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**LETTER FROM THE EDITORS**

Throughout its sixteen years of publication, *Historia* and its editors have made it their mission to create a journal that reflects the scholarly abilities of the students at Eastern Illinois University. This volume attempts to maintain that legacy, and provides a showcase of several of the finest examples of research and writing in the field of history. *Historia* received dozens of submissions this year; each one was well-written, intriguing, and a testament to the diligence and scholarship of the students at Eastern. But as editors of *Historia* we are entrusted with the unenviable task of choosing only a handful of papers for publication from this deep pool of worthy submissions. We sought to illustrate not only the depth of historical research that students engage in, but also the breadth of topics, and the wide range of methodology that they employ. In this volume the reader will find essays spanning a wide range of time periods, geographical locations, and techniques for analysis. With humble allegiance to *Historia's* enduring devotion to diversity, we have chosen articles from the ancient, early modern, and modern eras, in the history of Europe, Asia, the United States, and Latin America. Each of these essays employs unique analytical methods; ranging from the traditional tools of social or cultural history, or those of memory and material culture. In publishing these selections, we have hopefully revealed the variety and quality of historical research in which Eastern's students are engaged. Despite the vast array of diverse topics discussed in this volume, they are all united in their common purpose of revealing some aspect of the greater human story. It is that interest and devotion to humanity that drives all of the students of history at Eastern to produce the quality work that is sampled here. Therefore, with deepest gratitude to the students who submitted their work and the History faculty that provided the guidance and inspiration necessary to create such works, we proudly present the latest volume of *Historia*.

The Editors

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## TROUBLED STATE: BRITISH DECISIONS IN CREATING MODERN IRAQ

**Amanda Lempera**

Modern Iraq is a man-made product of the twentieth century. Prior to World War I the area was called Mesopotamia and was a collection of provinces in the Ottoman Empire. In World War I, Britain invaded the territory and held it after the war under a League of Nations Mandate. By the 1920's The British government had decided to group the provinces together to form Iraq, anticipating that the state would eventually function independent of the mandate system. What was discussed and understood is that each province contained a different group of people, a different culture altogether from the adjacent province. The provinces were grouped together to save money; in the interests of Britain, not the provinces. The tragedy of this mass grouping is that the Kurds of Northern Iraq, who also reside in several other modern day states, were left divided. This group of people was pushed aside in favor of what others desired and now they function as a nation without a state. The important thing to understand is that creating a state is a difficult task and this creation was strained by budget issues. Every angle of forming Iraq under the mandate was discussed in cost to Britain rather than what was best for the disparate peoples living there. The tragedy of the Kurds is that they were acknowledged, and then ignored. They were left to find their place among people unlike them in an artificially made state created by an imperial power to benefit itself, not the Kurds or their neighbors.

Britain's interest in the area called Mesopotamia began with oil. In 1904, the British Navy was facilitated a plan to change from coal power to oil power. The change would primarily make the ships faster, but it would also quell fears that British coal

reserves were running out. In 1908 oil was discovered in Persia, a British area of influence in the Middle East, adjacent to Mesopotamia. Winston Churchill, as First Lord of the Admiralty, made it his mission to get Parliament to approve joining with Persia to form the Anglo-Persian oil company. The company would allow Britain to have oil in exchange for providing infrastructure to Persia. In early 1914 Churchill had finally received permission from Parliament and the company was in motion. Late in 1914, as the world entered into war, the British felt it necessary to invade neighboring Mesopotamia, in the Ottoman vilayet of Basra. The vilayet was the southernmost region of Mesopotamia and would create a buffer between Ottoman-Turkish forces and British oil interests in Persia.<sup>1</sup>

In the game of alliances the Ottoman Empire often sided with Britain for protection from Russia. In World War I, Britain and Russia allied together creating a dilemma for the Ottoman Turks. In 1914, Winston Churchill was worried about where the Turks would side. His response was to confiscate two Dreadnaught ships being built for the Turks. The Turks did not receive the Dreadnaught ships they had been promised from the British. Soon afterward the Turks decided to ally with Germany, but it is unclear whether Churchill's actions directly contributed or not. In any case, the British were then at war with the Turks who were the nearest threat to new British oil holdings.<sup>2</sup>

The Ottoman Empire, often referred to as the "sick man of Europe," had been artificially propped up by Europeans for over a century. The empire made a convenient buffer between Western Europe and Russia. Because the empire was considered so weak, defeating the Turks seemed like more of an inconvenience than anything. The first plan to disable the Turks was a swift push to their capital, Constantinople. The best route

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<sup>1</sup>Sara Reguer, "Persian Oil and the First Lord: A Chapter in the Career of Winston Churchill." *Military Affairs* 46, no. 3 (October 1982): 134-137.

<sup>2</sup>Christopher Catherwood, *Churchill's Folly: How Winston Churchill Created Modern Iraq* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2004), 34.

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involved an invasion of the Dardanelles strait. The European side was named Gallipoli. The plan for this infamous battle was developed by Winston Churchill. This battle badly bruised Churchill's political career when the invasion turned out to be a disaster. It was a disaster because the Turks were underestimated, the British never achieved naval superiority, and the battle was unlike the trench warfare the British were accustomed to on the Western front. The drive to Constantinople was not completed as the British and Australian troops took heavy casualties and retreated. Churchill lost his post as First Lord of the Admiralty after the debacle, hence the bruising of his career. With the failure to take Constantinople the British turned to the Middle East as a path to defeat the Turks.<sup>3</sup>

This is where the invasion of Basra comes into play. Christopher Catherwood posited it had been motivated equally by desire for oil and Ottoman land, but few other historians hold this view. Most see Persian oil or the possibility of Mesopotamian oil as driving factors behind the invasion of Basra, therefore leaving out the land angle. The desire for land that Catherwood references, however, is not a figment of his imagination. After invading, the British had high hopes to cultivate the land, even if only to save money by using it to feed the troops deployed there.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the motivation, the British eventually invaded Basra in 1915. William Polk points out this probably would have been good enough to ensure the security of the Persian oilfields. Polk claims the later decision to push north to Baghdad was a product of a mix of overambitious and unruly generals and intelligence that the Turks intended to attack British forces in Basra. The thinking by the generals, it seemed, thought it best to have a buffer for our buffer.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>William R. Polk, *Understanding Iraq: The Whole Sweep of Iraqi History, From Genghis Khan's Mongols to the Ottoman Turks to the British Mandate to the American Occupation* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 70.

The decision to go to Baghdad created another British debacle. The British troops did well on their way North from Basra, but stalled just outside Baghdad in late 1915. There, General Townsend and his battalions encountered Turkish troops and were forced to retreat back to al Kut, where they sat besieged for four months. Eventually the British surrendered and were marched out.

The Arab revolt of 1916 could not have come at better time. Mesopotamian Arabs were irritated with Ottoman rule, and they decided to fight back. Not surprisingly, the British, along with Australians, aided the Arabs in whatever ways they could. The revolt was not strong enough to allow the British to take Baghdad, but as luck would have it, just as the revolt was fizzling the United States entered the war on the Allied side. The Americans did not fight in Mesopotamia, but their large contribution in the Western theater freed up resources that could be diverted to the Middle East for Britain. Consequently the British pushed through Baghdad claiming the entire Baghdad vilayet and part of the Mosul vilayet farther north.<sup>6</sup>

The British never fully captured the Mosul vilayet. However, in October 1918 Britain obtained control through the Armistice.<sup>7</sup> They occupied the area, but the Turks did not let go that easily and later the League of Nations decided Britain should have it.<sup>8</sup> Britain was now in control of three formerly Ottoman vilayets. The new British colonial government maintained most of the Ottomans' original political organization. Each conquered area was made into a vilayet. In this way each vilayet was often a state or province-type creation that was in agreement with the groupings people had made for themselves in the past. This system kept people with a group they had already felt close to or comfortable with. The three vilayets Britain took had little in

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<sup>6</sup>Catherwood, *Churchill's Folly*, 52-55.

<sup>7</sup>Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992), 49.

<sup>8</sup>C.J. Edmonds, "Kurdish Nationalism." *Journal of Contemporary History* 6, no. 1 (1971): 88.

common except they happened to be near one another. Each was an autonomous unit. The Basra vilayet in the south was an Arab Shia Muslim area, the Baghdad Vilayet was an Arab mostly Sunni Muslim area, and the Mosul vilayet was a mostly Kurdish Sunni area. As the war drew to a close it became apparent the British would have to find a way to either put them together or figure out a way to keep them separate.<sup>9</sup>

In looking at the three, it appears that Basra and Baghdad could possibly live as one due to their Arab backgrounds. Polk argues the fears of "Pan-Islam" or as it is now known, pan-Arab nationalism, motivated Britain to go to Basra in the first place. The British feared an uprising of all Arab peoples and Muslims. This could cause issues in both Africa and India. To stop the uprising before it began, they decided they needed to control the Middle East, the center of the Pan-Islamic movement.<sup>10</sup> To what extent this is true cannot be determined, but the British were aware of a common bond Arabs felt with one another. It is easy then to see why they would naturally put the Arab vilayets together. This union of Basra and Baghdad from now on will be referred to as Iraq because it is the first piece to the puzzle of modern Iraq. What was not so obvious was what to do with the Kurds in Mosul.

The Kurds are not an Arab people. Racially Aryan, like the Persians, they are Muslim, but are Sunni, unlike the Shi'a Persians. The other vilayets of Iraq were mostly Sunni, but the Kurds felt uncomfortable with them because they were Arab.<sup>11</sup> The Kurds are a people consistently acknowledged as separate from their neighbors who get pushed around, divided up, and ignored by them.<sup>12</sup> There are many myths that explain the emergence of the Kurds as a people, but the history is traced back by their calendar. The calendar began with the Kurds'

<sup>9</sup>Catherwood, *Churchill's Folly*, 25.

<sup>10</sup>Polk, *Understanding Iraq*, 68.

<sup>11</sup>Stephen C. Pelletiere, *The Kurds: An Unstable Element in the Gulf* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1984), 19.

<sup>12</sup>Edgar O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Struggle 1920-1994* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 3.

defeat of the Assyrians almost 3000 years ago.<sup>13</sup> The Kurds are dispersed among modern day Iran, Turkey, Russia, Iraq, and others. They are a proud and militaristic people, often defeating neighboring Arabs and staying on top of military technology and advances.<sup>14</sup> The most important thing to remember about the Kurds is their fiercely separate identity from others around them. Also it is important to note they are not the only ones who believe this. Many other peoples and nations, the Arabs among them, have acknowledged this difference, even if it is hard to explain and trace the origins.<sup>15</sup>

When dealing with Mosul and the Kurds within it, the British had conflicted interests. Helen Chapin Metz asserts the British wanted Mosul to be included in Iraq because oil was there.<sup>16</sup> Most any historian will give this some validity. Steven C. Pelletiere believes in the oil theory as well. What makes his argument different is he believed the British acknowledged the Kurds deserved their own state. They had proved this by including the Kurds in the Treaty of Sévres, to be discussed later, but ultimately it was more convenient to include them in Iraq and take the oil.<sup>17</sup> But perhaps the most interesting assessment is Catherwood's; he does not merely speculate, but shows some good evidence to support his claim that Britain would rather just give up Mosul. By "Britain" he means Churchill who had become secretary of War and Air by 1919. By the time a true decision would be made in Iraq he would lead the discussion as the Secretary of State for the Middle East. In a letter Churchill wrote, but never sent, he calls for Western powers to all leave the Middle East. What he later said out loud was, "The cost of Military establishment in Mesopotamia appears to me to be out of all proportion to any advantage we can ever expect to reap

<sup>13</sup>John Bulloch and Harvey Morris, *No Friends But the Mountains: The Tragic History of the Kurds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 50-59.

<sup>14</sup>O'Ballance, *The Kurdish Struggle*, 5.

<sup>15</sup>Bulloch and Morris, *No Friends But the Mountains*, 50-51.

<sup>16</sup>Helen Chapin Metz, ed., *Iraq: A Country Study* (Washington D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1990), 38.

<sup>17</sup>Pelletiere, *The Kurds*, 58.

from that country.”<sup>18</sup> Churchill did allude to oil as well, but was so concerned with limiting the military presence in Iraq, thereby limiting the budget, that he would do most anything to meet that end.<sup>19</sup> What was not discussed here were the people who lived in what would become Iraq.

So far only preliminary discussions of the Iraq question have been noted. The first real step to deciding on what Iraq would become was the Treaty of Sévres in 1918. The details of this treaty were configured in 1918 after the armistice was signed between the allies and the Turks, but it was never implemented. The treaty, although never used, is important to the Kurds because it validated their feelings that they should have their own state, meaning Mosul should not have been included in Iraq. To start, it is best to explain there are conflicting views on how the Kurds were able to get included in the treaty. It is also helpful to understand what the treaty said about the Kurds. Article 62 laid out a three-month time line to grant the Kurds autonomy and defined where that state should be. Article 64 said that the Kurdish state, within one year of gaining autonomy, needed to go to the League of Nations to show that the majority of the population desired independence. If the League feels they are capable, the independence will be granted at that time.<sup>20</sup>

Three historians have weighed in about the Kurds inclusion in the treaty. Edgar O’Ballance argues the Kurds were taken by surprise in 1918. He says they were not inclined toward a modern form of nationalism and therefore were not prepared for division after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. He also includes that they were not organized enough to take advantage of the new idea of “self-determination” and demand their autonomy.<sup>21</sup> This implies the British were concerned about the Kurds enough

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<sup>18</sup>Catherwood, *Churchill’s Folly*, 73-74.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>20</sup>W.G. Eliphinston, “The Kurdish Question,” *Royal Institute of International Affairs* 22, no. 1 (January 1946): 95.

<sup>21</sup>O’Ballance, *The Kurdish Struggle*, 12-13.

to include concessions for their autonomy. In direct contrast to O’Ballance is W.G. Eliphinston’s view. Eliphinston supports the idea there was a group of Kurds that organized during the war that contacted the Allies in 1918. This contact raised awareness of the Kurds and of their ability to organize that got them included in the treaty.<sup>22</sup> David McDowall falls somewhere in the middle of the previous arguments. McDowall asserts the tribal leaders of certain tribes did work with the British, but there was no greater Kurdish unity. At the tribal level these particular Aghas, or leaders, felt comfortable with the British rule because they were leaving the nomadic life in exchange for city life. They were westernizing. By the time they organized themselves together and realized they would prefer autonomy it was too late.<sup>23</sup> McDowall’s moderate interpretation is the best of the three. Not only does it take into account both of the other arguments’ extremes, but it rectifies them together to form a story that makes sense.

The Treaty of Sévres validated the Kurds’ desire for autonomy, but it was never put into place. The blame for dropping the treaty is typically put in the hands of the Turks, therefore blaming them for the failure to make Mosul independent of Iraq. Something else to note is the Kurds in Turkey were to be joined with the Kurds in Mosul to create a greater Kurdistan. When the treaty was dropped, a Greater Kurdistan was not created and so the Kurds in Turkey remained in Turkey and the Kurds in Mosul in Mosul.<sup>24</sup> There were also Kurds in Russia and Persia. If Mosul was to become part of Iraq the Kurds would then be a nation without a state. They would be spread all over forming a distinct minority in a handful of separate states. If indeed the treaty was passed and the Kurds in Mosul and Turkey united, then half of the world’s Kurds would

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<sup>22</sup>Eliphinston, “The Kurdish Question,” 95.

<sup>23</sup>David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 151.

<sup>24</sup>Nigel, Davidson, “The Termination of the Iraq Mandate,” *Royal Institute of International Affairs* 12, no. 1 (January 1933): 75.

reside in a Kurd-dominated state. After the Treaty of Sévres was scrapped the Kurds joined with the Armenians, an ethnic group in much the same situation as the Kurds, and lobbied at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 for the right to self determination.<sup>25</sup> The Kurds were not a priority at the peace conference and the “Kurdish problem” seemed forgotten. In the Treaty of Lausanne, the final treaty with Turkey signed in 1923, the Kurds were never mentioned.<sup>26</sup> The decision on the Kurds was already made by 1923. The Cairo Conference of 1921 had concluded what would happen to the Mosul vilayet.

In October 1920, Sir Percy Cox became the High Commissioner of Baghdad. He became the standout personality of the Cairo Conference which commenced on March 12th, 1921. Many of the decisions made at the conference are linked directly back to him and to Winston Churchill. Churchill ran the conference as the Secretary of State for the Middle East, but Cox is regarded as the architect of modern Iraq.<sup>27</sup> Toby Dodge goes so far as to assert Cox is to blame for creating and accepting plans for Iraq.<sup>28</sup> In reality Churchill and the thirty-nine other delegates at the conference also had a hand in planning Iraq. By Churchill’s direction the conference focused on a solution to the Iraq problem under the theme of saving Britain money. The whole conference then was focused on the vilayets of Basra, Baghdad, and Mosul. All decisions were discussed in relation to cost of maintenance, the men hoped to create a state they could control on the cheap. Britain was in control of the area under a League of Nations mandate, so the delegates had to come to some conclusion on what to do with the area. It was a British responsibility.

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<sup>25</sup>Edmund Ghareeb, *The Kurdish Question in Iraq* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 6.

<sup>26</sup>Pelletiere, *The Kurds*, 53.

<sup>27</sup>Bulloch and Morris, *No Friends But the Mountains*, 88.

<sup>28</sup>Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation-Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 21.

The idea of a separate Kurdistan being made of the Mosul province was an attractive idea. It would serve as a buffer between British Iraq and Turkey. Churchill supported this because he was concerned about how an Arab leader would treat the Kurds if they were included in Iraq. Also, he feared the Kurds would never accept an Arab ruler. He worried they desired a separate Kurdistan so bad they would fight for it. This would cause an issue because a Kurd revolt would cost more money, something Churchill was desperately trying to avoid. Cox opposed this wholeheartedly. He pushed the unitary state idea and it was granted, perhaps because he was able to make it seem more cost efficient. Cox argued there was no obvious leader for the Kurds as there was for the Arabs. In addition, the Kurds of Mosul would be alone, without the Kurds from Turkey, making the state too small to support and defend itself when the British left. The British would have to stay in Mosul for some time to ensure protection, an expensive venture. In the interest of saving money, the conference decided to include all three vilayets into one state and Iraq was born.<sup>29</sup>

The Cairo Conference has some critics due to the nature of the state they created. Iraq has been unstable and turbulent throughout its short history as a cohesive state. Elizabeth Monroe has said the conference was working for, “An Arab façade with complete British control of administration and finance.”<sup>30</sup> This interpretation coincides with arguments that the British were there for oil, not just to administer a mandate. An Arab façade was a great way to install a pro-British government to continue getting the oil, and cheaply too. Also, the pro British government would help the British control the population, another way to save money on military support. Catherwood calls the conference a dilemma between officials who backed a truly independent Kurdish state and those who cared only about

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<sup>29</sup>Catherwood, *Churchill’s Folly*, 128-149, and Aaron S. Klieman, *Foundations of British Policy in the Arab World: The Cairo Conference of 1921* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 110.

<sup>30</sup>Elizabeth Monroe, *Britain’s Movement in the Middle East 1914-1956* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1963), 53.

British imperial ambitions.<sup>31</sup> Given the differences of opinion of Churchill and Cox, Catherwood has made a good argument. Nader Entessar thinks the idea of a pro-British government in Iraq simply became more important than Kurdish independence or autonomy.<sup>32</sup> This ties in with Monroe's ideas. No matter what the idea it is clear the Kurds were shoved aside in favor of a scheme that was better for Britain. This is not terribly controversial in itself. Given the time frame and Britain's imperial nature, the decision to form Iraq around what is best for Britain would have been obvious to the men at the Cairo Conference.

It is easy to place blame on the men of the Cairo conference for creating a state that could not function properly. Making a state is a challenging task. The delegates did take into account the cultural differences of each vilayet; they just could not seem to come up with a suitable solution to group them. Perhaps the blame is on Turkey for not allowing its Kurds to join the Mosul vilayet. The blame for the failure of a state is a heavy burden to bear. The men in both the Cairo Conference and the men making decisions in Turkey did the best they could with what they knew. No one could have foreseen all the problems of the future. Had these men been able to see the future of Iraq they may have done something differently, but this was not the case. The founding of Iraq was based more in saving money than in looking out for the populations there. Now that Iraq is formed, and failing, it is best to understand why from its origins. Iraq has clearly been troubled from the start. The grouping together of different ethnicities into one state has created different kinds of nationalism. Kurdish nationalism spars with Arab nationalism farther south. There is no cohesive Iraqi nationalism, and perhaps this is one problem that will never be solved. Iraq was constructed as an arbitrary state with three distinct nations to save money rather than to benefit the peoples there.

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<sup>31</sup>Catherwood, *Churchill's Folly*, 125.

<sup>32</sup>Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, 51.