontier. Thus even while both Sahlins and Evans assert their belief in the concept of a fluctuating frontier conditioned by ideological, socioeconomic and political factors not entirely under state control, their studies actually gloss over the significance of the pre-industrial frontier, and consign it to primeval impulses that soon withered away with the coming of nationalism.

While Sahlins and Evans analyze the frontier principle only with respect to Europe, McNeill uses the whole world as his canvas, and propounds a truly global vision of the frontier by extrapolating from his research on central Europe to analyze frontier societies in North and South America, and China. Starting with his *Europe's Steppe Frontier* and terminating with *The Great Frontier,* McNeill proposes a schema whereby the Eurasian steppe frontier—an "empty" no-man's-land alternating between nomadism and cultivation, minor, polyethnic kingdoms and large land empires, sabres and guns, and freedom and compulsion—underwent a series of expansions and contractions that finally fixed it by the eighteenth century. Beginning with the premise that a thinly-populated frontier could never be a credible line of defense, he suggests that as soon as peasant communities in the agricultural rim of Europe were able to organize themselves into a successful bulwark against horse-nomads such as the Crim Tartars and later on, the Ottoman cavalry, the frontier began to assume shape.[16] The author cautions us that the creation of what was to become the central European frontier was a slow and unquestionably violent process, proceeding through fits and starts, and provoking intra-European strife as much as it stirred anti-Ottoman energies. Thus, the turmoil within Europe was just as ruinous as the off-and-on wars with the Ottoman armies; with Christian warlords in Hungary concentrating their attacks on their own peasantry at the same time as they arrayed themselves against Ottoman soldiers, and Moldavian princes preferring to recognize Ottoman suzerainty rather than succumb to either Hungary or Poland.[17] After the seventeenth-century "time of troubles" subsided, a period which saw the exhaustion of the "Ottoman expansive capacity," and the frittering away of military and political gains in Austria, Poland, Russia, Wallachia, Moldavia, a newer, tighter constellation of European alliances restructured the frontier to suit their interests.

Despite McNeill's rather unsubtle description of the Ottoman Empire as a collossus which foundered on its own inadaptability,[18] the rest of his thesis is on

sturdier ground. The seventeenth century is taken as the starting point for the entry of two new forces: the emergence of a more compact, better-organized army in Austria, Hungary, and Transylvania, which established an alternative model to the heretofore-organized anarchy of the Cossack brigades on the Russian and Polish frontier; and the rise of autocratic government in Russia. These two developments had the effect of concretizing the frontier into a more or less defensible line, around which military autocracies and standing armies could take up firmer positions. At the same time as the military authority of the competing states on the border became more entrenched, a more novel educational system began to expose the ruling class of central and northern Europe to a more egalitarian world-view. Thus, nearly everywhere in Europe, more rigorous schooling was instituted, usually at the behest of an active Jesuit priesthood; and while this form of education catered in the main to the upper classes, the middle classes and in some instances even the peasantry were inducted into this Catholic-inspired educational system. The inference here is that eventually a near-universal educational system sowed the seeds for a more "national" curriculum in the schools, and reshaped the idea of the frontier even further.

Moreover, with the end of the massive Ottoman campaigns that had embroiled the central and northern European states in an almost-permanent state of siege, the frontier zone "became once more capable of sustaining settled agricultural populations."[19] New standing armies replaced undisciplined frontier irregulars; taxes, not plunder, became the base of the professional army and commercialized agriculture and trade brought more revenue to the state, which redistributed it to the army and the new, centralizing bureaucracy in the Hapsburg Empire and later on in Russia. With the growth and consolidation of the "limitrophe" empires (Austria under the Hapsburgs and Russia under Peter the Great), it was only a matter of time before the "interstitial polities" (Hungary, Transylvania, the Ukraine) were subsumed into one of the large empires, thus marking an end to the independence of the border regions in central and northern Europe, and demarcating the frontier once and for all.

DEPICTIONS OF THE FRONTIER, AND OF THE OTHER IN THE HISTORY OF IRAQ, ARABIA, AND THE GULF

Where the Sahlins/Evans scenario diverges from McNeill's is over the conceptualization of the frontier. The former view it more as a military-strategic line on the map than a region. McNeill's frontier, on the other hand, is composed of multi-ethnic zones where people are constantly rubbing shoulders and socializing with one another, only to find themselves on different sides as unwilling draftees in other peoples' armies. His frontier is a bustling and busy place, constantly being replenished by a diverse population and forever at the mercy of the expansionist designs of various leaders, whether Tartar,

Hungarian, Transylvanian, Austrian or Russian. In this respect, McNeill's contentious frontier, in which a host of different regional principalities and empires-in-the-making assert and re-assert their tenuous control over large, poorly-inhabited zones of grasslands and subsistence agriculture, is a model that fits in well with parts of the central Arabian and Iraqī landscape. The most important thing about it is its assumption that, throughout the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, both in Europe and in other parts of the globe, there was never one frontier but many different frontiers. In the main, these were untidy clusters of settlements contiguous to other, equally sprawling but poorly-inhabited zones of population, whose inhabitants were never completely independent of one another, even though they may have been moulded by different regimes of production, social norms, and political structures. Although at times violently intrusive upon one another, the occupants of these frontier societies also influenced each other to a great degree. McNeill's frontier is therefore a permeable, cross-cultural passage, a middle ground in which socio-cultural and technological acculturation continues to take place until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Although the secondary literature on frontiers and on the workings of regional societies in Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf is nowhere as explicit, nor even as voluminous as the European or American historiography on the subject, the primary literature in Arabic suggests that some of McNeill's, Sahlins', and Evans' theoretical points do in fact clarify a number of features pertaining to this large region abutting on to the Indian Ocean. In particular, the notion of a frontier as a defensive belt of territory "fronting" onto another jurisdiction is important; it implies that all frontier-making, whether entered into by shahs or sultans, provincial governors, tribal merchants or cultivators, possessed a common military-political dimension which translated into notions of inclusion/exclusion. Thus, in the eighteenth century, tribal irregulars secured the frontiers of desert settlements in central Arabia; was that any different from the organized armies sent out to defend the Iraq-Iran frontier in the sixteenth century? Both aimed at excluding foreign elements from their territory, and both sought to contain the inhabitants of their respective domains within well-defined territorial spheres as tributaries of the "state." While there is a school of thought that continues to see imperial frontiers, i.e., the military-strategic zones carved out by the Ottoman and Safavid empires in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as radically different from the "borders" or "boundaries" demarcated by tribal shaikhs and local office holders, it may be that the similarities between both notions of frontier-making far outweighed the differences. For even though Ottoman or Safavid armies secured the outermost frontiers of their empires at the behest of imperial rulers, and even though the bureaucracy of these empires registered these frontier zones as revenue-producing districts from which stipulated taxes were to be paid to the imperial treasury, the only real difference between imperial frontiers and local ones may have been a difference of perception.

While a fuller explanation will be attempted later on in the chapter, suffice it to say that when the history of the region is viewed from the perspective of tribal merchants or shaikhs, there were no "lesser" borders or boundaries in Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf; there were only constantly evolving frontiers that were defined from within the region according to the socio-economic and military-political context of the moment.

A reading of the literature of the period reinforces this depiction of frontiers as polyglot, ethnically diverse regions. It suggests that most of Iraqīi/Gulf society coalesced around a region of shifting frontiers that stretched from central Arabia to western India. This is evidenced by the fact that a substantial number of the local histories written in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf were of a transregional nature, written most often by 'ulamā' whose places of origin may have been almost incidental in the larger scheme of things, but whose real contribution lay in the description of the other districts and regions that formed the body of their work. Because of their frequent journeys in search of knowledge throughout the Islamic East, their histories bore all the imprints of the travelling scholar; their insights and observations therefore can be used to reconstruct a partial picture of the social and political context of the region. This is particularly true with regard to merchants; for even while some 'ulamā' thought trade a lowly occupation, and considered merchants unworthy of biographical notices (a particular idiosyncrasy of certain "high" 'ulamā' in the towns of the interior, who confined themselves instead to recording the obituaries of governors, religious scholars, and town notables),[20] other 'ulamā,' especially those from Basra, Arabistan, and Najd, included merchant biographies in their histories almost as a matter of course.

Because direct references to regions, frontiers, and borders are rare in the Arabic primary literature, any theory that attempts to encapsulate the workings of an identifiable region must take its cue from McNeill's "empty" frontier and infer the existence of a region-in-the-making from scattered textual allusions to zones of material and cultural exchange situated in or around centers of agricultural settlement, places of worship, or ports of trade. Best conceptualized as swaths of territory that functioned as passages instead of barriers, the permeable and fluctuating frontiers that emerged as a result eventually demarcated zones of settlement at the interstices of former military camps (Basra), near the burial ground of Muslim saints (Zubair) or on the edge of coastlines (Kuwait). Taking this as our point of departure, we can then deduce the importance of an integrated region from the very methodology employed in the historical texts. For instance, Najdī literary sources mention events not normally within the purview of central Arabia proper as if they had a direct bearing on the society's development. Thus, factional struggles in Iraqī towns or villages are sometimes inserted in the middle of narratives concerning Najd, as if they naturally belonged in the same narrative sequence.[21] Plagues in Baghdad and Basra are given long, horrific descriptions by Saūdī historians, just as the Persian siege of Basra in 1775 is detailed in depth.[22]

However, the interesting thing is that most of these accounts are interspersed between references to Saūdī campaigns in central Najd. From a literary point of view, it would seem that the events recorded by Najdī historians may be more than incidental allusions to noteworthy events; they could well be clues to the practical reality which underlay these regional histories. In effect, eighteenth and nineteenth-century Najdī historians conceptualized a large region in which events occurring in neighboring societies were of more than passing interest, for very often these same events, in Iraq or Kuwait or elsewhere, may have significantly affected the daily lives of Najdīs. In much the same way, historians of Basra normally included events in Najd, Kuwait, and Muhammara in their chronicles. As a result, regional market towns in Arabistan and Najd were sometimes given more importance than Baghdad, and historians of Basra seemed to be more conversant with the names of Kuwaiti landholders in south Iraq than with those of Mosul in the north.[23] On very rare occasions, the parameters of the region were even widened to include merchants from India; admittedly, however, local historians only seemed to refer to India-based merchants when the latter transgressed social norms (such as taking refuge in saint's sanctuaries in Wahhābī Arabia).[24] As time went on, popular culture assimilated this social reality, and gave voice to it through poetry and other forms of oral expression. One Najdī proverb sums it up best in the following manner: "Al-Hindu Hinduka' idhā qalla mā 'indaka wa al-Shāmu Shāmuka' idhā al-dahru dhammaka" [India is yours if you have lost most of your possessions and Syria is yours if fate has been unkind to you].[25]

For our purpose, there are at least two ways that a concept of the frontier can be formulated in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf. Basing ourselves on the greater historiography of the region, we can label one approach the agricultural and trade settlements model, and the other the moral-territorial hypothesis. On one level, there is evidence that a full three centuries prior to the emergence of the Wahhābī movement in the mid-eighteenth century, tribal expansion, urban settlement, and intellectual efflorescence paved the way for the rise of the most dynamic revivalist movement in central Arabia.[26] Tribal migration from Najd had an impact on societies in Iraq and the Gulf as well, as "newer" tribal confederations from central Arabia pushed out "older" communities from northern and southern Iraq, at the same time that other tribal sections established principalities in Kuwait and Qatar. In Iraq, tribal expansion was met with fierce government resistance, as Ottoman representatives in Baghdad and Basra attempted to impose imperial order on the wave of tribal migrants and settlers from the south. As a result of this conflict, a secondary clash developed between the tribal frontier, the *dīra,* and the Ottoman political frontier. This clash was endowed with religious symbology in the historical texts of the period, as historians attempted to invest the imperial frontier with "higher" moral properties, and to denigrate the seemingly spurious claims of tribal shaikhs and merchants in the process.

On another level, the polemics of the Wahhābī movement in the mid-eighteenth to early part of the nineteenth centuries gave rise to a subsidiary exchange between historians in the region in which territories were delimited, routes were monopolized and frontiers were defined. As a result of the Wahhābīs' frontal assault on the religious traditions and practices of the region as a whole, and their claim to a higher moral authority embodied in the principles of a more rigorous *Salafī*-inspired Islam, historians of Wahhābī Arabia, Iraq, and the Gulf clashed in print over which polity, the Saʿūdī state or Mamluk Iraq, had jurisdiction over certain frontier districts in the region. Thus, both as a result of the material encroachment of agricultural settlements and trade routes on the Najdī heartland and the migration of Najdī tribes to Iraq, as well as the intellectual currents that swirled in the region both as a result of the imposition of Ottoman control on Iraq and the Wahhābī revival, a "frontierless" region began to take on definition and shape. This frontier-making imperative was directly linked with depictions of "the other," and littered with direct or indirect allusions to the ethnic, religious, and sectarian communities that made up the author's world. Even though most historians tended to disparage the "otherness" of the communities that settled in their space, many of whom practiced distinctive occupations, followed divergent religious interpretations, or belonged to different linguistic minorities, they included them in their narratives all the same. In fact, only through such descriptions can present-day historians begin to even infer the larger complex picture of regional society in Iraq, Arabia, and the Gulf; so it is to the primary literature that we now turn.

TRIBAL MIGRATION, TRIBAL SETTLEMENT, AND THE "GREENING" OF ARABIA c.1400–1800

The pioneering work of Uwaidah al-Juhany on pre-Wahhābī Najd proposes a novel schema whereby nomadic expansion, and the settlement (and resettlement) of towns on trade routes and near oases in turn gave rise to a movement of urbanization that eventually sponsored an unprecedented intellectual efflorescence throughout central Arabia.[27] The most frequent reasons for the migration of tribes from the south-west to the north and east, and their reconfiguration into different confederations were climatological and ecological changes such as droughts, plagues, attacks by locusts, or crop failures.[28] Among the earliest groups to migrate were the important tribal leagues of the ʿAnayza and Zhāfir; these began their northeastern expansion as early as the middle of the fifteenth century.[29] By the seventeenth century, they had been joined by other famous tribal confederations, such as the Shammar, Muṭair, and Banū Khālid.

The constant movement of migration and re-migration of central Arabian tribes to greener pastures was not carried out without a struggle over grazing land and water rights; on the contrary, there was an intense conflict over the

most significant pasture lands, setting into motion a movement whereby weaker tribes allied themselves with more powerful ones in order to retain some control of the available resources in Najd. This push to confederate into larger tribal principalities was a natural reflex that drew its strength from the never-ending tribal wars over territory; and one of its unexpected results was that those older nomadic confederations that had been pushed out of their ancestral grazing lands began to make the trek into neighboring Iraq.[30] Among the most important was the Banū Lām, whose journey from Najd to Iraq took close to a century to complete; by the eighteenth century, they had become the successful occupants of the fertile districts of the eastern Tigris, on the borders of Iran.

One of al-Juhany's significant conclusions is that nomadic and semi-nomadic groups were the major force behind the expansion of towns in Najd. By and large, towns were not instituted by sedentary tribesmen because the latter were relatively few in number; in fact, their numbers increased only with the settlement of Najdī pastoralists in the century and a half prior to the birth of the Wahhābī movement. The first reconstituted tribal settlements were established in the districts of al-Washm and Sudair (northern Najd) in or around the sixteenth century;[32] but in that first wave of expansion, other notable towns were instituted, the most important of which were Dar'iyya, later on the chef lieu of the Wahhābī movement, and ʿUyayna. It was only in the seventeenth century, however, that sedentarization really took hold in central and eastern Arabia. In fact, al-Juhany concludes that "by the middle of the twelfth/eighteenth century, the demographic map of Najd became completely different from that which had prevailed before the ninth/fifteenth. century."[33]

While the majority of these settlements eked out a tenuous livelihood from the cultivation of food crops, especially dates, some townlets actually prospered from agriculture, so much so that the leadership of some of the latter towns began to fight over the surplus, meager though it was. Eventually the defeated tribal sections were turned away, which forced them to establish their own settlements elsewhere. For instance, in the year 1300, the al-Wahba of 'Ushayqir locked the gates of the town against the Banū Wā'il and then expelled them with these words:

> These are your women and this is your property. We have no claims on them; we are only frightened of the consequences that may soon arise between us, so leave this town while we are still friends. Whosoever possesses date plantations, let him appoint an agent to take over their cultivation until the harvest, and whosoever has other property, let him also take on an agent. If any of you would like to come back for trade purposes, you are free to do so. We are only anxious that you might overtake the town, and become the majority.[34]

The Banū Wā'il left and settled elsewhere, and one of their tribal sections established "the famous town of Hirma" in or around 1386 as an agricultural

settlement built around an oasis.[35] Similarly, the town of al-Majmaʾa was built by a Shammarī shaikh in 1417; its population grew very fast, and became very diverse, even attracting sections from the ʿAnayza tribe. Eventually the leadership of the town built a mosque, wells, and plantations; the whole town was later on made into a *waqf* (endowment) for the upkeep of the mosque. In the fifteenth century, other towns such as al-ʾUyayna, al-Ẓarma, al-Mulaybid and al-Ghuṣayba were built in central Najd, to be followed by Buraida(1541), al-Ḥuraymilā (1635), and finally the most significant town of all, Darʾiyya (1726).[36]

Thus, from the fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries, Najdī society witnessed an urban revival. New confederations of nomadic pastoralists elbowed out defeated tribes and established undisputed sway over oases and date plantations, building new settlements over the remains of older ones, and carving out new frontier zones in Najd in the process. These fluctuating frontiers were defended by force against outsiders, and legitimized through the paramount shaikh's patronage of weaker sections and tribes, some of whom settled in the new towns, even though very frequently they had no direct family links to the founding tribe.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FREE PORTS IN THE GULF

The migration and settlement of Najdī tribes was also a phenomenon that affected eastern Arabia and southern Iraq. Again, overpopulation, poverty, warfare and starvation pushed Najdī tribes to the coast, where they founded a number of important settlements. In fact, as a result of this in-migration from central Arabia, the region as a whole witnessed the proliferation of many market towns, both large and small, which took their cue from the dramatic upsurge in the building of settlements in pre-Wahhābī Najd itself. Even though climatological adversity was responsible for the creation of many new settlements, a clear pattern emerges of shaikhs-entrepreneurs instituting towns to serve as markets for a large semi-nomadic clientele, founding them on the main routes of trade from Najd to Iraq or Syria.

The growth of urbanization in the Arabian peninsula and the Gulf entailed a number of patterns, chief of which was the phenomenon of tribal "secession,"[37] or the voluntary withdrawal of a substantial part of the population from the paramount shaikh's authority in order to found towns elsewhere. Because certain tribal sections disagreed with the ruling shaikh's actions or pronouncements, migration and resettlement became a realistic option. Although instances of once-disgruntled clans returning to their original abodes are available in the literature, a substantial number of sectional chiefs became independent of their former tribes and went on to build, or resettle "new" towns in Arabia and the Gulf. In this respect, a mid-nineteenth observer's comments underline what could only have been a continuing development in the region:

> It is by no means uncommon for one of the branches of a tribe, to the number sometimes of several hundred individuals, in order to escape excessive taxation and oppression, or with a view to secure to themselves greater immunities and advantages, to secede from the authority and territory of their lawful and acknowledged chief into that of another, or to establish themselves and build a fort on some other spot and assert and maintain independence; nor is it a matter of great moment that the chief they are about to join, or whose friendship and countenance they must in the first place command, is a rival at implacable feud with their own: the advantages attending any numerical increase of subjects ensure them welcome asylum and protection. It will not escape observation, that the facilities thus mutually offered to seceders on the one hand, and the loss of authority and revenue consequent on their secession on the other, act, vice-versa, as a salutary check to the tyranny and oppression of the respective chiefs. . . .[38]

The examples of Kuwait, Zubara (on the borders of present-day Qatar and Bahrain), and Bahrain highlight this development further. A reading of the literature suggests that by the middle of the eighteenth century a number of settlements had made their appearance in the region. From the eastern Arabian coast to the inner reaches of the peninsula, and stretching all the way into Iraq, tribal *sūqs* or markets emerged to take advantage of the carrying trade of the region. The establishment of these centers of trade had come about, in part, as a result of the migration of pastoral tribes to coastal settlements; facing drought and dessication in their traditional *diyār* (communally-owned pasture lands), as well as periodic raids from rival tribes that left them almost denuded of their livestock, tribal sections of one such confederation, the ʾUtūb,[39] migrated to the coastal outposts of Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Although no exact date can be given for the migration of the ʾUtūb, it is almost certain that by 1750, regional trade in Arabia and the Gulf had received a boost with the settlement of Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain by ʾUtbi tribesmen. In the space of a generation, these resourceful and enterprising people completed the transition from camel-herders to seafarers and fishermen, building a fleet of merchant vessels that was unparalleled in the Gulf.

The most important aspect of these trading centers was their lack of a customs administration. In fact, they were established as free ports by regional entrepreneurs to service regional loci of trade. As such, the administrations of these market towns allowed regional merchants the freedom of exchanging and trading their goods without the payment of customs tax to the chief merchant, shaikh, or ruler of the town, thus earning their reputation. Unlike the Ottoman port of Basra, which had a regular customs operation supervised by a *gümrükçü* (customs master) with several clerks to help him tabulate the duties on goods exiting Basra by way of the Shaṭṭ al-ʾArab, the free ports of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, illustrated by Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain, asked nothing from regional merchants other than a small subsidiary payment for the local shaikh.[40] As a re-

sult, regional merchants were attracted to these entrepots in droves, and plied their trades freely in the absence of excessive controls.

Other than Kuwait, the most important free port in the region was Zubara. Established by elements of the ʾUtūb, the same tribes that had a hand in redeveloping Kuwait, Zubara soon became a focal point for the regional trade of the Gulf in the early to mid-eighteenth century. Under the able administration of Shaikh ʾAḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥusain ibn Rizq, scion of the important al-Rizq merchant dynasty, Zubara soon became a glittering emporium, known for its quasi-monopoly on pearl trading.[41] Again, because there were no taxes levied on merchants or other sectors of the population, the town not only attracted regional merchants but many ʾulamāʿ as well, who benefited greatly from Ibn Rizq's largesse to the migrating scholarly community of the region.

Of course, the emergence of the free ports of Kuwait, Zubara, and Bahrain were not autonomous developments, but were also conditioned by the external influences brought to bear on the region as a whole. While the frequent wars between Wahhābī Arabia and the Banū Khālid tribes was in large part the backdrop for the emergence of Kuwait and Zubara (discussed elsewhere in the chapter), the Persian challenge remained a constant threat to Bahrain. Still, the ups and downs of regional trade allowed the merchants of these free ports considerable leeway in reorienting transit trade to their door. Thus Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar were instrumental in furthering the transit trade that circulated from Arabia to India, as well as the internal trade generated by market towns in the Arabian peninsula, southern Iraq, and Arabistan. Pearls, horses, grain, dates, textiles, glass, coffee, copper and Indian teakwood were bought, sold, and exchanged at Kuwait, Zubara, and other regional markets througout the area. Overland merchants, shippers, and livestock agents tied this regional network together and facilitated access to the region by means of a ready supply of revolving credit and a variety of local and international currencies. Because of the vicissitudes of regional supply (which was often tied to the chronic instability of the market, caused by plagues, droughts, and the military adventures of tribal chieftains), economic survival depended on open and easy access to a wide region in which secondary markets made up for traditional trade centers which became inoperative over time.

The proliferation of these regional emporia or market towns in the eighteenth century Gulf still awaits definitive treatment. For while historians can note the appearance of tribal markets from the eastern Arabian coast to the inner reaches of the peninsula, and correlate that phenomenon with the emergence of other free ports in the Gulf, there are still a number of unanswered questions with regard to the dynamics of the intra-regional trade that produced them in the first place. For instance, there is some debate as to whether regional trade experienced a boom in this period, and whether that boom came about as the result of the redirection of trade away from traditional economic centers such as Ottoman Basra, a development that resulted because of the many wars of the period. Thus one line of argument posits the view that since a good number of

coastal merchant principalities were established at precisely this juncture, there quite possibly may have beeen a link between the reorientation of trade and the development of free ports.[42] On the other hand, it has been argued that the wars between the Wahhābīs and other regional dynasts may have eclipsed whatever profits the carrying trade may have amassed at this time.[43] Obviously, a little bit of both took place. How much can only be determined by future historians with access to more reliable statistics than we now possess. In any case, it is logical to impute the emergence of free ports to the determination on the part of merchant capitalists to redirect intra-regional trade, for many of these coastal settlements were built on contraband or smuggling, the hallmark of all diverted trade in the Gulf.

Clearly, the key to economic continuity was the internal structure of the market, and the built-in, organic strategies devised by regional merchants, shipping agents, and livestock owners to control, re-route and monopolize trade to their advantage. Undoubtedly, the settlement (and resettlement) of towns itself formed a large part of this regional strategy. The evidence suggests that throughout the eighteenth century free ports were the one method whereby trade survived and prospered in the Indian Ocean. Even though merchants were confronted with a number of natural as well as man-made catastrophes, those merchants that could afford to do so, may have indulged in a traditional regional practice, and seceded from their original tribe or market town in order to establish newer markets elsewhere. Refusing to buckle under, regional merchants continued to reinvest their capital in new urban centers. As a result, the flight of capital usually ended up being re-invested in the region itself, usually by the same merchant families that had holdings elsewhere.

TRIBAL AND IMPERIAL FRONTIERS IN IRAQ FROM THE SEVENTEENTH TO THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURIES

The eastward migration of Najdī tribes to central and coastal Arabia, Kuwait, and southern Iraq redrew the frontiers of Najdī society by creating a larger, more populated area in which clans and families, sometimes disassociated from their traditional tribal confederations by force of political or socioeconomic circumstance, found it convenient to re-form themselves under the aegis of different tribal groupings. While this was a process most often identified with Najd, similar conditions occurred in Iraq. Here, too, formerly Najdī-based tribal sections who had either been chased out by stronger tribes, or migrated because of their own free will, regrouped into newer, more powerful confederations in Iraq, and worked out their own bargains with the indigenous tribes of Iraq, as well as the political bureaucracies already in place.

An important reason for the migration of Najdī tribes to Iraq and the Gulf coast was the birth of the Wahhābī revivalist movement in or around 1745. In

the late eighteenth century, the Wahhābī movement spread from central and eastern Arabia to the fringes of Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, and the northern Gulf. Military campaigns designed to bring about the submission of townsmen and tribesmen to the Wahhābī *ʿaqīda* (credo) were not confined to Najd alone, but were also waged against the towns, villages, and tribal encampments of neighboring districts, especially Basra, Zubair, Karbalāʾ, and Kuwait. In the turmoil that ensued, the seemingly inexorable expansion of the Wahhābī movement created yet another reason for tribal migration to the south. In fact, many defeated anti-Wahhābī tribes were forced to move out of their traditional pastures, and to head for Iraq in order to regroup their forces and start anew.

The reconfiguration of the tribal map in Najd and Iraq did not fail to make an impression on the historians of the period, as the references in their histories amply demonstrate. For instance, historians noted the reemergence in the seventeenth century of the Muntafiq as one of the powerful tribal confederations in southern Iraq; originally, the latter had been an ancient *ʾimāra* (tribal principality) whose shaikhly house, the Shabīb, had ruled as masters of Basra and al-Ahsa (eastern Arabia) from as early as the thirteenth century, albeit not uninterruptedly.[44] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Muntafiq was joined by several "new" tribal sections, the majority of whom had left Najd for Iraq because of drought and dessication. The leadership of the Muntafiq had been traditionally invested in the al-Shabīb family, who were reputed to be Meccan *ʾAshraf* (descendants of the Prophet's family); by the mid-seventeenth century, the Saʾdūn family wrested the paramount leadership away from the Shabīb *riʾāsa* (leadership), and thereafter continued to represent the Muntafiq tribal sections until the twentieth century. Again, tribal recomposition was a constant feature of the tribes of southern Iraq, as it had been in Najd; as a result of which, the main body of the Muntafiq was reconstituted in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to allow the fusion of the large tribes of al-ʾAjwād, Banū Mālik and Banū Saʾīd into a powerful confederation. Thus al-ʾAjwād occupied an important stronghold in al-Ahsa (eastern Arabia) before the Ottoman occupation of Iraq, and only allied themselves with the rest of the Muntafiq in the eighteenth century,[45] while ancient tribes such as al-Khafāja (which had been present in Iraq at the time of the Islamic conquests) were completely subsumed into the Muntafiq by the nineteenth century. By 1850, the borders of the Muntafiq *dīra* had taken on their final shape, encompassing important territories between Samawa[47] and Sūq al-Shuyūkh on the Euphrates, and other lands on the Gharraf river.

The Muntafiq was periodically strengthened by fresh tribal recruits from Najd, who had left their traditional pastures either because of overcrowding, dessication, or famine. Again, the impact of the Wahhābī movement provided yet another reason for tribal migration into the Muntafiq dīras. According to a Najdī historian, the Zāfir tribes were defeated in battle by Saʿūdī troops and thereupon took refuge in Iraq in 1688;[48] by the mid-nineteenth century, they were reckoned to be in the vicinity of 30, 000 people, and had settled among

the Muntafiq tribes, where they formed a solid phalanx of anti-Wahhābī tribesmen ready to fight the Saʿūdī state at a moment's notice.[49]

The ʿAnayza tribe, on the other hand, rallied to the cause of the Saʿūd 'imāra, all with the exception of the Fidʿān section which joined the Saʿūd's inveterate enemies, the Banū Khālid; as a result of which, they "went to live in the lands of the Khawālid."[50] By the latter part of the eighteenth century, tribal sections of the ʿAnayza had made their appearance in Iraq. Although the sources do not specify why sections of the ʿAnayza migrated to Iraq, those clans that did settle in south-central Iraq (the Wild ʿAlī, al-Fidʿān, al-Rwalla, al-ʾImārāt and al-Dahāmsha) immediately began to compete for pastureland with the indigenous Iraqī tribes of the region, inevitably antagonizing the Mamluk government of Baghdad in the process, which launched several offensives against them. On one notable occasion, the ʿAnayza chiefs took refuge among the Qashʿam tribes, whose leaders refused to hand them over to the Mamluk army that beseiged the Qashʿam *dīra;* the Iraqī historian who described this incident wrote approvingly that the Qashʿam had refused to do so "because (doing so) was contrary to Arab tradition."[51] Eventually, however, the ʿAnayza bought their freedom by presenting 3,000 mules and 50 horses to the Mamluk authorities.[52] By the mid-nineteenth century, Shaikh Ibrāhīm al-Ḥaidarī, one of the most perspicacious historians of the period, noted that the ʿAnayza (who were now viewed as "belonging to the tribes of Iraq") had become one of the numerically important tribes in the region; according to him, they numbered close to 300,000 people, lived in the Shamiya desert, and were "originally from Najd."[53]

As for the Shammar, they are noted for having been early adherents of the house of Saʿūd; in fact, a local historian estimates that twenty-thousand Shammarī tribesmen swelled the ranks of the first Saʿūdī 'imāra.[54] After a conflict of interests soured the alliance between the Shammar and the Saʿūdī state, sections of the tribe left for Iraq. The first shaikh of the "Iraqī" Shammar to settle in Iraq was Muṭlaq ibn Muḥammad al-Jarbā; he moved to northern Iraq in 1791, and died in 1798 in a battle against his erstwhile ally, Shaikh Saʿūd ibn ʿAbdul-Azīz.[56] Repeating a tradition that countless other property-less tribes had initiated before them, the Shammar displaced the ʿUbaid and Jubūr tribes, took over their pasturelands and soon began to reign supreme in the Jazira district. By the early nineteenth century, they were the undisputed masters of northern Iraq.[56]

As a result of this in-migration, new tribal frontiers (dīras) were established, in which victorious tribes staked out grazing land and agricultural territory. "The tribal term dīra, in keeping with its bedouin origins, conveyed more of the sense of the domain over which the tribe exercized sovereign rights rather than that of exclusive ownership";[58] it was land "that was spoken of in terms of habitual but not exclusive grazing zones." These were the "natural" frontiers par excellence of the Arabian peninsula, the Gulf, and Iraq, and they centered around wells, oases, or date plantations. Dīras were defended by force, and regularly patrolled by the shaikh's militia. The shaikh of the tribe imposed the khuwwa or the

"brotherhood" tax on all those unaffiliated with his confederation and who traversed the tribal dīra; he also sent representatives to collect the khuwwa from "protected" tribes and villages within the dīra itself (the khuwwa was normally paid in consumer goods, such as grain, dates, or textiles). Payment of the khuwwa implied recognition of tribal frontiers by all those parties that crossed and re-crossed the tribal dīra, be they merchants, pilgrims, or pastoralists in search of water and forage.

When the Ottoman and Safavid empires began expanding into the area early in the sixteenth century, and began fighting over key territories in Iraq, imperial frontiers were established marking out each empire's jurisdiction over terrain won in war, or exchanged in peacetime. These frontiers were ratified by the peace treaties entered into by various Ottoman sultans and Persian shahs, starting with the Treaty of Amasya in 1555. This treaty was adhered to for twenty years, then further wars erupted between the Ottomans and Safavids, ending with the recapture of Baghdad by the Ottoman Sultan Murad IV in 1638. In 1639, Sultan Murad and Shah Safi signed the Peace of Zuhab in which the provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Shahrizor (including districts in Kurdistan) were placed under Ottoman jurisdiction, while Mehereban and its dependencies were allotted to Iran.[59] In 1746, after yet another war had come to an end between the Ottomans and the Persians, a further treaty was signed by Sultan Mahmoud I and Nadir Shah, reconfirming the territorial provisions of the earlier agreement.[60] However,

> As was customary of border treaties in the region prior to European penetration of the area, the treaty [of Zuhab in 1639] defined the boundaries in accordance with the loyalties of the tribes inhabiting the frontier between the two empires. In essence, control of Iraq was defined by the limits of effective Ottoman administrative control emanating from Baghdad . . . [which] progressively became weaker, and hence more contentious, with geographic and administrative distance. In the peripheral areas, then, the tribes exercized a form of self-determination and considerable autonomy, while the two empires tried to coerce and coax their allegiance. In this way, conflict between the two empires was contained in a frontier zone and was manifested in shifting tribal allegiances, inter-tribal conflicts, and raiding. In the 1639 treaty, the frontier zone was over one hundred miles wide, between the Zagros mountains in the east and the Tigris and Shatt al-Arab rivers in the west. . . .[61]

Even though it has been maintained that the first Ottoman annexation of territory in northern Iraq and Kurdistan in 1516 was accomplished with local support, and that the administrative borders of the Ottoman Empire were fixed once and for all in Mosul and the Kurdish principalities in that same period,[62] the new Ottoman order eventually broke down in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Especially in southern Kurdistan, the resurgence of military campaigns between different Baban ʾamīrs, and between the Baban ʾimāra and other near-

autonomous tribal principalities kept the frontier between the Safavid and Ottoman Empires in constant turmoil. Moreover, the Ottoman naval campaigns in southern Iraq and eastern Arabia, while successfully occupying Basra and al-Qatif, failed to completely eradicate Portuguese influence in the Gulf.[63] Significantly, the Ottomans were successful in capturing Aden, Muscat, and Bahrain by 1554; but these were short-lived victories, eventually surpassed by Shah Abbas I's conquest of Hormuz, the most important market in the seventeenth-century Gulf.[64] By the eighteenth century, the Basra-based Ottoman fleet could barely hold its own against the seafaring tribes in the Gulf and Arabian sea, some of which (such as the Ka'ab) retained their mastery of Gulf waters throughout the century. Nor did the Ottoman land campaigns have an appreciable effect on powerful tribal confederations such as the Muntafiq in lower Iraq (see next section). Pitcher echoes Ismael's assessment when he comments that:

> Provincial divisions were fixed during the course of the sixteenth century and thereafter remained fairly constant for two hundred years . . . [but] the boundaries of the empire towards the desert and the Iranian plateau . . . fluctuated greatly, and tended to advance or recoil as the central government grew strong or weak . . . the desert fringe collapsed completely soon after the close of [the seventeenth century] . . . when the Shammar emerged from north Arabia and began to push their way across the Euphrates. . . . [While] the Persian frontier was never defined until the late nineteenth century, it is clear from the number of sancaks on the edge of the Pusht-i-Kuh that Ottoman rule extended farther into Iran than it did two hundred years later. . . .[65]

Despite the fact that the long wars with Iran brought about a parcelling of Iraq into Ottoman and Safavid zones during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the effects were uneven. For one thing, imperial frontiers were never defined in an exact manner; in fact, both the Ottomans and the Persians continued to treat them as buffer zones or strongholds, a no-man's-land defended by tribal armies in the pay of either empire, or sometimes of both.[66] For another, imperial frontiers in Iraq were not only contested by the armies of the Ottoman or Safavid states, but they were also viewed as defensive bulwarks against the paramount leaders of tribal confederations or merchant principalities. Because the priorities of local officeholders and shaikhs had not been taken into consideration with regard to ultimate jurisdiction over the frontier, imperial officers enjoined to uphold the dignity of the Ottoman and Safavid empires were frequently assailed by recurrent raids on "their" sovereign territory by the tribes already inhabiting the region, even though some of these had made prior submission to imperial rule. For the Ottoman or Safavid representatives in Baghdad or Isfahan, imperial priorities of security and defense were the only factors worth considering with regard to the maintenance of the frontier; yet the fact that these same frontiers were superimposed on the local diras of agricultural settlements and tribal