Chapter Four

Rural and Urban

THE DIVIDED SOCIAL IMAGINATION OF LATE COLONIALISM

History, for the British, has an ontological power in providing the assumptions about how the real social and natural worlds are constituted. — *Bernard S. Cohn, Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*[1]

The British forces, sent from India, that landed at the head of the Persian Gulf on November 6, 1914 had woefully little understanding of the three *vilayets* of the Ottoman Empire that were to form the new state of Iraq. This lack of empirical knowledge about Iraqi society had barely improved by the time Britain accepted the Mandate for Iraq in 1920. The "sacred trust" of the League of Nations demanded that Britain guide the Iraqi people to statehood. But who were these people?

In an atmosphere of international change and ideological flux, Iraq was perceived of in terms of the already known. British officials were forced, individually and collectively, to fill the gap in their knowledge of Iraq by drawing on previous professional experiences. To many this experience came from British India. That experience, combined with that of the British Empire at large, structured perceptions of Iraq. Beyond this English administrators were deeply influenced by competing European philosophic traditions and by British understanding of European history.

The Iraqi polity was conceived of as being deeply split between urban and rural forms of social organization. All the legal and democratic institutions of the new state were built with this division in mind. The shaikh, as the personification of his tribe, became the pivotal indispensable figure in British conceptions. He was someone who could effectively serve as the point of contact between the state and the wider rural population. It was the shaikh who was to reconcile the contradictions between the modernity to be imposed by the apparatus of the liberal state and the "immaturity" of Arab society within a colonial logic of historical development. This understanding simplified the task and cost of

administration. But it also meant that the structures of the new state did not reflect the realities on the ground. The British social vision of Iraqi society blinded them to a whole range of possible solutions to the problems they faced and severely limited any chance of successfully achieving a viable modern state for Iraq compatible with a new and more just international order.

At the end of the First World War there was a profound sense of uncertainty about the direction of British politics and Britain's place in the world. However, this did not displace the cultural attitudes that had driven the imperial mission forward. In Iraq, British officials' perceptions were still structured by an ensemble of prejudice and racism. The Orientalist discourse that influenced British thinking involved three basic elements. First, British officials juxtaposed their own selfless motives in offering advice and framing policy against the interest-driven actions of corrupt Iraqi politicians. Secondly, the urban Iraqi population was generally portrayed as being irrational and aggressive. Finally, Iraqi society was thought of as being hopelessly divided into rival religious and ethnic groups who were unable to overcome their mutual hatreds. The Shia community was perceived as backward-looking and prone to greater irrationality and violence than were the Sunnis.

The British in positions of power found that their means of control were limited. Colonial administrators knew what was best for those under their tutelage, but from 1920 Iraqis under the ebbing power of British instruction found ways of ignoring or circumventing their supposed tutors. As orders became advice responses were no longer demanded and could be tailored to suit identifiable British predilections and weaknesses.

The overt Orientalism of British personnel in the Middle East was generally deployed to justify their own position of superiority and influence. In 1907 Bell stated that "The Oriental is like a very old child . . . He is not practical in our acceptance of the word, any more than a child is practical, and his utility is not ours."[2] In the case of Iraq, Haldane, Head of the British Forces, again deployed the metaphor of immaturity to justify Britain's mandatory role but also to explain away the popular Iraqi dislike of its strictures as hypocritical:

> They (the Iraqis) seem to me to resemble a child who, in its anxiety to display its power of walking, resents the nurse taking its hand, but submits, without loss of amour-propre and possibly with some gratitude, to support exerted less ostentatiously elsewhere.[3]

Through this construct of the Iraqi individual it was possible to deny any demands articulated by Iraqi public opinion. The population was "a mass of uninformed opinion with its natural propensity for 'backing the winner.'"[4] This allowed the British to place much of the responsibility and blame for growing dissent on the politically active, urban-based élite and outside forces who manipulated the mass of the population. "Arabs are too fickle, weak and uncivilized to rise against an organized Government, unless backed by some political or religious organization."[5] The logic of Orientalist understanding worked most brutally against those identified as urban and politically active. It was also used to understand the motives and actions of the king, his Hashemite retainers and the group of politicians that surrounded him. The king, who had been picked and installed by the British to be a pliant and "right-thinking" monarch, had by 1922 transmuted into something much more sinister. Cox argued that

> he has in these recent episodes unmistakably displayed the cloven hoof. I have endeavored to be absolutely straightforward and frank with him, and to treat him like a brother, but there you are, when he is scratched deep enough the racial weakness displays itself.[6]

In the king's case the "cloven hoof" showed itself in his allegedly highly-strung nature, his moral weakness, his temper and his tenuous grip on sanity.[7] This moral weakness was exemplified in a classic Orientalist trope with reference to his sexual conduct, which, according to a report by Dobbs, was scandalizing polite society and further added to his untrustworthiness.[8]

Arabs who were in positions to act as historical agents were uniformly described in these terms. Such stereotypes were especially applied to all who were politically active. Nuri Said was described by the Chief Inspector of the Levies "as a man with the mind and morals of a monkey, who was an inveterate political intriguer."[9] Ja'far Pasha, one of the politicians closest to

Britain, was written off as "Obese and pathetic" and branded as duplicitous and insincere.[10] The Oriental's love of intrigue and scheming was deployed as a description and explanation of the political élite's actions.

The image that permeates British descriptions of the Iraqi governing group was of a small élite floating above society. "I do not suppose there is in the whole of history another example of a state with a representative government of a modern type, in which the only people who count are two or three hundred at the most. It is in fact a close[d] oligarchy."[11]

Although this can be seen as a fairly accurate empirical description of the size of the political élite, the explanation given for it by the British could hardly be more self-deceiving or revealing. The political élite was small and detached because the wider population, by its nature, could have little knowledge about or interest in high politics. The motivation of the unrepresentative élite involved in politics was bound to be that of self-aggrandizement and the furtherance of its personal interests. The inference that the British permitted themselves using the Orientalist explanation that only the informed and selfless British were capable of guiding the naive and uninformed Iraqi population safely to nationhood missed the point and the problem of Iraqi modernity entirely.

Under this rubric the hostility of the population towards the expansion of state control could be blamed on local government officials who were corrupt by their very nature, either because they had been trained under the Ottoman administration or because, as urban-based *effendis*, they had lost the innocence of the larger rural population. They "devote themselves entirely to the gratification of their own whims and ambitions to the entire disregard of the interests of the people committed to their charge."[12] A contributing factor was the character of Iraqis: honesty, punctuality, equality and the discouragement of corruption were "irritating and uncongenial to a Kurd or Arab. . . . we offer justice, he perhaps prefers a verdict of known price; we offer efficiency and speed, to him it is a set of annoying half-grasped rules to be kept at the cost of comfort and habit."[13]

The rise of a nationalist movement directed at the reduction of Britain's power in Iraq could be written off as unjustified in view of the selfless sacrifice of the British administrator. Those involved in agitation were doing so because it suited their pockets. When one of the Shia *Ulama* returned from his exile in Iran, his anti-British stance was explained by his inability to get a "big enough job in the Auqaf department."

This view of Iraq's politics was exploited and even encouraged by key Iraqi politicians. When, in 1924, the Iraqi cabinet and High Commissioner were having difficulties getting a new treaty ratified by the Assembly, the Prime Minister, Ja'far al-Askari, explained the problem to the High Commissioner: "You are trying to deal with these Arabs as if they were honest men. I know they are all rogues and villains and can only be won over by corruption."[14]

Orientalist discourse through which the British perceived Iraqi society robbed the majority of the Iraqi population of agency. Having escaped the grasping and inept clutches of Ottoman rule, they awaited British guidance to maturity. This construct allowed the politically active minority to be written off as aberrations, corrupted by exposure to Ottoman methods and driven by a selfish desire for money and power.

British understandings of Iraqi society were heavily dependent upon the rigid boundaries of its different ethnic, religious and social groupings.[15] Orientalism determined the way in which Islam was conceived. The religious divide was a major category through which British personnel understood the urban communities of Iraq. These groupings were ranked according to overlapping criteria at the heart of an Orientalist discourse: how rational and hardworking were they and how favorably disposed towards the British.

> The Jews and the Christians . . . are the most progressive of the inhabitants of the country. Although they number only about 7 per cent of the population, the proportion of wealth in their hands must be very much greater. They are much more interested in the development of the country.[16]

The majority of the population, being Muslim, were generally dismissed, Islam being seen as a constraint upon the progressive development of the population. Longrigg sums this view up boldly by stating that "no Islamic state in modern times had reached the first rank of nations." The effect of Islam meant that "in the very air and aspect of the East there seems to lie an acquiescence, a lack of the forward impulse."[17]

Islam was a hindrance to development and, to the British Shia Islam, seen as more Islamic than Sunni Islam, was a metonym for all that was wrong with Iraq. A distinction was first made between the powerful

clique of *Mujtahid*s (the Shia religious hierarchy) and the Shia population itself. It was the *Mujtahid*s who posed a direct challenge to British influence and to state building itself. Like the political élite, the *Mujtahid*s were conceptually excluded from the larger Iraqi population. They were aliens, Persians, who owed neither loyalty nor commitment to Iraq.[18] Their interests were diametrically opposed to the process of centralizing governmental power. In a zero-sum game the state had to break the influence of the *Mujtahid*s. Gertrude Bell repeatedly compared them to a group of "alien popes," "exercising real temporal authority . . . and obstructing the Government at every turn."[19]

The British saw the *Mujtahid*s, who are at the core of Shia Islam, as having a philosophy opposed to progress of any kind. Their "authority . . . rests on an intimate acquaintance with accustomed knowledge entirely irrelevant to human affairs and worthless in any branch of human activity."[20] They were seen as being "arch conservatives" with a mastery of obscurantism. The *Mujtahid*'s attitude had been formed in the isolation of the claustrophobic towns of Najaf and Karbala, which were permeated with "a baneful atmosphere." Clerical attitude and its influence were considered as promoting bigotry and instability. The length and ferocity of the 1920 revolt was blamed on the *Mujtahid*'s influence, as they urged on the rebels hoping for the imposition of a theocratic state. Intelligence reports between 1920 and 1927 focus on the supposed role of the *Mujtahid*s in formenting the violent uprising amongst the Shia tribes of the Euphrates.

The Shia population was viewed as being different from their religious leaders. British estimates of the *Mujtahid*'s influence over their congregation varied. After 1920 there was a feeling that tribal shaikhs from the Euphrates had learnt their lesson and would be less responsive to calls from the holy cities. But a negative view of the wider Shia population drove British thoughts and actions. Within the British unilinear view of development, it was assumed that the Shia community would slowly integrate into a wider Iraqi identity, yet despite British efforts they remained "self-consciously sectarian."[21] Within an Orientalist discourse this was explained in terms of the backwardness of the religion. The Shia were unable to break from their *Mujtahid*s who kept them in a state of ignorance for their own selfish interests. The potential dangers of having a hostile group holding sway over a majority of the population had to be

countered. This was one of the reasons, claimed Gertrude Bell, for keeping Sunni Mosul in Iraq and leaving the final authority with Sunni politicians. Otherwise Iraq would exist as "a mujtahid run, theocratic state, which is the very devil."[22]

It was the urban-rural divide, identified by the British, that structured their understanding of the emerging polity and determined the individual-collective tensions that emerged. The gulf between the urban-based *effendi* and the rural tribesmen was the assumed social fact around which the state was created. The *Ulama*, for example, were not only chastised for being Persian but also for being exclusively "town dwelling."[23] Najaf was described with an imagery that subconsciously alluded to the horrors of urbanization, one that would not have been out of place in one of Dickens's novels, in its description of the crowded towns where poverty and "oppressive wealth" lived side by side.[24]

This anti-urbanism can be partly explained by the fact that Baghdad was the main center of nationalism. But this demonizing of cities and their population can be traced back to England.[25] The rise of "ruralism" in popular British discourse in the 1800s and its great influence after World War I was the cultural background to Colonial Office employees harboring such a passionate distaste for urban Iraqis. This expanded into an active attempt to stop the commercialization of agriculture and the concomitant rise in power of large-scale urban-based landowners. We can identify similar attitudes and approaches in colonial discourse in both India and Africa.[26] The whole notion of the "martial races" is structured around the virile qualities of soldiers untouched by the emasculating effects of modernity and the city.[27] The notion of the "noble savage," deployed by Rousseau to rail against injustice in Europe, was easily adapted by those who saw the effects of modernity as undermining humanity's "natural" abilities, constraining them through complexity and regulation.[28] Although initially constructed as an internal critique of European society, it took on new resonance within British imperialist experience and helped determine British interactions with the rural population of Iraq. Fundamentally, capitalism was regarded as a negative force, destroying stability and tradition and entrapping the essence of humanity within a selfish and commodified world.[29] To the British the noble bedouin, untouched by all that was negative about the modern day, stood in stark contrast to those

who peopled the cities -— to those who had succumbed to the temptations of modernity. In Iraq this discourse predominated. Henry Dobbs, when reviewing the principles that drove his approach, claimed that Iraq was unique because

> the country men, including the inhabitants of the villages, are almost all tribal, unlike the cultivators of Egypt or India or even Persia . . . In this respect I doubt whether the conditions of any other country in the world, even of Afghanistan, resemble those of Iraq.[30]

For both Dobbs and his staff in Iraq, the prevalence of what they had identified as tribes indicated a society only lightly touched by modernity. The tribal system still held sway because capitalist penetration was limited. The notion of rural Iraq was therefore constituted to contrast with the evils of urbanism. This polemical vision was sustained by stressing the difference that separated the two spheres. The Iraqi population had no national spirit because it was "split by an effendi-tribal breach."[31] This was mutual and all-powerful, with the propertied and conservative classes regarding the tribesmen as "little removed from savages"[32] and the tribesmen possessing an "almost instinctive hostility to Arab 'Effendis' in positions of authority."[33]

For the British the towns seemed to be populated solely by the *effendi* class and the rural areas by tribespeople. Apart from the unsustainability of such a caricature, there is strong evidence that the divide itself was empirically false. With the rapid growth of Baghdad's population, "many townsmen were of relatively recent tribal origin"[34] and some of the tribespeople who migrated into the city "ignored urban laws and entered into written compacts binding themselves to regulate their conduct and their disputes in accordance with their ancient tribal customs."[35] The relative speed and extent of Iraqi urbanization had led the countryside to enter the town and hence blur any rigid distinction between the two. Henry Dobbs's understanding of the nature of Iraq (like that of many of his fellow administrators), could not countenance this ambiguity. The towns were urban and so should be quantitatively and qualitatively different from the tribal rural areas that accounted for the majority of the population.

At the center of the British conception of Iraq and its social structures, therefore, was an unsustainable dichotomy between town dwellers and rural society built on a misinterpretation of both. Previous work on Iraq has noted this,[36] but it has been interpreted as a conscious effort to categorize and divide society, making it easier to dominate. A closer reading of the archival material, however, gives no support to this position. The officials concerned saw the division as real and continually worried about its effects on the present and future government of Iraq.[37] Many of their policy initiatives had the stated outcome of trying to lessen the ramifications of a fractured society. Far from consciously trying to create such divisions they saw them as a negative but pre-existing fact of social relations.

This view of an unbridgeable division between town and country was structured around a jaundiced construction of an uncivilized city with a biased view of the characteristics of urban populations. British discourse on urban Iraq developed the image of the young, politically aware Baghdadi as interest-driven and fighting for access to corruption. A standardized model of the effete urbanite, the "beffezed" and "tomato-eating" *effendi* began to develop in the minds of those based around the country.[38] He was young, loud, self-centered and self-seeking, and overly influenced by a half-formed understanding of European politics and culture.[39] This powerful image recurs in dispatches and letters with reference to the coffee-shop, an urban phenomenon that allowed the inactive dilettante to be seated amongst his own kind, commenting loudly on that which he knew little about.[40]

The politically active members of Baghdad's élite were negatively described at all levels of the colonial staff. Cox calls them "impecunious and backward," whereas Wingate, a Political Officer in Najaf, sought to isolate the rest of the country from the "half-fledged intelligence of Baghdad."[41] Tyler, a Political Officer in Hillah, also rails against "the low-born Baghdadi" and his hatred of the tribal system. The city, and especially Baghdad, carried the negative influence of modernity within it. The sons of shaikhs had to be isolated from townsmen to stop them being "corrupted by the manifold vices of the Iraq city" whose notables were described as being "spoilt by the acquisition of the worst European habits."[42]

The urban population was not only morally and intellectually defective it was also sub-standard physically. The long and acrimonious debate amongst British officials and between them and the Iraqi gov-

ernment over conscription and the size of the Iraqi army was greatly affected by the view that urban recruits were not up to the job of soldiering. Replicating the notion of martial races across the Empire, British officials argued that conscription would not produce the "viril" tribesmen required but instead would deliver weaker and less suitable townsmen.[43]

This class of urbanites was, in the British mind, synonymous with government administration and political activity. Any incursion of this separate and degenerate part of the population into the rural idyll constructed by the British could bring only negative effects. The division between these two sections of Iraq was so great, argued the British, that the town population could never understand rural life. Yet the tribesman had a "truer appreciation of what government entails than the average townsman."[44] In effect, any criticism of British actions in rural areas by Iraqi politicians must be driven by self-interest or ignorance.[45] The Iraqi administration, staffed by "corrupt and self seeking officialdom," created only resentment and instability as its influence grew among the rural population.[46]

This anti-urbanism at the core of British discourse was combined with a strong unease about the penetration of capitalism into rural areas. The vehicle for this was the commercial landowner, resident in the cities, motivated by profit and with no interest in the welfare of his *fallaheen*. These landlords were to be the tool which would eventually destroy the tribal structures that held sway over rural Iraq. For the Divisional Adviser in Dulaim, the major capitalists already established there were "parasites on society," positioned in opposition to the tribes. They "despised the work of the fallah."[47] An explanation for the constant unrest around land issues in the Muntafiq centered on the imposition of commercial property rights and landlords by Midhat Pasha. From 1920 these landlords "allied themselves with the extremists and with the merchants of the town known for their talent for intrigue."[48] Dobbs, in explaining why the Sa'duns were the core reason for the Muntafiq's instability, describes them as "never truly tribal," "urban dwelling" and, finally, Sunni "city overlords."[49]

Dominating the analysis that shaped British understandings of Iraq was the individual-collective and the urban-rural distinctions. The structure of this divisive social vision had its origins in the evolution of Euro-

pean development and social trends in Britain in the run up to and after the First World War. In Iraq it encouraged a conception of society that saw an unbridgeable gap between the *effendi* politician in urban centers and the rural tribesman. In effect, the urban-based minority of the population had been demonized as contaminated by both Ottoman rule and the negative aspects of capitalism. Outside these areas society was largely untouched, leaving the rural tribesman as the personification of prelapsarian man. The tribesman was certainly naïve, but he was honest, upstanding and ready to make the necessarily slow passage to a better, more authentic life under the modern liberal state.

British knowledge about Iraq was very inconsistent. In the archives of the Political Department of the Government of India there was a great deal of valuable information supplied by its officers who had been stationed across the region before the war. But this information was never distributed to British colonial commanders on the ground. British military forces were accompanied by officers from the Indian Political Service, as if British interest in Mesopotamia after the collapse of Ottoman rule could be handled through the administrative apparatus developed to run the Indian empire.

From the outset an atmosphere of uncertainty enveloped the administration of Iraq.[50] During an earlier more confident period or in a different, less demanding international context, the extension of British authority across Iraq would have involved mapping it geographically and ordering its population through scientific quantification.[51] That era of colonial penetration represented a time when the structures of European modernity were at their most visible, in contrast to the invisibility of older, non-European notions of order.

The colonial project of modernity was centered on disciplining the pre-modern individual and enframing him or her. This disciplinary power worked on the micro-level, restricting the individual by "entering into particular social processes, breaking them down into separate functions, rearranging the parts, increasing their efficiency and precision."[52] Colonialism was supposed to create a "modern" order through precise quantification, "enframing" and capturing the population by situating it within terms of reference of its own making. Some have argued, incorrectly, that the British did indeed succeed in using this approach "by means of their censuses and other methods of categorization."[53]

But there is ample evidence that the process of mapping and quantification identified as key to colonial power did not occur in Iraq. A.T. Wilson laments the Indian General Staff's neglect in failing to collate information about Mesopotamia in advance of the campaign and then failing to distribute what information it had.[54] The situation deteriorated further when Ottoman officials, retreating in the face of the British advance, took all the records they could with them.[55] This lack of knowledge was not corrected by either a universal cadastral survey or by a census. Ad hoc attempts were made at various locations to make assessments of land holdings and the population, but under the Mandate this was never coordinated across the country as a whole.[56]

British staff saw this lack of empirical knowledge of the country as a weakness in their attempts to control the population.[57] But the cost of a nationwide cadastral survey and the antipathy of the population towards a census, which they saw as a precursor to conscription, meant neither measure was enacted under the Mandate. The staff charged with creating the Iraqi state, who would previously have depended upon a vast quantity of reliable empirical knowledge, had limited data with which to work.

How the British understood the non-urban population of Iraq can be seen in their construction of tribal lists. This process began almost as soon as British troops moved up from Basra in November of 1914. Those involved realized they were beginning with almost no knowledge:

> It is easy to imagine that when we first took over the administration, the unraveling of this skein of tribes was quite a business in itself, with nothing more to help one than an odd name or so jotted down on a map, as often as not at the wrong point.[58]

In the absence of information, the importance of the lists to British understanding can be gauged by the time and effort expended in compiling and updating them throughout the Mandate period.[59]

These lists reveal the way the British thought rural society was structured. Each tribe was listed under its name with its history detailed at length. This involved tracing the origins of tribes back to the larger groupings from which they had split, with great importance placed on the "purity" of each tribe and the extent to which it was made up of peo-

ple who could rightfully claim direct descent from the original formation. The geographic area each tribe claimed as its own was delineated along with the size and extent of its historic agricultural output. The core of the list was the naming of key shaikhs within each tribe. They were the only persons identified individually by the compilers. The character of each tribe was gauged by the character of its leaders. The shaikh's personality, his lineage and, especially, how he came to obtain his authority determined the authenticity, strength and cohesion assigned by the British to his tribe.[60] No other unit of analysis was used to organize these lists.

A. T. Wilson did recognize the "peculiar complexity" of Iraq, but he described this complexity in terms of pastoral tribes, some partly nomadic and some sedentary, but all organized along tribal lines.[61] Official estimates of the numbers of tribespeople in Iraq ranged from the High Commissioner's estimate in 1919 of three-quarters of the population to Kinahan Cornwallis's statement in 1926 that "settled tribes . . . constitute practically the whole of the rural population of Iraq" (Cornwallis was responsible for overseeing tribal policy at the Interior Ministry).[62]

The British approach to what was in fact a diverse and complex society was neatly summed up in a Land Revenue Report on Kirkuk written in 1919:

> Political freedom cannot be attained except through a community. We must therefore look for some simple form of responsible community on which to base our system. The simplest form of community in the purely Kurdish area is the tribe or the section of tribe: elsewhere the village.[63]

Competing methods or categories of analysis were ignored or downplayed for the sake of simplicity. In this way, the homogeneous category of "tribe" was violently superimposed over British ignorance and a complex and ambiguous social, political, religious and cultural reality. The late-colonial imagination at work in Iraq injected the administrative rationality of western enlightenment with more than a dose of romanticism. The tribe was conceived of in Lockean terms, as having been created by a state of democratic nature.

The ramifications of this approach were that those rural groups or individuals that did not fit well into the single all embracing category of "the tribe" were difficult to deal with. Their position had either to be violently distorted or overlooked. The High Commissioner, his staff and the advisers to the government in Baghdad, acknowledged variations in economic and social conditions across Iraq. But the rigid definition applied to "rural" social structures meant that those acknowledged variations would not enter into British policy. Although tribal disintegration had been identified and was a major point of debate, the rigid categorization of rural areas by tribe meant that it could not be understood as a prelude to an indigenous modernity. Until 1932, "tribal fragmentation" was seen by the majority of British officials not as leading to individualization and social modernity but to the creation of smaller tribal units and "petty shaikhs."[64]

The idea of the "tribe" was primarily defined by those outside it. As a unit it certainly existed, juxtaposed against non-rural sections of society and, more tangibly, against other tribes competing for land and government resources. But there was limited investigation into its internal coherence and dynamics as a structure of collective life.[65] Instead, the romantic theme of brotherhood and premodern mutual affective bonds ran through descriptions of tribal life and identity. A.T. Wilson strikes a familiar tone when he describes the "unsophisticated" Arab, Kurd or Persian's deeply held loyalty to family and tribe. Although practical, thorough and sustained until death, this loyalty appeared to Wilson to be beyond rationality, being "largely independent of admiration or affection for individuals", but giving, "unity and stability to their philosophy of life."[66]

Of all the colonial officials in Iraq, John Glubb had the most intense and extended exposure to the everyday life of both nomadic and sedentary Arabs. Glubb spent World War I fighting in Europe but volunteered to go to Iraq after the cease-fire. As a Special Services Officer he spent the 1920s stationed in rural Iraq many miles from the out-posts of the British Empire. He developed a very strong affinity with Iraqis, spending the vast majority of his time living amongst them, arguing for the protection of their way of life. Although his exposition of tribal cohesion was more detailed and anchored in experience than that of others, his understanding was still nevertheless permeated with romanticism. His written work

can be read as an extended homily to the dying of a more noble way of life, one based on honor and virility.[67]

The tribe was described by the British as a democratic system of equality: leaders were naturally selected on the basis of strength of character;[68] the individual member gained his definition through the collective. When the organization broke down its members degenerated, becoming lesser beings. Assistant Political Officer Mylles, when comparing the members of the Dulaim to the Agadat, described the Dulaim as "twice the men . . . chiefly because the tribal organization is still strong." The Agadat suffered in comparison because the Turks had broken their "tribal spirit."[69]

The social plane upon which these tribes acted was seen by the British as one structured by anarchy. The internal life of the tribe exemplified respect and cooperation while the external world was Hobbesian. Intertribal relationships were defined by the lack of a sovereign-state structure to guarantee order. The feeble nature of the Ottoman government had left these groups to evolve in a violent atmosphere where internal collective security was the only guarantor of survival.[70] Thus, it was internal tribal cohesion that guaranteed the continued existence of authentic Iraqi society. The authentic Iraqi tribesman had been unencumbered by the state or any imposed notion of civilization. This had left him to rely on his natural abilities and the solidarity of his comrades.

In theory individual tribes were organized for purposes of defense into confederations grouped under a paramount shaikh. The tribes themselves were loose organizations within which "sub-tribes," with their own "sub-shaikhs," or headmen, appeared to be the final unit of analysis. D.G. Hogarth, who had been head of the Arab Bureau in Cairo during the First World War, attempted to clarify this with reference to the Anazeh tribe of the Syrian desert. They were not, he argued, a tribe but a people comparable in racial terms to Scandinavians. This racial whole, as with the Scandinavian people, could be sub-divided into smaller units: states for the Scandinavians tribes for the Anazeh. These units were politically independent yet bound together sentimentally by "a tradition of remote common origin." A pedantic and elaborate concern for blood traditions and genealogies, the veneration of their shaikhs, allowed them to remain loosely affiliated.[71]

Sir Henry Dobbs, the longest serving High Commissioner and a

champion of this system of classification, was clearly uneasy about the smaller units. Before his appointment as High Commissioner, while still serving as Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, he wrote to the then acting High Commissioner, A.T. Wilson, to address the issue of the future political role for those exercising authority in the context of tribal subgroups. A committee discussing the future constitution had suggested that heads of the "sub-sections" should elect tribal representation. Dobbs argued that this method would be unworkable, as within tribes subsections were flexible and thus membership interchangeable. What was crucial, he argued, was to preserve the coherence of the tribes by bolstering the authority of the big shaikhs, which could not withstand the intrusion of "all kinds of petty headmen."[72]

The tribe, not the individual, became the unit of analysis through which this interpretation of Iraqi society gained its coherence. Tribal organization made other categories of analysis unnecessary. Such a clear understanding of how rural society functioned yielded a clear policy by which it could be controlled.

The centrality of the shaikh in the British imagination meant that those below him went unregistered as targets of policy. When it came to gauging the views of tribal populations, to ask the "rank and file of the tribesmen, shepherds, marsh dwellers, rice, barley, and date cultivators of the Euphrates and Tigris, whose experience of statecraft was confined to speculations, as to the performances of their next-door neighbors" would be ridiculous. Instead, Bell recommended consultations with their immediate chiefs, "in districts where the tribal system is still in force (and this includes much the greater part of the country)." This should be organized by election "by headmen of the tribal subsection."[73]

For the British, the "authentic," or ideal, tribe would be hierarchically divided into three categories the confederation, the tribe and the subtribe. At the very peak of tribal authority, and the point of contact with Baghdad, would be the paramount shaikh, who in theory controlled a whole tribal confederacy, someone like Ali Sulaiman, who ruled the Dulaim on the upper Euphrates, or Ibn Suwait, who was the paramount shaikh of the Dhafir. The position was supposed to have been inherited "in accordance to tribal tradition."[74]

In 1921 the Divisional Adviser of Muntafiq claimed there were only three such figures in his region: Salim al Khaiyun of the Bani Asad, Badr

al Rumaiyidh of the Albu Salih and Khaiyun of the Abudah tribe in the Gharraf. Their authority over "unruly, turbulent and warlike tribesmen" was dependent entirely on the support they could muster from within the wider tribe. They were a "necessary evil" because of their role in providing social stability.[75] Glubb, in 1924, summed up the traditional powers of office as the right to make war and peace on behalf of the tribe, while emissaries from foreign tribes must dismount at the paramount's tent to conclude treaties.[76]

Beneath the paramount leaders were the "big shaikhs," or shaikhs of tribes that made up the confederacy, and below them the heads of the tribal sub-sections (these two categories were somewhat flexible and not always distinguishable). The High Commissioner went to great lengths to discourage all but minor dealings between the British staff, the Iraqi government and tribal sub-sections.

In this idealized framework of tribal organization a loose form of democracy was thought to permeate the three levels of the tribe. The shaikhs dominated and came to represent these democratic structures by force of personality and natural intelligence. The British saw the whole collective organized around a community of interest.[77] Shaikhs could thus be identified and admired for their attainment of social position. Bell, amongst others, frequently referred to this group as "great personalities" and "aristocrats," with the system generally being maintained in a "natural equilibrium."[78]

The shaikh and his relatives became vehicles for the late colonial romantic imagination. Captain Holt's description of Shaikh Mahmud's surrender to British forces in May 1931 is instructive. As a long standing Oriental Secretary to the High Commissioner (the post also held by Gertrude Bell until her death), Holt had played a key role in forming policy and disseminating information across Iraq and back to Britain and India. Shaikh Mahmud on the other hand had been the major challenge to British and then Iraqi dominance of Kurdistan since 1920.[79] Upon Mahmud's capture Holt wrote a note, detailing his history, which was organized around romantic imagery and a lament for times past.

Holt describes the first engagement Mahmud had with Turkish forces during the battle of Shu'aibah in April 1915. Mahmud, "like many other tribal chiefs of ancient lineage," had arrived with his feudal levies to do battle with the foreign invaders. Then, after prayers, "believing that the

age of chivalry was still with them, they swept forward on their gaily caparisoned horses to drive their enemies back into the sea which it was said was their home. Taunts and challenges were shouted at the still invisible enemy but only the shriek of shrapnel answered and a dozen saddles emptied and a score of horses fell. Ardour was daunted, home became dearer than glory and life on earth more blissful than the hope of Paradise and the hosts of chivalry melted away; each man the richer by at least two rifles taken from the Turkish wounded."

Describing Mahmud's final surrender to the British, Holt's admiration for the man and the passing of what he represented makes itself felt in gushing prose:

> As he rode to captivity after his surrender at Penjwin the Kurds streamed down from the villages on the hill sides to cluster round him and to kiss his hand and the eyes of many were filled with tears as they bid him farewell . . . His tyranny is the will of a tyrant but it is mellowed by the generosity of a prince. If he is cruel, where are the witnesses? Not among the villagers who press around to kiss his hand in the hour of his defeat, nor among the officers of the Royal Air Force who have fought against him (and of whom two have been his prisoners), who are all eager to say a cheery word of comfort to him . . . An outlaw brigand, let that be granted, so were Garibaldi and Mustafa Kamal. But when all has been said on both sides perhaps the wisest judgement is that his greatest fault is that he was born a century too late.[80]

In tandem with this romance of the shaikh was a continuing and sometimes bitter debate about whether authority and order could be transmitted through the tribal system. For some British staff, the office of the shaikh had failed to have any real political or social efficacy long before British troops landed in 1914. For others its weakness was personified by the 1920 revolt and the subsequent ignominious exit of some shaikhs from their supposed areas of influence to British-held towns. But the power of the British romantic vision meant that the version of Iraq's social realities championed by Sir Henry Dobbs — which fastened on to the shaikh as the linchpin of rural society-— won out. The clash between this sociological romance and the problems of trying to rule Iraq through

its categories led the British to adopt policies that can only be described as contradictory. Ultimately this clash sabotaged any successful realization of liberal modernity for the newly constructed Iraqi state. Dobbs's approach did however have the unintended consequence of restructuring Iraqi society.