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A Kurdish Warlord on the Turkish-Persian Frontier in the Early Twentieth Century: Isma`il Agha Simko

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During the Great War and the first few years of the post-war period, the dominant personality of the Persian-Turkish frontier was Isma`il Agha, better known as Simko, chieftain of the large Shikak tribe. Cleverly exploiting the possibilities offered by the turbulent history of the region in the first quarter of the 20th century, balancing between the Turks, Russians and Persians, and later British in Iraq, with all of whom he was in regular contact, Simko not only managed to hold his own but to increase the extent of his power and influence in the region. In the aftermath of the war, he set himself up as an independent local ruler, co-operating with a number of leading Kurdish nationalists and challenging the central government. Even after his 'rebellion' was crushed by the modernised Persian army in August 1922 and he had to flee from Persian soil, he remained an influential actor in central Kurdistan, whom both Turkey and the British attempted to use in the favour in the conflict over the status of the Mosul vilayet.

Simko's career was not an atypical one for a Kurdish tribal leader. Most of the powerful Kurdish chieftains strengthened their positions within their tribes through various forms of association with outside forces, most commonly the Ottoman and Persian states but since the late 19th century also the European great powers (and more recently yet, especially the United States of America). What made him unique is the nexus of time and space in which he operated. The Shikak territory, in the mountains to the west of Lake Urmieh, was just inside Persia but so close to the border that even in times of peace their influence extended into Ottoman territory; it was part of the periphery of both states. Until well into the 20th century, the border had not much practical significance for the Kurdish tribes, many of which had pastures on both sides. Nor did the border represent a fixed boundary to which Ottoman and Persian control extended; authority in the frontier districts was in permanent flux.

In 1906 Ottoman troops invaded Persian Azarbaijan and occupied a significant part of the Kurdish-inhabited districts of that province. They remained present, though not in full control, until 1911, when they were expelled by the Russians. The latter had in 1909 invaded the province and occupied Tabriz which was then, together with Rasht, the last bastion of Persia's Constitutional movement. They stationed infantry and cossacks in Tabriz, Khoy, Dilman and Urmieh. Until the outbreak of the Great War these managed to keep the Kurdish tribes in check without actually occupying their territory. The Russian troops were called back at the time of Enver Pasha's Caucasian campaign in December 1914, and in early January 1915 Ottoman troops, aided by Kurdish irregulars, briefly occupied Azarbaijan. Russian troops returned almost a year

later and stayed in the region until Russia in the wake of its revolution withdrew from the war altogether. For a final brief period in 1918, Turkish troops, aided by Kurds, once again controlled parts of Azarbayjan.¹

A complicating factor was the presence of a considerable force of Christian Nestorians in the Urmiyeh area. The Nestorians of Hakkari, who had before the war been in contact with the Russians and with American missionaries in Urmiyeh, felt threatened when the war broke out and fled from Ottoman soil to Urmiyeh and Salmas, seeking Russian protection. Many of them were to help the Russians as advance scouts when these invaded central Kurdistan and often took private revenge on the Muslim population. Christian-Muslim relations, which had been relatively good before, deteriorated badly during the war. The departure of the Russian troops in 1917 left the Nestorians without foreign protection, but by then they were reinforced by numerous Armenian refugees, well-trained, and well-armed with weapons the Russians left behind. In this tense situation, Simko committed the most notorious misdeed of his career. He invited the religious leader of the Nestorians, their patriarch Mar Shimun, to negotiations and had him and his entire company shot dead. This led to a series of mutual massacres between Christians and Muslims. Meanwhile, the British attempted to liaise with the Nestorians at Urmiyeh and organise their irregulars into a fighting force that could halt the Turkish offensive towards Tabriz. This effort failed; most Nestorians evacuated Urmiyeh and fled south, to the British-controlled zone. Later the British resettled them in the Mosul vilayet, where they were used as a barrier against the Turks.²

The conditions due to which Simko could emerge as one of the three warlords on Iran's periphery who seriously threatened the integrity of the state were unique, but in many respects his career exemplifies the relations between Kurdish tribes and the states in whose peripheries they exist. The internal structure of these tribes and the nature of the chieftains' authority over their followers are to a large extent a product of their relations with the state. The first part of this article will sketch the changing relations between Kurdish tribes and the relevant states; in the second part, Simko's rebellion and its aftermath will be studied in some detail.

Kurdish Tribes between Powerful States

Kurdistan has for millennia been not just a frontier area, but a buffer between two or more empires. Unlike Afghanistan, however, it has never been politically distinct, but has been partitioned between two empires, the Ottoman and the Iranian, for almost five centuries. Nevertheless, the natural conditions are such that these, like previous conquerors, could establish only a very tenuous suzerainty over Kurdistan. Direct rule could only rarely be maintained, and usually some form of indirect rule through local

¹ A.C. Wratislaw, *A Consul in the East* (Blackwoods, Edinburgh and London, 1924), pp. 213-14, 229-32; W.E.D. Allen and P. Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields. A History of the Wars on the Turco-Caucasian Border 1818-1921* (Cambridge University Press, 1953); A. Kasravî, *Târîkh-i hijdah sâleh-yi Azarbâyjân* (Amir Kabir, Tehran, 4th impression, 1346/1968).

² J. Joseph, *The Nestorians and their Muslim neighbors* (Princeton University Press, 1961); K.P. Matiyef (Bar-Mattay), *Asurlar: modern çağda Asur ulusal sorunu* (Bet-Froso Nsibin, Södertälje, 1996); Surma d Bayt Mar Samcun, *Doğu Asur kilise gelenekleri: Patrik Mar Samcun'un katli* (Bet-Froso Nsibin, Södertälje, 1993).

chieftains was practised, as it still is in some parts. This contact with well-developed states, stretching over many centuries, could not but have profound effects on the social organisation of Kurdistan. When the Ottomans incorporated most of Kurdistan (c.1515) there existed several *emirates*, state-like units of varying size and organisational complexity, some of which then claimed ancient origins. Their political system more or less resembled that of the Qaraqoyunlu and Aqqoyunlu Turkman confederation-states, with which they had been in relations of alliance and/or vassalage. The Ottoman conquest did not result in the destruction, but in the preservation of the emirates and consolidation of the ruler (*emir* or *mir*)'s position within each emirate. Around 1800 some of these emirates still existed. Their internal organisation by that time appears to have been much influenced by Ottoman state.³ The two emirates in Iranian Kurdistan on which some information is available, Ardalan and Guran, both seem to have differed considerably from those under Ottoman suzerainty: for instance, the ruling stratum in both was largely non-tribal. It is tempting to speculate that this represents differences in organisation and policies of the Ottoman and Iranian states. There are, however, other factors at work that may be equally important: natural conditions, population density, the ratio of settled and nomadic population, etc.

The presence of more than one strong state in the vicinity also had its specific effects on the political process in Kurdistan. For instance, it gave the local chieftains more leverage in dealing with the suzerain state: they could threaten to switch loyalties (or actually do so). Moreover, the local rivals of these chieftains were not dependent on popular support if they desired to replace them but could attempt to invoke the aid of the rival state. In several emirates, the ruling families were thus split in 'pro-Turkish' and 'pro-Iranian' branches.⁴ The nineteenth century witnessed, for obvious reasons, the emergence of 'pro-British' and 'pro-Russian' wings in Kurdistan's ruling circles. By the second half of the century Russia and Britain had become the most significant powers in the environment. The actions of the leading Kurds were strongly influenced by their perception that those states were stronger than the Ottoman and the Iranian, and that both intended to acquire control of Kurdistan. Moreover, the emergence of Kurdish nationalism received a firm boost from the political and military advances these powers made, and, of course, from the news of Greek and Slav independence, due to the powers' support. Most Kurdish nationalists of the period 1880-1930 envisaged an independent state, under British and/or Russian protection. To this day, the nature of the Kurdish nationalist movement is strongly influenced by the presence of the successors of these rival powers, the USA and — until its demise — the Soviet Union, and by the generally perceived need to enlist their support.⁵

³ Two Kurdish emirates under Ottoman suzerainty, Bitlis (as around 1650 AD) and Baban (as of 1820) are described in detail and analysed in my *Agha, Shaikh and State: the Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (Zed Books, London, 1992), pp. 161-73.

⁴ For the Baban emirate this is nicely illustrated in C.J. Rich's diary, *Narrative of a Residence in Koordistan ...* (Duncan, London, 1836), vol. 1, *passim*. Some time after Rich's visit in 1820 the ruling *Mir*, Mahmud Pasha, an unwilling vassal of Baghdad, did in fact switch loyalties and submit to the Iranian Heir Apparent Abbas Mirza, thereby precipitating a war between the two empires.

⁵ Mulla Mustafā Barzani, who among recent contemporary Kurdish leaders was the one most representative of the tribal milieu, was in contact with both powers as early as 1946. He spent 11 years (1947-58) in exile in USSR, and in the Kurdish war in Iraq in spite of all vicissitudes he remained in contact with Soviet representatives and received Soviet support until 1972, when he received definite promises of substantial aid from America. Before that date he had on many occasions attempted to elicit American support, even declaring his willingness to join the USA as the 51st state. Since 1991, the two

Emirate, Confederacy, Tribe

It is especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that great changes in the social and political organisation of Kurdistan took place, as central control by the Ottoman and Iranian states became increasingly effective. The consequence of the elaboration and refining of the administrative networks of the encompassing states was that the highly complex indigenous forms of political organisation (the emirates) gave way to simpler ones.

The basic organisational pattern of the emirates had been the same as that of many Middle Eastern states, the most obvious parallels being the Turkman confederation-states. The ruler belonged to a chiefly lineage that usually claimed prestigious descent different from that of the powerful tribes of the emirate. There was no set rule of succession, only certain minimum requirements of descent (belonging to the ruling lineage), intelligence, courage, etc. The actual selection of a successor usually involved fierce competition within the ruling lineage and numerous intrigues by internal and external interested powers. The ruler was surrounded by a court consisting of leading military men (tribal chieftains) and civilian officials and scholars. There was a standing army or armed retinue drawn from different tribes of the emirate as well as from outside. The loyalty of this retinue was ideally to the ruler alone, but they constituted only a small fraction of the total military strength of the emirate. The bulk of the army consisted of tribesmen, led by their own chieftains, who could mobilise them in case of need. The tribesmen, usually nomadic or semi-nomadic, constituted in fact a military 'caste' that dominated a lower stratum of cultivators and artisans: non-tribal Kurds, Christians, Jews. Not all tribes were equally closely bound to the emirate. The permanent core was organised in a number of confederacies, typically two, each again under a chiefly lineage unrelated to the component tribes. In none of the cases that I studied more closely could I ascertain whether these confederacies had already been in existence prior to the emirate. Legend suggests so for some,⁶ but it seems to me that in at least several cases the emirate itself was the *raison d'être* of the confederacies.

It was the organisation of the tribes into confederacies more or less balancing each other that made the *mir's* (divide and) rule possible. The chieftains of these confederacies were the *mir's* advisers and counsellors, and in many cases the real makers of policy. Each of the component tribes also had its own chieftain, but these appear to have been of the *primus inter pares* type, and rarely played important political roles.

In emirates that had more than one urban centre the *mir* kept the most important town as his own residence and capital, and appointed governors, usually from among his close relatives, to the other towns and surrounding districts. These governors took care of military and financial affairs and the most important judicial cases; other affairs were left to the chieftains of tribes or sub-tribes. As yet, I have found few data about the

major Iraqi Kurdish parties have been highly dependent on the USA for protection against Saddam Hussein. The PKK (of Turkish Kurdistan) has depended much on Syrian patronage and has vied — largely unsuccessfully — for Soviet and later Russian support.

⁶ For instance, the Bilbasi confederacy in the emirate of Bitlis had, according to the *Sharafnâme*, come from the Hakkari district before the emirate was established; Amir Sharaf Khân Bidlîsî, *Sharafnâme: Târikh-i Mufasssal-i Kurdistân*, ed. M. `Abbâsî (Ilmi, Tehran, 1343/1965).

division of revenue between tribal chieftains, governors, the *mir* and the central government. Most probably this showed great fluctuations, as the actual balance of power between these authorities changed frequently.

Not all tribes belonged to one emirate or the other. There were probably always (and certainly around 1800) groups that managed to maintain a delicate independence, by balancing emirates against each other: nomadic tribes whose migration routes passed through more than one emirate, semi-nomadic (transhumant) tribes living at the periphery of the emirates. These tribes belonged, as it were, to the frontier of the emirates. The political processes there replicated, on a lower, less complicated level, those of the empires' frontiers, i.e. those in and between the emirates.

The distinction made here between 'confederacy' and 'tribe' is one of degree rather than of kind. Kurdish usage does not make the same distinction: both may be called *ashiret* or *taifeh*, and the same terms may even be applied to sections of tribes. The Kurdish tribes are political associations consisting of at least one descent group (but usually several) with a number of other people who have attached themselves to it. Quite different degrees of complexity are possible and do or did in fact occur in Kurdistan: tribes consisting of one or two lineages, tribes consisting of a number of (named) associations of lineages, tribes consisting of associations of associations of lineages, etc. Size and degree of complexity form a continuum, and it is largely a matter of choice where one finds the term 'confederacy' more appropriate than 'tribe'. A confederacy, as I use the term, is a large-scale association, less integrated than a tribe, and with less clearly defined boundaries. It is a political association of tribes that previously had an independent existence and that retain a separate identity. Individual persons are referred to by the name of their tribe rather than that of their confederacy. When there is a tendency to invent a common ancestor this suggests increasing integration and I would use the term 'tribe' rather than 'confederacy'.

In confederacies and tribes there are chieftains at several levels of segmentation: confederacy, tribe, lineage, extended family, household there may be one or more intermediate levels between the tribe and the maximal lineage: I shall speak of 'sub-tribes'. In confederacies and large tribes the chieftains generally belonged to separate chiefly lineages not closely related to the commoners and had an armed retinue to enforce their rule, whereas in smaller tribes the chieftain was (is) usually related to the commoners and ruled by consent rather than by coercion. In different historical periods it was chieftains of different levels of segmentation that played the most significant political parts. In recent times, for instance, several former confederacies have continued to exist, if only in name. The paramount chieftain enjoys respect but has no political functions any more. Real political power is in the hands of the chiefs of tribes or, frequently, sub-tribes, who were much less important two centuries ago. This change is connected less with economic changes than with changes in the political environment, i.e. the central state, as will be discussed below.

Kurdish Tribes and the Ottoman State

In the first half of the nineteenth century the Ottoman and Iranian governments, in their drive for administrative reform, abolished the remaining Kurdish emirates. These reforms were the result of European pressure, as the Kurds realised only too well. The

destruction of the last great emirate, Botan, and the capture of its ruler Bedir Khan Beg (1847), was the immediate result of British intervention with the Porte. Bedir Khan Beg was responsible for the massacre of some of his Nestorian subjects, and the British demanded his punishment.⁷

The dissolution of the emirates resulted in chaos and lawlessness. Tribal conflicts, no longer checked by the emirs, proliferated. Not only the emirates as such, also most of the tribal confederacies fell apart. Ambitious chieftains attempted to usurp as much as possible of the power formerly belonging to the *mirs* — which involved a lot of raiding, feuding and warfare. Many leaders of the ‘chief’ type had to cede to ‘brigands’.⁸ Contemporary reports all mention the absence of physical security. The state was as yet too weak to restore law and order. The most that provincial governors could do was to send punitive raids, or support one chieftain against others and occasionally back him with military support. They did not have the authority to negotiate or impose a solution in the many tribal conflicts.

In this Hobbesian situation there remained one type of ‘traditional’ authority who could restore some kind of order: the *sheykh*. Sheykhs are ‘holy men’, usually associated with a sufi or dervish order. Many have reputations for piety, wisdom and miraculous powers that earn them wide respect. Many people had (and have) a special relationship with a particular sheykh whom they visit(ed) periodically: sometimes just a courtesy visit, but more often with the intention of receiving a protective amulet, a cure for barrenness or disease, advice in spiritual or worldly matters, mediation in a conflict. Sheykhs are generally not associated with any particular tribe (although an entire tribe may consider themselves the followers of one and the same sheykh), so that they are not party to any conflicts between tribes. This and the wide respect some of them enjoyed made them the only persons remaining that could resolve such conflicts — as go-betweens, counsellors, mediators, notaries and guarantors of the agreements reached. The successful resolution of tribal conflicts in turn increased their prestige and political influence. Gradually some sheykhs took over a part of the role of the former emirs. After a few decades of chaos and insecurity, from ca.1860 we find sheykhs as the most influential political leaders all over Kurdistan. It is not accidental that most of the early Kurdish national revolts (until the 1930s) were led by sheykhs: these were virtually the only leaders that could make a number of tribes act in concert. Another factor that contributed to the increasing political influence of these primarily religious leaders was European missionary activity, which resulted in anti-Christian feeling and a stressing of the Muslim identity of the Kurds. Sheykhs not only resolved conflicts: precisely because their political power derived from their ability to do so, they also needed conflicts if they wished to increase their power. Some ambitious sheykhs therefore actually fanned conflicts between rival chieftains in order to impose their authority.⁹

⁷ For these events and the situation in Botan after the collapse of the emirate, see van Bruinessen, *Agha*, pp.177-182. Missionary activity in central Kurdistan is excellently described in Joseph, *The Nestorians* and, more extensively, in Hans-Lukas Kieser, *Der verpasste Friede: Mission, Ethnie und Staat in den Ostprovinzen der Türkei 1839-1938* (Chronos, Zürich, 2000).

⁸ See Richard Tapper, ‘Introduction’, in R. Tapper, ed., *The Conflict of Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan* (Croom Helm, London, 1983).

⁹ A highly amusing but true account of how a shrewd sheykh manipulated conflict between two rival chieftains and thereby appropriated part of their power as well as their property was written for Basile Nikitine by his Kurdish teacher, the former secretary of the sheykh concerned, Mihemmed Siddiq of Nehri. See B. Nikitine and E.B. Soane, ‘The tale of Suto and Tato. Kurdish text with translation and

Gradually, and not without reversals, the Ottoman state and its twentieth-century successors brought Kurdistan under closer central control, breaking the power of the great tribal chieftains and sheykhs. The result was not the complete dissolution of the tribes but their change of character. Successful centralisation broke larger structures up but thereby freed their segments for independent action. The deeper the state and its administrative organs penetrated into Kurdish society, the smaller the tribal entities with which it interacted. Whereas until the early 19th century Ottoman and Persian governors had dealt with the Kurds through largely autonomous emirs ruling large tribal conglomerates, in whose internal affairs they but rarely intervened, the first great administrative reforms replaced the emirs by centrally appointed district governors, who administered the tribal population through chieftains of large tribes and confederacies or an occasional influential sheykh. Further extension of the state bureaucracy broke up the large tribes and confederacies and resulted in smaller chieftains being the middlemen between state and society. The relevant tribal units thus became ever smaller, from emirates to confederacies to large tribes to smaller tribes. With each step, they came to resemble more the ideal model of the tribe as a large descent group. Kinship, which had always been central in tribal ideology, became more important than political affiliation in the actual functioning of the tribe. Instead of undergoing de-tribalisation, Kurdish society became in a certain sense even more tribal. With the overarching confederate structures gone, narrow tribal loyalties became more pronounced and tribal feuds increased.¹⁰

This general trend of ‘devolution’ of the tribes was sometimes reversed, if only for a short time, when central authority weakened or when for some reason the state found the presence of strong tribes in its interest. This was for instance the case when the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II recruited cavalry regiments, the Hamidiye, from Kurdish tribesmen. Each regiment consisted of 500 to 1150 men of the same tribe, commanded by their own chieftain. The ostensible duty of the Hamidiye was to guard the frontier against foreign (i.e., Russian) incursions and to keep the Armenian population of the Empire's eastern provinces in check. For the sultan they represented a parallel system of control of the East, independent of the regular bureaucracy and army which he did not fully trust. The Hamidiye enjoyed a high degree of legal immunity — neither the civilian administration nor even the regular military hierarchy had any authority over them, and no court had the competence to adjudicate crimes committed by members of the Hamidiye — and the regiments turned into virtually independent chiefdoms. Their commanders could not only consolidate their control of their own tribes but also expand it at the expense of neighbouring tribes that did not constitute Hamidiye regiments. The establishment of the Hamidiye did not entail the creation of new tribes but it strengthened some of the existing tribes economically and politically at the expense of their neighbours and it made them internally more hierarchical.¹¹

The Hamidiye were hated by reform-minded Turks as representing the worst aspects of Hamidian reaction, and after the Young Turk *coup d'état* of 1908 they were dissolved.

notes', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*, 3, 1 (1923), pp. 69-106. For an extensive discussion of the political role of sheykhs in Kurdistan, see van Bruinessen, *Agha*, pp. 220-57, 296-9.

¹⁰ See the more detailed analysis in van Bruinessen, *Agha*, pp. 192-5; also M. van Bruinessen, ‘Les Kurdes, États et tribus’, *Études kurdes* 1 (Paris, 2000), 9-31, esp. 11-4.

¹¹ B. Kodaman, *Sultan II. Abdulhamit devri Dogu Anadolu politikasi* (Ankara, Türk Kültürünü Arastirma Enstitüsü, 1987), pp. 21-65; S. Duguid, "The politics of unity: Hamidian policy in Eastern Anatolia", *Middle Eastern Studies* 9 (1973), 139-156; van Bruinessen, *Agha*, pp. 185-9.

A few years later, however, some of them were revived under another name. They did not play a major part in the Great War, at least not as part of the Ottoman forces.¹² During the war years and in the aftermath of the war, weakened central control made it possible for several large confederacies to reassert themselves under powerful chieftains. They regained their former unity and even drew neighbouring tribes into their orbit. Several of these revived confederacies even reached the newspaper headlines in the 1920s, mainly for their association with Kurdish nationalism: the Hevêrkan (east of Mardin in Turkey), the Jalali (around Mt. Ararat), the Pizhdar (east of Qaleh Dizeh, Iraq) and the Shikak, who are the subject of the case-study below.

In this period the organisation of the Hevêrkan and the Shikak confederacies, and probably also of the Jalali, differed at a few points from the 'ideal' pattern. Fredrik Barth has provided us with a somewhat idealised description of the Jaf confederacy.¹³ In this description the Jaf consist of a number of lineages, some of them 'real' Jaf, others more peripheral, all of them subordinated to a single ruling lineage, the Begzade. The Hevêrkan and Shikak differed from this model in that there was not one, but several competing chiefly lineages, and each of them was associated with a specific component tribe of the confederacy. This seems to me an indication of the recent (re-)constitution of the confederacies. Their growth and integration went together with the victory of one of the chiefly lineages.

The component tribes maintained their own identity. Each inhabited a well-defined territory and owned or had rights in well-defined pasturelands. Leadership in these tribes seems more permanent than in the confederacies. They were by and large marriage isolates - though not the minimal ones, given the strong preference for father's brother's daughter marriage. These component tribes could be quite heterogeneous, as in the case of the Hevêrkan, where some were Muslim, some Yezidi, and where even Christian groups were considered as part of the confederacy. Not all of these tribes had equal political status within the confederacy: there were 'central' tribes, which dominated the confederacy politically and militarily, and more marginal 'client' or 'vassal' tribes, that had joined it because of its success or had been subjected by it. The latter were the first to break away in times of adversity.¹⁴

In periods of relative quiet it was virtually impossible for ambitious chieftains to rise to or maintain a position of effective paramount leadership of such large confederacies, unless supported by a strong central state. Prestigious descent, lavish hospitality, wisdom, readiness to help his subjects (characteristics of the 'chief' type of chieftain) might be necessary to make a chieftain respected, but were rarely sufficient to guarantee him general recognition as a paramount ruler. In such periods there were several competitors for paramount leadership over the confederacy, each recognised by some of the tribesmen only. Within the component tribes there were also several aspirant chieftains, each of whom allied himself with one of the competitors at the confederate level. Thus resulted a factional system of the 'chequer-board' type, in which the relevant units were sections of the component tribes.

¹² According to Allen and Muratoff, *Caucasian Battlefields*, p. 296, in the first war year the Ottoman Kurds were organised in four Kurdish tribal cavalry divisions. They proved to be so ineffective that two of them were demobilised again.

¹³ F. Barth, *Principles of Social Organization in Southern Kurdistan* (Jorgensen, Oslo, 1953).

¹⁴ On the Hevêrkan: van Bruinessen, *Agha*, pp. 101-5; *Asiretler Raporu* (Kaynak Yayinlari, Istanbul, 1998), pp. 234-5.

At times of weak government, however, such as the period 1915-1930, the rival chieftains could indulge in the kind of military activities that increased their hold over the tribes — the ‘brigand’ aspect of the chieftain. These included raiding caravans or towns, or the villages of neighbouring tribes — an excellent means of reinforcing the unity of one’s own tribe — but apparently raids against villages or camp groups of one’s own tribe were equally important. These raids were directed mainly against the ‘non-tribal’ subjects of a rival chieftain and the client (sub-)tribes that recognised his authority. There was usually little killing and destruction in these raids; only the animals were driven away and movable property taken, and both might later be partially restored. These raids were carried out by the chieftain’s retinue, tough warriors of diverse origins (sometimes even including non-Kurds), who had cut all previous social ties (‘they were ready to kill their own parents if the chieftain ordered them to’, as one of my informants explained); they lived with and at the expense of the chieftain, to whom alone they were loyal. In more peaceful times these retainers performed the related task of collecting the tithe for the chieftain and of enforcing the labour corvée from the ‘non-tribal’ subjects. If a number of raids were successful, villages and tribal sections would switch their loyalties to the raiding chieftain both out of fear and because the most courageous and cunning chieftain is thought to be the best.¹⁵

‘Brigand’ and ‘chief’ are not necessarily different *types* of chieftains; they are rather complementary aspects of the ideal chieftain. Scions of old, established tribal dynasties may act as brigands as well as any parvenu who challenges them. It is largely external political factors that determine which aspect will prevail. It should be stressed, however, that even the most successful ‘brigand’ chieftains did not rise to power by the above means alone. They supplemented them with the method employed by chieftains of all types and in all periods: political alliances with outside powers. These outside powers might include other tribes or confederacies (it is significant that the great chieftains of the Shikak and the Hevêrkan acquired a large following among *other* tribes before they completely dominated the ‘central’ tribes of their own confederacies), as well as urban merchants, but the most significant powers were, of course, the states. Even when the state had no effective control, a chieftain might derive much power from it — as long as it was not entirely absent and could in theory apply the ultimate sanction of violence. The state might recognise a chieftain as the one and only paramount leader of his tribe or confederacy in exchange for promises of ‘loyalty’. If the Ottoman Sultan (who was also widely accepted as the Caliph) recognised a chieftain, this in itself was already effective. Frequently, however, recognition by the state was substantiated with significant gifts and by increasing the coercive powers of the recognised chieftain.

From the last decades of the nineteenth century on, many chieftains thought it useful to establish contacts with Russia and/or Britain besides the states of the region. These powers, though despised, were seen as more powerful (and therefore more useful allies) than the Sultan or the Shah. The British appear to have remained non-committal until the Great War, but Russia several times invited leading Kurds on tours of the Caucasus

¹⁵ The career of a chieftain who applied these methods with great success, Hajo of the Hevêrkan confederacy (flour. ca. 1920-30) is described in some detail in van Bruinessen, *Agha*, pp. 101-5..

and Georgia, made them many promises and distributed much money and other presents among chieftains,¹⁶ which strengthened the latter's positions.

Tribes and Non-Tribal Population

It should not be assumed that at any period in the past all Kurds were 'tribal'. There have always been large numbers of Kurdish 'non-tribal' peasants (variously called *kurmanj*, *guran*, *rayat*, *miskên*), with no autonomous social organisation beyond shallow lineages. The tribesmen that dominated and exploited them superimposed their own organisational structure on theirs. Thus a *kurmanj* living on land controlled by the Shikak confederacy might identify himself with a particular tribe or subtribe of that confederacy, and even feel antagonism towards *kurmanj* living with rival Shikak sections. They might play a part, though mainly as victims, in feuds between sub-tribes, but no one would consider them as Shikak proper. The tribesmen were a military elite, usually (but not necessarily) nomadic or transhumant pastoralists. The term *ashir* or *ashiret* is often used not to denote any particular tribe, but the tribesmen as a sort of military caste. Several nineteenth-century travellers observed that the terms *ashiret* and *sipahi* — the latter referred to the traditional Ottoman military class, the feudal cavalry — were used interchangeably in Kurdistan.¹⁷

Since many nomadic tribesmen have settled and taken up agriculture the difference between tribal and 'non-tribal' Kurds has become less obvious. It is however still recognised by the Kurds themselves, and is frequently reflected in the control of land. Tribesmen generally own some land; informants from several Kurdish tribes in Iran claimed not to know of any fellow-tribesman who is not at least a *khurdeh-malik* (small landowner). 'Non-tribal' Kurds, on the other hand, were usually tenants, sharecroppers or landless agricultural labourers. *Rayats* who received title to land under the Iranian Land Reform have not, as yet, been accepted as equal to the tribesmen, in spite of the fact that they differ very little from the sedentary tribesmen.

Although within any one tribe a rather strict caste-like division was maintained between the tribesmen and their non-tribal subjects, there appears at times to have been a significant mobility between the two strata. The rapid growth shown by some tribes at times of prosperity (increases by 200 per cent within a five to ten year period were not rare) was only possible by the incorporation of 'non-tribal' elements from elsewhere. The reverse process, de-tribalisation, could result from conquest by another tribe, or from impoverishment followed by settlement.

Muslims and Christians

Until recently, the Kurds, tribal and non-tribal, were not the only inhabitants of the Turco-Persian frontier, but they shared this habitat with other ethnic groups, the most

¹⁶ B. Nikitine, *Irânî ki man shinâkhtam* (Ma'rifat, Tehran, 1329/1951), p. 229; W. Eagleton, Jr, *The Kurdish Republic of 1946* (Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 7. Nikitine was the Russian consul in Urmieh at the time; his memoirs are therefore a major primary source.

¹⁷ E.g. Rich, *Narrative*, p. 88; C. Sandreczki, *Reise nach Mosul und durch Kurdistan nach Urmia* (Steinkopf, Stuttgart, 1857), vol. 2, p. 263.

significant of which were Christians (Armenians and Assyrians) and Jews. Most of the craftsmen and many urban merchants belonged to these ethnic groups. The majority of the Christians were, however, agriculturalists, often more prosperous than the non-tribal Kurds because they possessed a more sophisticated technology. At most places, they were dominated politically and exploited economically by Kurdish tribes, but this was not everywhere the case. The district of Van had until the Great War a large, rural as well as urban, Armenian population that was not subjected to any one tribe (although not immune to raids by Kurdish tribesmen, especially after the establishment of the Hamidiye.¹⁸ The most important Christian population in the present context, however, were the Nestorian (Assyrian) communities of Hakkari.¹⁹ As among the Kurds, there were tribal and non-tribal (*rayat*) Nestorian communities. Each tribal community had its own political and military leaders (*malik*) but all recognised the Nestorian patriarch (a function hereditary in the Mar Shimun family) as their highest authority. The relations between the Kurds and the tribal Nestorians were long those of equals; the patriarch mediated in Kurdish tribal quarrels, and Nestorians often had recourse to a Kurdish *sheykh*.²⁰

There was a marked deterioration in Christian-Muslim relations during the nineteenth century, when the European powers increased their missionary efforts among the Christians of Kurdistan. Both Christians and Kurds perceived the activity of the missionaries as a preparation for more direct interference by the Powers. The Christians, feeling they had powerful protectors, began to resist the traditional exploitation and oppression by Kurdish chieftains. Many Kurds, understandably, felt threatened by the growing control of the European powers over the Ottoman and Iranian governments, by the increasing missionary activity in Kurdistan, and by the resulting militancy of the local Christians; they directed their anger against the latter. This increasing antagonism was to make the Kurds receptive to the pan-Islamist propaganda of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876-1908) and to lead to several massacres of Christians.²¹

Pan-Islamism and Kurdish Nationalism

The loyalties of Kurdish tribesmen are embedded in a system of segmentary alliance and opposition. In the period under consideration, however, there appeared two important ideologies that appealed to wider loyalties than the tribal ones: pan-Islamism and Kurdish nationalism. There is a certain similarity between the pan-Islamic and

¹⁸ See G. Wiessner, *Hayoths Dzor - Xavasar. Ethnische, ökonomische und kulturelle Transformation eines ländlichen Siedlungsgebiets der östlichen Türkei seit dem 19. Jahrhundert.* (Reichert, Wiesbaden, 1997). This is an excellent micro-history of the 'Valley of the Armenians' (the Khoshab valley south of Van). The early occupation of Van by Russian troops saved most of the inhabitants of this valley from the deportations and massacres of 1915. Many fled during the war; those who remained were forced out by Kurdish tribes after the withdrawal of the last Russian troops in 1917 and fled across the Persian border.

¹⁹ The term 'Nestorian', which refers to their religious affiliation, was at the time concerned the most common; the communities themselves prefer the name 'Assyrian', which includes also the Chaldaeans (East Syrians recognising the authority of the Church of Rome) and, for the nationalists among them, the West Syrians ('Jacobites') as well. Cf. Joseph, *Nestorians*, pp. 3-21.

²⁰ Joseph, *Nestorians*, pp. 33-7; M. Chevalier, *Les montagnards chrétiens du Hakkâri et du Kurdistan septentrional* (Département de Géographie de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1985), pp. 90-7, 206-20.

²¹ In 1843 and 1846, Nestorians of central Kurdistan; in 1894-6, Armenians; in 1915, Armenians, followed by all Christian groups.

Kurdish nationalist movements on the one hand and the states on the other, in their relations with the Kurdish tribes and chieftains. For the chieftains these movements offered the same ideological and material sources of power as the state. The movements, on the other hand, needed the tribes to give them military strength, but they found them as unstable a basis as the states did. This is especially true of the nationalist movement: tribal division has always been its main weakness.

The pan-Islamic movement was closely linked to the Ottoman state or, more precisely, to the Sultan and Caliph. It became influential in Kurdistan for at least three reasons: first, the European powers and their perceived support for the Christians in Kurdistan aroused Kurdish anxieties. The 'Christian threat' made Muslim solidarity appear necessary for defensive reasons. Moreover, pan-Islamism was to give the Kurdish tribesmen a licence to loot Christian property. Secondly, it was in the interest of the sheykhs, the most influential leaders in Kurdistan, to strengthen Islamic sentiment. They were its most fervent propagandists. Thirdly, Sultan Abdülhamid II, the chief initiator of the pan-Islamic movement and the founder and patron of the Hamidiye, was perceived by the Kurdish chieftains as their protector against the reform-minded state bureaucracy that desired to break their powers. His successors inherited these loyalties.

According to some observers, pan-Islamic propaganda was so effective that in 1914-15 almost all Kurds (including those of Iran) responded to the call for *jihad*, but others seriously contest their commitment to the Ottoman-Islamic cause. Basile Nikitine, the Russian consul in Urmiyeh, claims that all Kurdish chieftains, including those that had been responding positively to Russian overtures and had previously accepted Russian money, obeyed the call for Holy War.²² Other sources emphasise the pragmatism or opportunism of the Kurdish tribal chieftains during the war. They took part when there was a possibility of rapid gains and looting but avoided dangerous engagements. Kurdish conscripts deserted massively, and various influential chieftains, including some former Hamidiye commanders, sided with the Russians.²³

Kurdish nationalism developed partly as a reaction to and imitation of Armenian nationalism and (later) the Young Turk movement. Both the British and the Russians stimulated this nationalism, which they intended to use against the Ottoman state. What appears to have been the first serious attempt to establish something like an independent Kurdish state was made in 1880 by Ubeydullah, a sheykh of great influence in the districts south-east of Lake Van. With an army recruited from the many tribes under his influence, he invaded Iranian Azarbayjan, where many of the local tribes joined him.²⁴ The sheykh had the tacit support of Sultan Abdülhamid II, who approved of the idea of a Kurdish vassal state on formerly Iranian territory, and who apparently intended to use the sheykh against the Armenian revolutionaries. Not deeming the Sultan's support sufficient, Ubeydullah also wrote letters to the British

²² Nikitine, *Irâni*, pp. 229-36; id., *Les Kurdes, Étude Sociologique et Historique* (Klincksieck, Paris, 1956), pp. 216-23.

²³ Kamal Madhar Ahmad, *Kurdistan During the First World War* (Saqi, London, 1994), pp. 90, 91, 92, 130, based on a variety of Russian sources.

²⁴ Joseph, *Nestorians*, pp. 107-13; W. Jwaideh, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: its Origins and Development*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Syracuse University, 1960, pp. 212-39; van Bruinessen, *Agha*, pp. 328-9.

government to inform them of his intentions.²⁵ He failed, but the ideal of an independent Kurdish state remained. It was embraced by many chieftains, if only because it seemed to promise them more personal freedom and power.

Modern nationalism developed in relatively limited circles of educated Kurds living in Istanbul and other major cities. A central role in it was played by members of the large family of Bedir Khan, the last ruler of the emirate of Botan. Emin Ali Bedir Khan led the 'separatist' wing of the Kurdish movement that surfaced in Istanbul after 1908; Sheykh Ubeydullah's son Abdulqadir, who enjoyed more authority among the common Kurdish population, represented the moderate, 'cultural' wing of the movement.²⁶ One of the Bedir Khanids, Abdurrazzaq, had fallen out with the Sultan in 1906 and gone into exile in Russia. By 1912 he had settled in West Azarbayjan, where he became the major proponent of Kurdish nationalism. According to one source, he started publishing a (Kurdish and Turkish) journal named *Kurdistan* from Urmiyeh.²⁷ In 1913 he founded, with Russian support, a Kurdish cultural association in the town of Khoy, which later that year opened the first Kurdish school.²⁸

During the First World War, pan-Islamic sentiment proved on the whole stronger than Kurdish national feeling, and there were no serious attempts to separate Kurdish territory from the Ottoman Empire.²⁹ Abdurrazzaq Bedir Khan took, with a Kurdish force of some 500 men, part in operations against the Ottomans alongside the Russians, but his efforts appear to have remained insignificant and not to have provoked the large Kurdish uprising he probably hoped for — Turkish exaggerated perceptions notwithstanding.³⁰ The tribes had little affinity with the idea of a Kurdish nation state.

After the Ottoman defeat, however, nationalism spread rapidly all across Kurdistan. There was a general awareness of president Wilson's 'fourteen points' (which included the principle of self-determination³¹) and of British plans for a Kurdish buffer-state between Turkey and Mesopotamia. As an independent Kurdish state became feasible, many sheykhs and tribal chieftains suddenly became nationalists and revolted. The difference between such national rebellions and the more traditional type of a chieftain's *yaghigiri* was not a sharp one, as may be shown by the case of Simko's rebellion, the most important of the type to occur in Iranian Kurdistan.

²⁵ Joseph, *Nestorians*, p. 109f.

²⁶ Malmîsanij, *Cezira Botanli Bedirhaniler ve Bedirhani Ailesi Dernegi'nin Tutanaklari* (Apec, Stockholm, 1994); van Bruinessen, *Agha*, pp. 275-9.

²⁷ J. Khaznadâr, *Rûznâme-nigârî dar Kurdistan*, tr. (from Kurdish) by A. Sharifi (privately published, Mahabad, 1357/1978), p. 5. This is not confirmed by Celîl or any other source.

²⁸ Abdurrazzaq's adventures are detailed in Celîlê Celîl, *Jiyana Rewsenbîrî û Siyasî ya Kurdan* (Jîna Nû, Uppsala, 1985), pp. 114-51; Kamal Madhar Ahmad adds that "twenty-nine pupils enrolled in the first class, in which they received instruction in the Kurdish language, using the Cyrillic alphabet in writing, and studied Russian language and literature. The school had also a small hospital attached to it." (Ahmad, *Kurdistan*, p. 61).

²⁹ A telling passage in the memoirs of the Kurdish nationalist Zinar Silopi (pseudonym of Jamilpashazade Qadri Beg) relates to his failure to find willing ears for his propaganda among Kurdish officers, due to the prevailing pan-Islamic feeling; Z. Silopi, *Doza Kürdistan* (Stewr, Beyrouth, 1969), pp. 38-39.

³⁰ Celîl, *Jiyana Rewsenbîrî*, pp. 150-1; J. McCarthy, *Death and Exile: the Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims, 1821-1922* (The Darwin Press, Princeton, 1995), p. 184.

³¹ It was especially Wilson's ideas on self-determination that had an impact on the Kurds. Lenin's and Stalin's theses on the same subject were as yet not influential and only became part of Kurdish political discourse in then 1950s and 1960s.

Simko and the Shikak Confederacy

Simko rose to paramount leadership of the Shikak, the second largest Kurdish confederacy in Iran. Only the Kalhur, living west of Kirmanshah, exceed them in numbers. The Shikak inhabit(ed) the mountainous districts of Somay and Bradost, west of Salmas and Urmiyeh. Around 1920 they numbered some 2000 households, non-tribal subjects not included.

There are no statistics on the neighbouring tribes for that period, but figures from the late 1960s give an indication of the relative strengths of the tribes as they may have been in Simko's time:³²

Shikak	4400 households	Mamash	950
Milan	2030	Zarza	750
Mangur	1500	Piran	650
Herki	1350	Begzadeh	500
Jalali	1135	Haydaran	300

It should be noted, however, that most of these tribes have sections living across the border, which are not included in these figures. Notably the Herki and the Haydaran are stronger than these figures suggest.

By 1920 those Shikak who remained fully nomadic were already a minority. They used *khaliseh* (crownlands) summer-pastures in the Tergevar and Dasht-i Bil districts, and spent the winters in the plains of Salmas and Urmiyeh. Most of the tribe were transhumant, spending the winter in mountain villages. The Shikak dominated a *kurmanj* population ('non-tribal' Kurdish peasants) that was three times more numerous than themselves and they had a similar parasitic/symbiotic relationship with the Christians in their midst. Many of the latter were quite rich; they were not only cultivators and craftsmen but also pastoralists, several of them owning something like 1000 sheep and 40 horse. In summer these animals went together with the flocks of the Shikak to the *yaylaq*, accompanied by one or more members of the family, while the other men remained in the village to cultivate.³³

Additional income to the tribe was generated by raiding: the Shikak had one of the worst reputations as robbers and raiders (and presently as smugglers). Some authors even claimed that this, and not animal husbandry, was their chief occupation. It appears that their raids were directed not so much at trading caravans as against the settled population of the plains and valleys: Christian Assyrians (Nestorians or converts to one of the European or American churches) and Shiite Azaris. They did not take loot indiscriminately, however; Nikitine found, in fact, that the poor population of the plains had a rather favourable opinion of Jafar Agha (Simko's elder brother, responsible for

³² H. Arfa, *The Kurds. An Historical and Political Study* (Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 48; M.J. Mashkûr, *Nazarî bi târîkh-i Azarbâyyân va âsâr-i bâstânî va jam`iyatshinâsî-yi ân* (Anjuman-i Asâr-i Millî, Tehran, 1349/1971), p. 190; A. Dihqân, *Sarzamîn-i Zardasht. Ouzâ'-i tabî'î, siyâsî, iqtisâdî, farhangî, ijtimâ'î va târîkhî-yi Rizâ'iyeh* (Ibn Sina, Tehran, 1348/1969), p. 60.

³³ Ghilan, 'Les Kurdes persans et l'invasion ottomane', *Revue du Monde Musulman*, 5 (1908), pp. 7, 10, 14.

much of the bad reputation of his tribe), for ‘souvent, après avoir dépouillé un richard, il distribuait une partie du butin aux miséreux’.³⁴

The Shikak consist of numerous tribes of quite unequal size and status: the lists I found add up to 25, of which nine occur in most.³⁵ Three of these are generally mentioned as the central, politically dominant tribes: Avdovi, Mamedi (or Mamdoi) and Kardar. The others appear more peripheral, joining the tribes mentioned when these were led by a great chieftain, but otherwise keeping a low profile. Some were apparently in a dependent position as ‘client’ tribes. Thus Ghilan described the strong sub-tribe Henareh as:

tribu...dans une espèce de vassalité à l’égard des Chéqqaq, car leur chef doit être accepté par l’Agha de ces derniers.... Ils n’aiment pas la guerre, sont surtout marchands et éleveurs de bétail; mais les Chéqqaq les poussent dans leurs guerres, et occasionnent d’ailleurs contre eux des représailles des tribus qu’ils lésaient.³⁶

When Blau visited the area in 1857, the Henareh were still considered a fully separate tribe, neighbour to the Shikak; in all more recent lists they are mentioned as a component tribe of the Shikak with no apparent lower status. Similarly the Mamedi, who were a leading Shikak tribe by the turn of the century, were in 1857 an independent nomadic tribe.³⁷ This means that the Shikak grew into the present confederacy in the second half of the nineteenth century, a period when many other confederacies were in decay.

One factor that made this growth possible and contributed to the rise of powerful chieftains here is immediately apparent from a study of local history: frontier warfare. The district of Somay used to be administered by a Kurdish dynasty on behalf of the Ottomans, and it was the Iranian government that actively encouraged the Shikak (who then lived further south) to conquer these districts, which took them from 1841 to 1893.³⁸ As a reward, and later also in vain attempts to restrain the Shikak from raiding Iranian territory, the Iranian government appointed Shikak chieftains as governors of the frontier districts.

There are two chiefly lineages (called Pishaqa) among the Shikak, associated with the Avdovi and Kardar tribes respectively. The former family claimed descent from Kurdish chieftains who had participated in Saladin’s military campaigns.³⁹ Between these two families there was always competition for leadership of the entire confederacy. Most of the time each controlled only part of the Shikak.

³⁴ Nikitine, *Les Kurdes*, p. 79.

³⁵ Lists in Ghilan, *Les Kurdes*, *passim*; Mashkûr, *Nazarî*, p. 190; Dihqân, *Sarzamîn*, p. 60; V. Minorsky, ‘Shikak’ *EI*, 1st ed., 4, 1, p. 290; *Central Asian Review* 7 (1959), p. 179 (after *Sovremenniy Iran*); and in Prof. Wolfgang Rudolph’s fieldnotes, which he kindly showed me.

³⁶ Ghilan, ‘Les Kurdes’, p. 14.

³⁷ O. Blau, ‘Die Stämme des nordöstlichen Kurdistan’, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 12 (1858), p. 593.

³⁸ V. Minorsky, Somai, *EI*, 1st ed., 4, 2, p. 482; Ghilan, ‘Les Kurdes’, p. 10-13.

³⁹ A. Sharîfî, *Ashâyir-i Shikâk va sharh-i zindigî-yi ânâ bi rahbarî-yi Ismâ`il Aghâ Simko* (Sayyidyân, Mahabad, 1348/1970), pp. 10-11.

Around the turn of the century at least three chieftains were competing for paramount leadership of the Shikak. The strongest was probably Ali Agha of the Avdovi Pishaqs; his sons⁴⁰ Jafar Agha and Ismail Agha, nicknamed Simko, made themselves quite a reputation as daring warriors and bold raiders. The second chieftain was Umar Agha, who led the Mamedi tribe (according to some sources he was an uncle of Simko, but there is much confusion), and the third was Mustafa Agha (later succeeded by his brother Ismail) of the Kardar Pishaqs who had also some other tribes and sub-tribes under his control. There was a high turnover of chieftains during those years. Another section of Avdovi Pishaqs, led by Ali's brother Yusuf, living further south, was dispersed when Ali rose to power at Yusuf's expense, and many of them were subsequently killed by the rival Kardars. Umar Agha of the Mamedi was killed by Iranian officials in 1902, and Mustafa Agha by his Avdovi rivals in 1906. Around the same time Jafar Agha, who had held official titles but continued to irritate the government of Azarbayjan by his raids on Urmiyeh, Salmas and Khoy, was invited to Tabriz by the governor and Persia's heir apparent, Nizâm al-Saltaneh, and treacherously killed.⁴¹

Perhaps it was this disappearance of most other experienced chieftains that made Simko's rapid rise possible. However, he was a clever and opportunist politician who knew with whom to ally himself and when. As a young man he had assisted his brother Jafar in his raids, and he was to continue raiding throughout his career, thus attracting many roughs into his retinue. In the Constitutional Revolution Simko turned against the Constitutionals (urban Azaris) and, without being invited, took 300 horsemen to join the forces of Iqbal al-Saltaneh, the governor of Maku, against the *anjuman* of Khoy. As a reward Simko was made sub-governor of Qotur district. In spite of his continuing raids the central government confirmed the appointment.⁴²

Neither the Turks nor the Russians occupied the Shikak lands before the Great War; Simko's contacts with both were mainly indirect. Prior to 1913 he appears to have co-operated with pro-Ottoman, anti-Russian Azarbayjanis, but in 1913 he delivered one of these, who had sought refuge with him, to the Russians in an attempt to gain their goodwill.⁴³ He was apparently successful, for in that same year a Russian observer noticed that two chieftains who had previously been clients of Ismail Agha of the Kardar Pishaqs (Simko's main rival) swore, under Russian pressure, fidelity to him.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Some sources suggest that Jafar and Ismail were Ali Agha's sons, others make them his grandsons and give their father's name as Muhammad.

⁴¹ Ghilan, 'Les Kurdes', pp. 7-9, 14; other accounts of Jafar Agha's killing in Wratislaw, *Consul*, pp. 207-9; Nikitine, *Les Kurdes*, p. 79; Sharîfî, *Ashâyir*, p. 12; G. Moradi, *Ein Jahr autonome Regierung in Kurdistan: Die Mahabad-Republik 1946-1947* (Hochschule Bremen, 1992), pp. 161-2.

⁴² Ghilan, 'Les Kurdes', pp. 7, 9n.; M. Aghâsî, *Târikh-i Khoy* (Faculty of Arts, Tabriz, 1350/1971), pp. 312-3. A possible reason why Simko may have attacked the Constitutionals voluntarily is the fact that the latter saw the Turkish invasion of 1906, in which many Kurds took part, as directed against themselves and in support of the Shah. "Anti-Kurdish sentiment flared, and there was rioting against members of the Sunni sect", R. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964), pp. 68-9.

⁴³ Kasravî, *Târikh*, pp. 454-5.

⁴⁴ These were Teymur Jang and Muhammad Sharif Agha of the village of Somay. See L.W. Adamec (comp.), *Historical Gazetteer of Iran, Part I. Tehran and Northwestern Iran* (Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, Graz, 1976), entry 'Somay', quoting *Voyenni Sbornik*.

By this time Simko was in regular contact with Kurdish nationalists and appears to have adopted some of their discourse, although it is hard to say how much it meant to him.

He had married a sister of Sheykh Sayyid Taha, grandson and successor of the famous Sheykh Ubeydullah.⁴⁵ This was a convenient marriage, for the sayyid was the most influential man across the border, besides being a leading nationalist. Simko and Sayyid Taha were to co-operate much in the following decade. Another of Simko's contacts was Abd al-Razzaq Bedirkhan of the famous nationalist family descending from the emirs of Botan. Sayyid Taha, Abd al-Razzaq and Simko's brother Jafar had previously been invited to Russia, whence they had returned with 'generous gifts and encouraging messages that stimulated their imaginations and ambitions'.⁴⁶ Abd al-Razzaq started publishing a monthly Kurdish newspaper in Urmieh in 1912. After some time, however, the Russians banished him from Urmieh, and according to one historian it was Simko who took over the responsibility for the paper until it stopped publication in 1914.⁴⁷

During the war Simko stood aloof from the real fighting, trying to keep all doors open, while expanding his control of the frontier districts. The Russians once arrested him and sent him to prison in Tiflis but, expecting to achieve more with the carrot than the stick, they let him return to Azarbayjan on the condition that he lived in the town of Khoy and remained 'loyal'.⁴⁸ When the troops of the Russian general Baratoff were called back from central Kurdistan after the Revolution, Simko managed to capture many of their arms, including field-guns. From other parts of Kurdistan too arms started flowing towards Simko, who had by then already a wide reputation as a nationalist leader. These arms were either left behind by departing Russians or had belonged to the Kurdish militias that had fought on the Turkish side.

Simko was not the only one to arm himself, however. The Nestorian Assyrians (the local ones, but especially the refugees from Hakkari, who were more militant) were quite well-armed too, and they were reinforced by equally well-armed Armenians from Anatolia. The departing Russians, unable to protect them any longer, left many arms behind and stimulated them to organise in fighting units. According to Arfa,⁴⁹ a French military mission had also brought arms for the Assyrians to defend themselves against the Turks. The Assyrians had desires similar to Simko's: the establishment of an independent state, in Urmieh and Salmas. The local Muslim population (Azaris in the plains and Kurds in the mountains) were hardly pleased, and the Iranian government

⁴⁵ Sharîfî, *Ashâyir*, p. 17. On Seyyid Taha and other descendants of Sheykh Ubeydullah mentioned in this article, see M. van Bruinessen, 'The Sâdatê Nehrî or Gîlânîzâde of Central Kurdistan', *Journal of the History of Sufism* 1-2 (2000), 79-91, reprinted in van Bruinessen, *Mullas, Sufis and Heretics: the Role of Religion in Kurdish Society* (The Isis Press, Istanbul, 2000).

⁴⁶ Eagleton, *Republic*, p.7.

⁴⁷ J. Khaznadâr, *Rûznâme-nigârî dar Kurdistan*, tr. (from Kurdish) by A. Sharifi (privately published, Mahabad, 1357/1978), p. 5. This was not Simko's only involvement in Kurdish publishing. Later in his career, in 1921, he had a bilingual newspaper of a Kurdish nationalist nature published in Urmieh: this was called *Kurd dar sâl-i 1340*, and was edited by Mulla Muhammad Tarjani of Mahabad, see M. Tamaddun, *Târîkh-i Rizâ'iyeh* (Islamiyeh, Tehran, 1350/1971), p. 371, quoted in A. Sharîfî, *Shûrîshâ-yi Kurdân-i Mukrî dar dourân-i saltanat-i dûdmân-i Pahlavî* (Shafaq, Tabriz, 1357/1978), p. 6. *Oriente Moderno*, 1, 9 (15 February 1922), p. 548, mentions a paper *Il Kurdistan indipendente*, published in Souj Bulagh, which is probably the same paper.

⁴⁸ Kasravî, *Târîkh*, p. 829; Aghâsî, *Târîkh*, pp. 352-3; Sharîfî, *Ashâyir*, pp.18-19.

⁴⁹ H. Arfa, *Under Five Shahs* (Murray, London, 1964), p. 122.

even less so. Famine and mutual depredations, in which the departing Russians had no small share, led to increased bitterness between Christians and Muslims. It was especially the Azaris and the 'non-tribal' Kurds that suffered, for the Christians were better armed. During riots in Urmieh (February 1918) the Christians got the upper hand and took control of the entire town. The Iranian government was incapable of restoring order. The governor of Tabriz, Mukht-i Shams, then approached Simko. At his instigation Simko invited Mar Shimun, the religious and secular leader of the Nestorians, for talks on a proposed alliance, and had him treacherously killed (March 1918).⁵⁰

Simko's men took no part, however, in the subsequent fighting between the invading Turkish armies and the Armenians and Nestorians, whom the British then attempted to mould into a force capable of stopping the Turkish advance. Only when most of the Nestorians, lacking strong leadership after the death of their leader, fled in panic from Urmieh did his men join Turkish soldiers in their pursuit, killing many (June or July 1918). Turkish soldiers and irregular bands of Kurds (dispatched, some claim, by Simko and Sayyid Taha) entered the town and plundered what was left.⁵¹

The Armistice brought an end to the Turkish presence in Azarbayjan, and no strong government was left. The Iranian government appointed new governors at Tabriz and Urmieh, but these did not succeed in establishing control of western Azarbayjan. The only authority with a strong power base was Simko, whose private retinue had been reinforced with several hundred Ottoman soldiers, many of them Kurds, either simply deserters or people with nationalist motivations; others, mercenaries attracted by the high pay (!) and the fact that Simko gave them wives. With their field-guns (some of them taken from the Russians) and machine-guns, they were to prove more than a match for the ill-trained government troops of Azarbayjan.

The government had for some time no way of subjecting Simko, who continued more boldly than ever to raid the plains. The governor of Urmieh, Sardar-i Fath, visited Simko in his stronghold at Chahriq (south-west of Dilman) and attempted to win him over by peaceful means, but Simko apparently saw this as further proof of weakness, and even expanded the areas where he took the tribute ('loot' in the Iranian perception, 'taxation' in his own) that was necessary to maintain his army. Some time later the governor of Tabriz, Mukarram al-Mulk, had recourse to modern technology and sent Simko a bomb-parcel that had been made to look like a box of sweets. Its explosion killed a younger brother of Simko and several of his retainers but failed to hurt the person for whom it was intended.⁵²

Simko's Rebellion against the Central Government

Meanwhile Simko was busily preparing for the establishment of independence. In February 1919 there was a meeting of most important chieftains of Iranian Kurdistan, at which the proposal for an open insurrection against the Iranian government was

⁵⁰ Kasravî, *Târikh*, p. 734-50, 829; Arfa, *Kurds*, pp. 50-54; Joseph, *Nestorians*, pp. 138-44; Aghâsî, *Târikh*, pp. 384-8; F.G. Coan, *Yesterdays in Persia and Kurdistan* (Saunders, Claremont, Col., 1939), pp. 264-70.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 270-2.

⁵² Kasravî, *Târikh*, pp. 830-2; Sharîfî, *Ashâyir*, pp. 19-20, 30-6; M. Bâmdâd, *Sharh-i hâ1-i rijâl-i Îrân* (Zawar, Tehran, 1347/1968), vol. 1, p. 136; Jwaideh, *Nationalist Movement*, pp. 401-2.

discussed. It was decided to postpone the rising until it had become clear what the attitude of the powers was going to be.⁵³ Sayyid Taha, who had joined Simko and closely co-operated with him (without however forgetting his own private interests) visited Baghdad in May 1919 in order to obtain British support for an independent Kurdish state. Simko himself addressed the Civil Commissioner, A.T. Wilson, by letter with similar requests. Neither received a definite commitment. According to Armenian sources,⁵⁴ Simko and Sayyid Taha were at the same time in touch with the Turkish nationalists at Van, who wished to employ them for resisting the proposed repatriation of Armenians to eastern Anatolia and therefore promised help. In the following years the two Kurdish chieftains were to remain in contact with both the British and the Turkish nationalists.

Without waiting for the other chieftains to declare themselves in open rebellion, Simko took the town of Dilman, looted Khoy, laid siege to Urmiyeh and massacred part of the (Azari) population of the Lakistan district (north-west of Dilman) that refused to recognise his authority and pay taxes. Those who escaped were pursued as far as Sharafkhaneh on the northern shore of Lake Urmiyeh. During the autumn of 1919 then Simko's Kurds kept these districts north of the lake under occupation.⁵⁵ Tabriz had however a new military commander, Intisar, who efficiently mobilised and co-ordinated whatever troops he could find (gendarmerie, cossacks, irregular Azari cavalry). Led by Filipov, a Russian cossack officer who had just arrived from Tehran, these troops managed to repel Simko's Kurds and to inflict heavy losses upon them. Simko was forced to take refuge in his mountain stronghold at Chahriq; many of his partisans deserted him (including several of the former Ottoman soldiers). For reasons which are unclear,⁵⁶ however, instead of following up their initial success and forcing Simko to surrender unconditionally, Filipov and Intisar entered negotiations with him. As a result of the negotiations, Simko promised to return the loot taken from Lakistan, to send off his Turkish soldiers and to surrender all his arms to the state.

None of these promises was fully executed, and the whole affair ultimately strengthened Simko's standing among the Kurds: he could apparently act against the state with impunity. During 1920 he re-established his control of the plains of Urmiyeh and Salmas and the southern part of Khoy district. In Urmiyeh he appointed men of his own choice as governors: at first Arshad al-Mulk, a local man, later Teymur Agha, a Kurdish chieftain from Kuhnehshahr. His men raided a vast area, mainly to acquire firearms and finance his future exploits. One day they took thousands of the inhabitants of Urmiyeh, people of all walks of life, hostage in a garden near the city, demanding 40,000 rifles and a similar quantity of gold liras for their release.⁵⁷ The villages were similarly 'taxed'. Gendarmerie troops sent from Tabriz to relieve the area were defeated

⁵³ *Précis of Affairs in Southern Kurdistan during the Great War* (Government Press, Baghdad, 1919), p. 14; Jwaideh, *Nationalist Movement*, p. 403.

⁵⁴ FO 371/1919: No. 58/89585/512. A later denial of this by Simko himself (in a letter to the British Consul-General at Tabriz) is enclosed in FO 371/1919: W 34/88614/7972. For the rumours about the repatriation of the Nestorians and their effects, see also Jwaideh, *Nationalist Movement*, pp. 413-15.

⁵⁵ Kasravî, *Târîkh*, pp. 839-41, 851-2; Arfa, *Kurds*, p. 57.

⁵⁶ See Kasravî's rather unsatisfactory explanation (old-fashioned and corrupt politics on the part of Azarbayjan's Governor, Eyn al-Douleh), *Târîkh*, pp. 854f. ; the similar one in Aghâsî (implicating Prime Minister Vusûq al-Douleh), *Târîkh*, pp. 440-4; and Sharîfî's suggestion of British pressure, *Ashâyir*, pp. 47-8.

⁵⁷ Dihqân, *Sarzamîn*, pp. 574-6.

by the Kurds and pushed back behind Sharafkhaneh (March 1921). Simko proved the strongest again, and thereby attracted many new followers.

Other victories over government troops during that year resulted in further increases. In March 1921 his forces were still described as '1000 horse and 500 foot, with a Turkish flag'; in a summer campaign they were already estimated at 4000, in the autumn of 1921 at 7000, while in his last great campaign, in the summer of 1922, 10,000 men are said to have participated.⁵⁸ Each of these estimates is rather rough and, except for the last, includes only a part of what Simko could mobilise. The increase is nevertheless clear. Simko's authority was recognised by a growing number of tribes.

Early in 1920 there had been several meetings of a 'Council of Kurdish chiefs' presided over by Simko, which were attended not only by chieftains of some of the biggest tribes of Azarbayjan (Herki, Begzadeh, Haydaran, Shikak), but also by chieftains of the Artushi confederacy and other tribes of Hakkari. It was said that in 1921 Simko *appointed* a certain Ahmad Khan as the paramount chieftain of the Herki, and that this was generally accepted by this powerful tribe.⁵⁹

By the middle of 1921 the area under Simko's authority included all Iranian territory west of Lake Urmiyeh and from there south as far as Baneh and Sardasht, as well as the north-western districts of Iraq, where the British and the Kemalists were still competing for control. Besides the entire Shikak confederacy and the Herki tribe, also the Mamash, Mangur, Dehbokri, Piran, Zarza, Gewrik, Feyzullahbegi, Pizhdar and the minor tribes around Baneh had joined Simko.⁶⁰ In October 1921 Simko's troops entered the town of Souj Bulagh (Mahabad), which had until that date been held by government troops. 200 of the gendarmerie garrison were killed, another 150 wounded. It may be illustrative of the motivation and attitude of many of Simko's men that they sacked the town upon capturing it — in spite of the fact that the inhabitants of Souj Bulagh, unlike those of Urmiyeh and Dilman, were mainly Kurds.

Other Kurdish nationalists later severely rebuked Simko for this pillage. Why sow discord among the Kurds and thus serve the interests of their enemies? In answer to such accusations from a Kurdish notable from Suleymaniyeh, Simko said that first, the gendarmerie had forced him to offer battle inside the town, and thereafter he had not been able to restrain his men who were used to follow up battle with plunder; and that secondly, he had his doubts about the attitude towards himself of the Dehbokri and the Mangur tribes that lived immediately around Souj Bulagh.⁶¹

Souj Bulagh naturally became the capital. Simko did not take residence there himself, however, but appointed a loyal chieftain, Hamzeh Agha of the Mamash, as governor. The Azari towns of Mianduab, Maragheh and Binab sent letters of submission to Souj Bulagh.⁶²

Further military successes against government troops that year added to Simko's standing among the Kurds, and swelled the number of his followers. By July 1922 his territory reached its greatest extension: it stretched as far east and south as Sain Qaleh (Shahin Dezh) and Saqqiz. Moreover, Simko was in permanent communication with tribes further south: he had influence in Mariwan and Awroman, and even tribes as far

⁵⁸ These estimates are given in FO 371/1921: E 6185/100/93; Arfa, *Kurds*, p. 58; FO 371/1921: E 13470/100/93; and Arfa, *Shahs*, p. 136, respectively.

⁵⁹ FO 371/1920: E 15670/11/44; 1921: E 13470/100/93.

⁶⁰ Arfa, *Kurds*, p. 59.

⁶¹ FO 371/1922: E 2402/96/65.

⁶² FO 371/1921: E 13470/100/93.

south as Luristan were to rise in support of his revolt.⁶³ Similarly, many Kurdish chieftains in Turkey and Iraq had established friendly relations with him. There were no concrete plans for united action, but it could never harm to have relations with a successful social climber such as Simko. Rumours started to circulate that the Iranian government was going to grant the Kurds autonomy because it could not subdue them.⁶⁴

Those rumours were to prove unfounded, however. Since the *coup d'état* of February 1921 Riza Khan had devoted his energies to the building of a modern, disciplined, coherent national army. His efforts were soon to bear fruit. During 1921 and even in early 1922 Simko had been able to inflict repeated defeats on the motley troops (irregulars, cossacks, gendarmerie) sent against him, capturing many of their arms. In August 1922 however, a well-coordinated campaign by the reorganised army brought him to heel.⁶⁵ His followers dispersed, leaving him nothing but a small band of loyal men. He had to escape into Turkey, and from there to Iraq. Edmonds, who interviewed him on his arrival in Iraq, observed that he was especially bitter against the Turks and the British. The former had always promised him assistance but they too had now turned their armies against him, and the latter had passively allowed him to be crushed in spite of his usefulness to them.⁶⁶

As a refugee in Iraq, Simko did not remain idle but immediately started attempting to strengthen old ties and establish new ones with Kurdish chieftains there, in preparation for return to Iran. He approached his old ally Sayyid Taha (who was now used by the British to get the Turks out of Rowanduz and had lost interest in further adventures in Iran), and also Sheykh Mahmud of Suleymaniye (the most influential nationalist leader of southern Kurdistan who showed equally little interest in Simko's problems), and many others. He even tried to appease the Assyrian refugees, who had been brought to Iraq by the British, and who still thought of return to Urmiye and Salmas. He was shown much respect wherever he went, but no one was ready to help him. In 1923 he went to Turkey, to solicit Turkish support, but equally in vain. In 1924 Riza Khan pardoned him, and he returned to Iran. In 1926 he made a last abortive attempt to regain the virtual independence he had once held, and besieged the town of Dilman, assisted by sections of the Herki and Begzadeh tribes. Again he had to flee to Iraq. In 1929 the Iranian government invited him back again, offering him the governorate of Ushnuviye. A few days after his arrival he was killed in an ambush set up by the same government.⁶⁷

⁶³ FO 371/1922: E 8437/6/34; A.J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1925, Part I, The Islamic World since the Peace Settlement*, (Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 539; Jwaideh, *Nationalist Movement*, p. 410.

⁶⁴ Toynbee, *Survey*, pp. 538-9.

⁶⁵ The military campaigns of 1921 and 1922 are described in detail in Arfa, *Shahs*, pp. 118-41; id., *Kurds*, pp. 58-63; Dihqân, *Sarzamîn*, pp. 585-94; and in the report by the British military attaché at Tehran enclosed in FO 371/1922: E 12242/1076/34.

⁶⁶ C.J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks, and Arabs. Politics, Travel and Research in North-Eastern Iraq 1919-1925* (Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 305-7.

⁶⁷ On Simko's last years, see Jwaideh, *Nationalist Movement*, pp. 410-13; Arfa, *Kurds*, p. 63. On his killing, A.M. Hamilton, *Road Through Kurdistan* (Faber and Faber, London, 1937), pp. 162-4; Shariffi, *Ashâyir*, pp. 64-71.

The Organisation of Simko's Forces

The most serious weakness of Simko's movement was the absence of any kind of formal organisation. There was just the network of Simko's private relations, no party to organise the followers, no formal government or war council. The major towns, Urmiyeh and Souj Bulagh, were administered by governors appointed by Simko who were both tribal chieftains unrelated to the inhabitants of the towns and simply took over the offices of the previous Tabriz-appointed governors. There was no systematic and equitable taxation; Simko's treasury was filled by indiscriminate looting, although the latter aspect may be severely exaggerated in the sources, most of which are inimical to him.

The army constantly fluctuated in size, as tribal armies do. The more or less permanent nucleus consisted of the chieftains' retinues, more precisely those of Simko himself and of Amr Khan, head of the Kardar section of the Shikak. In 1918 Simko's retinue included several hundred former soldiers of the Ottoman army, well-armed and trained by German instructors. In 1921-22 Simko was said to have a large Turkish contingent which, so the Iranians and British suspected, had been put at his disposal by the Ankara government,⁶⁸ though proof of these suspicions was never found. Most probably there were Kurdish nationalists from Turkish Kurdistan among his retinue too; during my researches among the Kurds of Turkey in the 1970s, I still heard many accounts of local men who had gone east to join Simko. Even this central core, however, was not really permanent. Many of the Ottoman soldiers who had joined Simko surrendered when they were promised amnesty during the 1919 campaign by Intisar and Filipov. Retainers also came and went according to Simko's fortunes, motivated more by pay and booty than by nationalist sentiment or personal loyalty. Whereas by July 1922 consistent success had swollen his forces to some 10,000, after the first reverses they dwindled, and within a few days no more than a thousand loyal followers remained.⁶⁹

A strong retinue appears to be a necessary condition for any chieftain who embarks upon an expansive political career. Once his strength is perceived, many others may join who are not, and do not become retainers. They are not fed by the chieftain, and it is well nigh unavoidable that they compensate themselves for their military services by plunder. This is not to say that retainers do not engage in pillage but rather that the chieftain has the other tribesmen even less under control.

In Simko's raids and battles against government troops not only his retainers but many other tribesmen took part. These were primarily Shikak, and especially from the Avdovi, Mamedi and Kardar component tribes. At times of Simko's good fortune, chieftains of other tribes also joined, with their retainers and with common tribesmen. It was especially the Herki tribe that contributed many men: the Herki and the Mamash proved to be Simko's most loyal allies. Others joined later and deserted earlier. At times of adversity even the closest allies left Simko. Thus Amr Khan, the head of the Kardar Pisaqas and therefore Simko's main potential rival among the Shikak, who had on many occasions acted as Simko's plenipotentiary, in 1922 attempted to desert him. He contacted the government through a local sheykh as intermediary and demanded

⁶⁸ FO 371/1922: E 8437/6/34.

⁶⁹ Arfa, *Shahs*, p. 141.

amnesty, in exchange for which he promised obedience to the government and willingness to fight against Simko.⁷⁰

Even though after his defeat Simko lost his actual *power*, the capacity to mobilise large numbers of men, he continued to enjoy wide *respect* among the tribes. Immediately upon his last return to Iran many chieftains of the Shikak confederacy and the Herki, Surchi, and other tribes came to pay him their respects, accompanied by large retinues.⁷¹

Simko not only sought support among the tribes; he also attempted to ally himself with foreign powers. Repeatedly he tried to elicit British support, usually through chieftains who had better relations with the British than he had himself: Sayyid Taha, or Babakr Agha of the Pizhdar.⁷² In this he had little if any success. At the same time he was in communication with the Soviet authorities in the Caucasus and with the Kemalists at Van. Some of his letters to the former were apparently intercepted;⁷³ British and Iranian authorities were convinced that the Kemalists had put troops at his disposal, as already mentioned. None of these foreign powers came to his support when he most needed it. In the early phases of his career, however, his association with state authorities (the Iranians, who made him a governor of Qotur; the Russians and Ottomans who recognised him during the occupation) had strengthened his position among the Kurds. Such relations with neighbouring states have — it has been said before — always been present in the politics of Kurdistan, and they continued to influence Kurdish nationalism in its later phases as well. They may well be considered part and parcel of Kurdish tribal politics.

The large confederacy of tribes that was Simko's movement continued to exist as long as the tribes were kept mobilised. One of the factors that did mobilise them was nationalism. The rapidity with which Simko's support dwindled in times of adversity, however, suggests that for the majority of his followers nationalism was at best an additional motive. As usual among tribes, mobilisation should have some more concrete and immediate object and there should be reasonable chances of attaining it, be it a military victory (over a rival tribe or government troops) or simply plunder. The frequent raiding associated with Simko's rebellion, which many contemporary and later nationalists held against him, was not simply accidental to it: it probably was a necessary condition for keeping the tribes mobilised and thus together. When mobilisation ended — in this case because most tribesmen judged the chances of further success very small and therefore gave up — the unity immediately broke down.

⁷⁰ Aghâsî, *Târikh*, pp. 457-8. Simko was, however, informed and put Amr Khan under surveillance at Chahriq. After Simko's defeat the government arrested Amr Khan and imprisoned him for several years.

⁷¹ Sharîfî, *Ashâyir*, pp. 64-5.

⁷² The following is an excerpt from a letter sent by Simko to Babakr Agha, in which he asks him to demand British support on his behalf: 'I am aware that my reputation is one of treachery and deceit in dealing with Governments and I therefore address you who have a standing credit in the eyes of the British Government upon the following matter: my recent actions and all my actions have no hostile intention with respect to the British Government. On the contrary, I have a sincere desire to be on friendly terms with that Government on my behalf for the purpose of arranging some mutual understanding' (enclosed in FO 371/1921: E 11773/43/93).

⁷³ Claimed by Aghâsî, *Târikh* p. 458, and, in a different version, by Sharîfî *Ashâyir*, p. 59. I have found no further confirmation of these claims.