

**In Memoriam:
Celebrating the Lifelong Contributions of a Marvelous NELC Scholar at IU**

Universities as educational establishments devoted to the production and dissemination of knowledge, when aiming to carry these heavy responsibilities conscientiously, contribute to the real and permanent good in this world, and as such they are the true philanthropic institutions—performing *sadaqah jariyah*. Small numbers of teachers and researchers in these learned institutions manage to leave powerful legacies of scholarship through their publications and, more importantly, a *silsilah* of accomplished pupils. Even smaller numbers succeed in leaving behind the most eternal and valued of societal capital: a personal reputation, a good name. As Shaykh Muslihuddin Sa'di of Shiraz has sagaciously said:

*Sa'diyaa mardi nekunaam Namirad hargiz
Murda aanast ke naamash ba neku-yi nabarand*
(Oh Sa'di, a person of good name shall never die;
Dead are those whose names are not uttered for good deeds!)

The Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (NELC) at Indiana University, during its short history that now approaches a half a century, has faced and met considerable challenges, and has been blessed by the leadership and services of some remarkably dedicated scholars, teachers, mentors and leaders such as Professors Wadie Jwaideh (the founder and long-time Chairman of NELC). This scholar of Middle Eastern history, languages and literature was a pioneer of his fields at Indiana University. NELC owes much to him for his many contributions.

Not long ago we encountered a series of crises, which briefly threatened the very existence of NELC as an academic unit on our campus (1999-2000). We are however very pleased to have regained our academic strength and administrative credibility, and emerged more determined to keep NELC as an important part of IU's mission for providing and promoting international education in the United States. We are especially pleased to be able to celebrate the accomplishments of our former colleagues through the annual Wadie Jwaideh Memorial Lecture in Arabic and Islamic Studies and Victor Danner Memorial Lecture in Islamic Studies. Both of these Memorial Lectures were inaugurated during the academic year 2002-2003, and we are delighted to publish the lecture (No. 6) by Professor Albertine Jwaideh, *In Memoriam*, to honor our colleague and to share their cherished memories with you.

The Memorial Lecture in this volume was made possible with the generous support from the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (COAS) of Indiana University, members of the Jwaideh family, their close relatives, students and friends around the world. We are grateful for their help.

It is with great pleasure that we can now announce that the Jwaideh Memorial Lecture Fund originated in 2003 and administered by the Indiana University Foundation to insure future funding for this important memorial lectures has surpassed our initial target and is fully endowed and its continuity assured thanks to those who have made generous contributions. We are delighted that these lectures will continue for decades to come, and thanks to you future generations will continue to benefit from the latest social sciences and humanities research and analysis on the Middle East.

Dr. Alice Jwaideh's enthusiasm and dedication, widely supported by other members of her extended family, combined with equally important organizational support and financial contributions from our colleagues Professor Suzanne Stetkevych and Dr. Robert Olson of the University of Kentucky, were critical to the creation and success of the Jwaideh lecture fund during its first year. We are gratified by the generosity of many who have made donations to the Jwaideh fund and we are happy to gratefully acknowledge them in this publication.

Many members of the Jwaideh family, especially Dr. Alice Jwaideh (his widow) and Professor Albertine Jwaideh (his sister), have honored us by their presence at the lectures every year since its inauguration. This time, Dr. Albertine Jwaideh, Professor Emerita of Mediaeval Islamic History and Modern Arab History, Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, gracefully agreed to present the Sixth annual Jwaideh Memorial Lecture herself. We are enormously pleased and grateful to Professor Albertine Jwaideh for offering her thorough examination of the origins, ecology, society and economy of the Marsh Dwellers of Southern Iraq. I personally would like to extend my thanks to her for delivering this important and timely lecture on October 30, 2007, at Indiana University.

It is our hope that through the publication of these lectures, we are able to perpetuate the legacies of great teachers, true scholars and inspiring guides. Indeed, it is the hope of immortalizing the memories of such exemplary colleagues and their good name and reputation that, with your generous help, we will be able to undertake presenting these Memorial Lectures for years to come.

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The Marsh Dwellers of Southern Iraq:
Their Habitat, Origins, Society, and Economy

Albertine Jwaideh
University of Toronto

Sixth Wadie Jwaideh Memorial Lecture
Indiana University
October 30, 2007

The marshes of southern Iraq have been objects of attention throughout the greater part of human history. And what can be more fascinating, for here many have long believed is where it began, the “in the Beginning” of ancient lore and the Bible, the location of the Garden of Eden.¹ Here, archaeologists commonly maintain, was the cradle of civilization.² Had the ancient Sumerians of this region in the third millennium B.C. not developed “the cuneiform system of writing and the formal system of education which was its direct outgrowth,” as S. N. Kramer has aptly stated, “it is hardly likely that the intellectual and scientific achievements of modern days would have been possible.”³ There are some 3,000 cuneiform inscriptions of high antiquity that mention the marshes⁴ that were called “*agamme*’ (swamps) and *apparate*’ (reed lands).”⁵ Surprisingly, they depict a landscape and way of life quite similar to what was found in later times. Greek authors mention the name *diotahi*, probably to be amended to *biotahi*, or the *bata’ih* of the Arab Geographers. Roman writers were likewise acquainted with the region as *lemne*’ or *chaldaicus lacus*. Nearchus’s account is particularly instructive, since he crossed this area of water and gave its breadth as 600 *stadia* (or eighty miles).⁶ The Sassanids, Umayyads, and ‘Abbasids gave much attention to the Iraqi Marshland. Even the Mongols, who conquered Iraq in 1258, noted the area that they called *al-Jawazir*, meaning islands. But in the succeeding centuries the region and its inhabitants faded into oblivion, an oblivion that only began to lift

¹ See Sir William Willcocks, *From the Garden of Eden to the Crossing of the Jordan* (London, 1919), passim.

² J. –L. Huot, *Les Sumeriens* (Paris: Editions Errance, 1986).

³ S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 229.

⁴ J. Dauphin, “Les Ma’dan de Basse-Messopotamie,” *Annales de Geographie*, LXIX, No. 371-76 (Jan.-Feb., 1960), p. 38.

⁵ See M. M. Streck-(Saleh El-Ali), “Al-Batiha,” in H. A. R. Gibb *et al*, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, Vol. I (Leiden: E. J. Brill/London: Luzac, 1960), p. 1093.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1094.

in the nineteenth century. Throughout the four centuries of their rule, Ottoman authority within the marshes was ephemeral. Attempts to penetrate the marshes by force were often calamitous. Officials dared not enter them without local tribal escort.⁷

In the 1830s, as a by-product of surveys of the Euphrates and Tigris for steam navigation and an increased interest in archaeology—especially since so many of the ancient sites were within the Marshland—awareness of the region and its inhabitants was renewed. However, owing to the dangers involved, only the fringes of the marshes were explored, and the greater portion remaining hidden from view. During British occupation precise surveys of the region and a systematic collection of data on its inhabitants began, resulting in a trickle of informed accounts.⁸ This peaked in the 1950s during which the famed British adventurer-explorer, Wilfred Thesiger, resided among the marsh dwellers.⁹ In that same decade S. M. Salim and S. Westphal-Hellbusch conducted their anthropological studies.¹⁰ Yet, “wide stretches of the marshes (remained)...quite

⁷ Sir W. Willcocks, “Two and a half years in Mesopotamia,” *Blackwood’s Magazine*, Vol. CXCIX (Jan. –June, 1916), p. 309.

⁸ Noteworthy among these were the reports, memoirs and articles by British administrators, the accounts of archaeologists, and the findings of anthropologists. E.g., see H. Field, *Anthropology of Iraq*, Part I, No. 2, 1949; Lady Drower, *The Mandaean* (Oxford, 1938). The spirit and atmosphere of the marsh people is well captured by a book written by Mr. and Mrs. S. E. Hedgcock, using the pen-name ‘Fulanain’, *Haji Rikkan; Marsh Arab* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927).

⁹ W. Thesiger, *The Marsh Arabs* (New York, 1964). See also his earlier articles: “The Ma’dan or Marsh Dwellers of Southern Iraq,” *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, XLI, Part 1 (Jan. 1954), pp. 4-25; “The Marshmen of Southern Iraq,” *Geographical Journal*, CXX, Part 3 (Sept. 1954), pp. 272-81; “Marsh Dwellers of Southern Iraq,” *The National Geographic Magazine* (Feb. 1958), pp. 205-239. He was accompanied for seven weeks by G. Maxwell who wrote *A Reed Shaken by the Wind* (London, 1957). See also G. Young, *Return to the Marshes* (London, 1977), especially for its colorful photographs.

¹⁰ S. M. Salim, *al-Cibayish, al Nizam al Ijtima’i al Siyasi*, 2 Vols. (Baghdad, 1957); S. Westphal-Hellbusch, “Die Kultur der Ma’dan in Gergenwart und Vergangenheit”, *Sumer*, XII, 1955.

unknown.”¹¹ With the quickening of change in Iraq, the marshes became increasingly accessible thereafter and it was in 1975 that I made my first field trip to the region.

Nowhere has geography played a greater role in the history of a region than in Iraq. Its broad valley is littered with the remains of once great city-states brought low by the vagaries of nature. While its rich soil and the abundant waters of its rivers have provided the means of support for many of the most fabled centers of civilization, the limits imposed by geography have defined the parameters within which the social organization and the patterns of economic enterprise of those who settled there have had to conform. The Marshland in particular has never been static, but a “living” phenomena, constantly changing, complex, and problematic. Therefore the geomorphology of the Mesopotamian delta, the variabilities in climate, the volatility and complexity of the river systems, the flora and the fauna require examination.

Until the mid-twentieth century, Iraq, despite its aridity, had a plenitude of marsh.¹² But the largest portion of Iraqi marshland was found within a 20,000 square mile triangular area bounded by Kut on the Tigris to al-Kifl on the Euphrates and down to Basra on the Shatt al-‘Arab. The extent of these semi-permanent and seasonal marshes varied from a low in the autumn of 3,000 square miles to a high in the

¹¹ W. B. Fisher, *The Middle East: a Physical, Social, and Regional Geography*. Fourth ed. (London: Methuen/New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961), p. 5.

¹² “Almost every village has its little marsh, and almost every marsh has its litter of wild boars.” W. F. Ainsworth, *A Personal Narrative of the Euphrates Expedition*, Vol. I (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1888), p. 210.

spring of 10,900 square miles or more.¹³ This was the land of ancient Sumer and Chaldaeia and it is this Marshland that will be the primary focus of this lecture.

These marshes formed from the spill of the rivers which did not penetrate into the ground owing to the very low permeability of the soils of Iraq. They also received the excess water drained off by irrigation canals, especially along the lower Tigris. It has been estimated that only 10% of the water flowing over the barrage at Kut reached 'Amara, a mere 140 miles down river.¹⁴ Consequently, in years of high flow the marshes greatly expanded. Firstly, to the east and running parallel to the Tigris were a string of marshes, largely seasonal in nature. They began to the north of Kut and ended in the south with Hor al-Huwaiza, the second largest marsh in Iraq, which extended beyond the Iranian frontier. The eastern side of Hor al-Huwaiza was too deep for the growth of reeds and as a result inhospitable to animals. Hence habitation was largely confined to the western side where a number of islands (*ishans*) were to be found. Apart from Tigris spillage and drainage from a series of large irrigation canals, the eastern marshes were fed by a number of streams emanating from the Pusht-i Kuh mountain range in Persia.

The second or central belt lay between the Tigris and Euphrates and included great tracts of both permanent and seasonal marshes. Most of the water was derived from the Tigris and to a lesser extent from the Shatt al-Gharraf. The latter was a large canal that took off from the west bank of the Tigris opposite Kut and flowed due southwards, subdividing into several channels, and eventually joined the

¹³ G. B. Cressey, "The Shatt al-Arab Basin," *The Middle East Journal* (Autumn 1958), pp. 448f. In a flight from Basra to Baghdad in the mid-1950s an hour of the time was over marshland. See: *Ibid.*, p. 452. Cp. C. E. Larsen, "The Mesopotamian delta region: a reconsideration of Lees and Falcon," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 95, No. 1 (Jan.-March, 1975), p. 47.

¹⁴ Cressey, *op. cit.* Water passing Baghdad had but one chance in 35 of reaching the Gulf. See: *Ibid.*, p. 455; Larson, *ibid.*

Euphrates.¹⁵ It was the first major man-made canal and was dug by the Prince of Lagash in the third millennium B.C.¹⁶ At one time it also formed the major channel of the Tigris.¹⁷ Regardless, the core of the central belt was formed in a depression running parallel to the Tigris from Shaykh S'ad to Qurna and consisted of permanent marshes, the southernmost of which was Hor al-Chibayish. Streams and canals connected most of these marshes, but there were a number that were unlinked with the appearance of lakes. Great expanses of the intervening spaces became temporary marsh during the flood season. More than two-thirds of the water of the Shatt al-Gharraf and of the marshes fed by it passed into the Hor al-Hammar.

The third belt lay to the south of the Euphrates and consisted of marshes centering on the Hor al-Hammar, a large expanse of open water stretching from Basra to near Nasiriyya, about seventy miles long and thirty miles wide in the east and fifteen miles wide in the west. Until the end of the nineteenth century the Euphrates connected with the Tigris at Qurna. Some time around 1900 it diverted and entered Hor al-Hammar through five channels shortly below Nasiriyya and from there joined the Shatt al-'Arab ten kilometers above Basra.

The geomorphology of this region is complex and problematic.¹⁸ Essentially two theories as to its origin have been advanced. The older, first articulated by Pliny in

¹⁵ J. R. Wellsted, *Travels to the City of the Caliphs, Etc.* (London, 1840), vol. I, pp. 157f; Loftus, *op. cit.*, pp. 106, 112, 126; Ainsworth, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 52, 82.

¹⁶ P. Buringh, "Living Conditions in the Lower Mesopotamian Plain in Ancient Times," *Sumer*, Vol. XIII, Nos. 1 & 2 (1957), p. 40; S. Lloyd, *Twin Rivers: A brief history of Iraq from the earliest times to the present day* (Oxford, 1943), p. 29. Sometimes called Shatt al-Hai. Cp. Wellsted, *op. cit.*; W. K. Loftus, *Travels and Researches in Chaldaeia and Susiana; Etc.* (New York, 1837) pp. 106, 112,, 126.

¹⁷ Eg. Willcocks, *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 39.

¹⁸ J. H. G. Lebon, "The New Irrigation Era in Iraq," *Economic Geography*, Vol. XXXI, No. 1 (1995), pp. 47f.

the First Century A.D. and codified by De Morgan in 1900, maintained that the Karun river in pushing its delta from the east pinched off from the Persian Gulf a lake which was gradually filled by silt deposited by the Tigris and Euphrates, and that the marshes were the vestiges of that lake.¹⁹ As the ancient Neo-Babylonian tale of creation asserted, “Marduk piled up a dam at the edge of the sea.”²⁰ Lees and Falcon in 1952 advanced an alternative theory. Through an analysis of borings made in the course of oil exploration, they found southern Iraq to be geosynclinally active with subsidence in the main predominating. They concluded that the balance between tectonic subsidence on the one hand and deposition of silt from the rivers on the other hand was finely balanced, and that the counter action of these factors was quite erratic.²¹ This theory has subsequently undergone significant modifications. Geographers now maintain that the Mesopotamian delta has also been subject to climatic changes, hydrological changes, and changes due to other factors.²² Whatever the causal explanation, what is clear is that not only the size and depth of the marshes varied depending on the quantities of water they have received, but also their configuration and very existence have been subject to change. A particular marsh may exist at one time and not the next, and *vice versa*.

¹⁹ De Morgan, *Delegation en Perse. Memoires* (Paris, 1900), Tome I, pp. 4-48. Cp. Ainsworth, *op. cit.*, II, p. 52; Loftus, *op. cit.*, p. 309.

²⁰ Steinkeller, P. “New Light on the Hydrology and Topography of Southern Babylonia in the Third Millennium,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie*, Band 91 (2001), p. 32. See also D. O. Edzard, RIME 3/1, 69 Cylinder A I 5-9. Cf. W. Heimpel, “The Natural History of the Tigris according to the Sumerian Literary Composition Lugal,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 46 (Jan.-Oct, 1987), pp. 316f.

²¹ Lees, Dr. G. M. & Falcon, N. L., “The Geographical History of the Mesopotamian Plains,” *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. CXVIII (Jan. to Dec., 1952), pp. 24-39.

²² For a condensed summary of current views of the physical geography of lower Mesopotamia and its evolution since the last glacial maximum, see Paul Sanlaville, “The Deltaic Complex of the Lower Mesopotamian Plain and its Evolution through Millennia,” in Nicholson, Emma and Clark, Peter (eds.), *The Iraqi Marshlands: a Human and Environmental Study* (London: Politico’s, 2002), pp. 133-150. For additional sources, see *ibid.*, pp. 149f. See also Larson, *op. cit.*, pp. 45ff.

At the lower end of the delta was the so-called Karun “highland.” Some forty miles wide and eighty miles long and 2.4 meters above high tide, it together with the sand bars in the mouth of the Shatt al-‘Arab formed an effective barrier that preserved the sweet-water quality of the marshes and made them habitable.²³

Water has always been the nodal point of existence in Mesopotamia, most of which derived from precipitation in the mountains of eastern Turkey and western Iran and brought down by the rivers. In the introductory stanzas of the hymn of Gudea, the heart of Enlil, the highest god in the Sumerian pantheon, “unpredictably violent and then overflowing with tenderness and generosity,” was “compared to the Tigris, which, at the flood-season, violently overflows its banks and brings the gift of life-giving water.”²⁴ As Sir William Wilcocks said, “The Euphrates and Tigris in flood are raging torrents, and their ungoverned waters need curbing with no ordinary bridle.”²⁵ The Tigris could double its volume in two days.²⁶ In a single night in 1831 it broke its banks and destroyed 7,000 homes in Baghdad.²⁷ Wellsted noted that the country from Baghdad to Basra, a distance of 400 miles, “presented the appearance of a vast lake.”²⁸ This flood, together with the plague that accompanied it, radically altered the course of the modern history of Iraq. If all the factors influencing flooding in the Mesopotamian plain were simultaneously to

²³ See Willcocks, *From the Garden of Eden*, p. 26; Loftus, *op. cit.*

²⁴ See sources cited in note 21 above.

²⁵ Willcocks, *From the Garden of Eden*, p. 12.

²⁶ Cressey, *op. cit.*, p. 453.

²⁷ For a day-by-day eyewitness account of this calamity, see Groves, Rev. A. N., *Journal of a Residence in Baghdad* (London, 1832), pp. 96ff. See also, Loftus, *op. cit.*, pp. 7f.

²⁸ *Op. cit.*, pp.158f, 207f, 233f. Similarly, on 17 May 1850 the correspondent of *The Times* reported from Baghdad that “after a break in the Tigris...bund about 2,000 mud houses have already collapsed.”

come into play at their maximal levels, as one modern geographer has put it, “Even Noah may need to be updated.”²⁹

But the floods were also a blessing. They were the “life quickener” whose annual silting provided the foundation of the luxuriant rice-fields.³⁰ Ninety per cent of the sediment carried by the Euphrates at Hit and of the Tigris at Baghdad was deposited on the broad plain north of Basra.

The flora of the marshes varied depending on differentials in water levels. The Hammar, for example, was roughly two-thirds lake and marsh with a few areas of open water connected by a labyrinth of narrow channels running in all directions through reed. Although the deeper channels were 1 to 2 meters deep—enough for boat navigation—at places the Hammar was 10 to 20 meters deep. Interspersed throughout were islands (*ishans*), many of which were submerged during flood season but were dry sufficiently long to support palm trees. In some areas of the marsh, giant reeds (*qasib*) grew to heights of 9 meters and were 5 or more centimeters in diameter, though they commonly grew in stands less than 6 meters high. Dense growths of giant reed sometimes became choked with other plant life and formed lagoons that gave the appearance of floating islands. In the shallower portions of the marsh and in seasonal marsh during flood times large tracts of bulrushes grew, reaching heights of 2 and a half meters, to be followed as the water receded by varieties of sedge. Other forms of flora natural to the area included numerous species of grasses, mint, and water-weeds. In the spring and autumn

²⁹ Cressey, *op. cit.*, p. 450.

³⁰ Thomas, B., *Alarms and Excursions in Arabia* (Indianapolis, 1931), p. 39.

some areas became a carpet of flowering plants, notably numerous varieties of water lilies.³¹

The Marshlands were particularly rich in fauna. They were one of the great bird sanctuaries of the world and a vital link in the easternmost of the three major migratory bird flyways of Eurasia. In season the sky was blackened by flights of birds and nearly every migratory species could be found. Several species endemic or near endemic to the Tigris-Euphrates basin are today endangered, if not now extinct. There were gulls, wild duck, geese, swans, cranes, pelicans, flamingos, storks, bustards, bitterns, and sandgrouse to name but a few.³²

There were also carnivorous animals. Lions made their lairs among the reed. The last Westerners to sight the Mesopotamian lion were probably Loftus and Layard in the nineteenth century, but Thesiger was of the opinion that they finally became extinct when the marsh dwellers acquired rifles during World War I.³³ Wild boar, among the largest in the world, and growing to in excess of 135 kilograms, wallowed in large herds in the marsh. They were quite brazen and ferocious, many

³¹ For a brief summary of the ecosystem of the Iraqi Marshlands, see M. I. Evans, "The Ecosystem," in Nicholson and Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-219. For a fuller account of the richness of the flora in the marshes, see A. -R. Akbar, *The Plants of the Marshes* [in Arabic] (Basra: University of Basra Press, 1982).

³² On the avifauna of Iraqi Marshlands in 1994, see E. Maltby, "An environmental and ecological study of the Marshlands of southern Iraq," (London: AMAR Appeal, 1994), Annex 13. Annexes 3-9 treat population sizes of individual birds. See also International Council for Bird Protection, *Putting biodiversity on the map: priority areas for global conservation* (Cambridge: Bird Life International, 1998); Lieut-Colonel Chesney, *The Expedition for the Survey of the Rivers Euphrates and Tigris Etc.* Vol. I (London, 1850), Appendix No. IV, pp. 730ff; J. Baillie Fraser, *Mesopotamia and Assyria* (Edinburgh, 1842), pp. 367-71; Thesiger, *Marsh Arabs*, pp. 160, 165f; Maxwell, *passim*.

³³ Chesney, *op. cit.*, p. 108; Loftus, *op. cit.*, pp. 61, 242ff, , 258ff; A. H. Layard, *Early adventures in Persia, Susiana, and Babylonia* (London, 1894), pp. 185-90; Ainsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 233; Parsons, *Travels*, p. 144; Thesiger, *op. cit.*, pp. 194ff, 220. Fraser notes the existence of a species of tiger as well. *op. cit.*, p.364.

marsh men having the scars to prove it.³⁴ A number of jackals, wolves, lynxes, and wildcats had their lairs in the marshes,³⁵ as well as the gazelle.³⁶

Fish abounded: 23 species of which were endemic to the region,³⁷ edible varieties of which the *bunni*, *sbur*, and *shabbut* were especially delicious and were noted as such by the ancient Sumerians.³⁸ There were also *rubyan* (shrimp).³⁹ There were many sorts of amphibians, reptiles, and insects;⁴⁰ the ubiquitous frogs whose croaking often drowned out all other sound;⁴¹ the swarms of midges that appeared like plumes of smoke; and the mosquitoes. The marshes of Suq-al-Shayukh were called ‘Umm al-Bag, “The Mother of mosquitoes.”⁴²

³⁴ On the wild boar, see Thesiger, *Marsh Arabs*, p. 194; H. Field, “Some Notes on the Al Bu Muhammad of Iraq,” *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, Vol. XXXVI, Parts 3 & 4 (July-Oct. 1949), p. 276. On the wild animals of the area, see Chesney, *op. cit.*, I, Appendix No. III, pp. 728f; Fraser, *op. cit.*, pp. 364ff.

³⁵ See R. T. Hart, *The mammals of Iraq* (Michigan, U. S. A.; Univ. Michigan [Misc. Publ. Mus. Zool. 1006], 1959); Maltby, *op. cit.*, Annex 12; Thesiger, *op. cit.*, pp. 194, 220; Maxwell, *op. cit.*, pp. 72f, 105f, 107f. Thesiger was of the opinion that the lion was wiped out when the marsh dwellers acquired rifles in WWI.

³⁶ Loftus, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

³⁷ See Maltby, *op. cit.*, Annex 10; B. W. Coad, “Zoogeography of the fishes of the Tigris-Euphrates basin,” *Zoology in the Middle East*, 13 (1996), pp. 51-70; Chesney, *op. cit.*, Appendix VI, p. 739; Fraser, *op. cit.*, 372f.

³⁸ B. Landberger, *Materialien zum sumerischen Lexikon, VIII/2: The Fauna of Ancient Mesopotamia*, Second Part (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1962), p. 82.

³⁹ S. D. Salman, M. H. Ali, and A. H. Y. Al-Adhub, “Abundance and seasonal migrations of the penacid shrimp *Metapenaeus affinis* (h. Milne-Edwards) within Iraqi waters,” *Hydrobiologica*, 196 (1990), pp. 79-90.

⁴⁰ See N. Mehdi and P. V. Georg, *A systematic list of the vertebrates of Iraq* (Baghdad: Iraq Nat. Hist. Mus., 1969); Maltby, *op. cit.*, Annex 11; A. E. Leviton, S. C. Anderson, K. Adler, and S. A. Minton, *Handbook of Middle East amphibians and reptiles* (Oxford, Ohio: Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles, 1992); Chesney, *op. cit.*, Appendix No. V, pp. 733-38; Fraser, *op. cit.*, 371-75.

⁴¹ G. Maxwell, *op. cit.*, pp. 58ff, 119, 161.

⁴² Loftus, *op. cit.*, p. 277. *Cp.* Ainsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

Photography does not fully capture the richness of color and the breathtaking beauty of the marshes, a beauty that has uniformly enraptured visitors to the area. The refraction from bits of desert dust and moist, humid droplets suspended in air, the reflections of vegetation in clear water, make for an ethereal beauty. It evokes the sense of that original chaos in which sky and earth and water formed an undifferentiated mass and from which, according to the Mesopotamian story of creation, Marduk created the world.

Reliable census data in regard to the population of the marsh areas do not exist. Salim was inclined toward a figure of 400,000 in total. Of these he estimated that 350,000 were engaged in agriculture and the remainder were evenly split between reed-gatherers and Ma'dan.⁴³ The primary focus in this lecture will be the reed-collectors and Ma'dan. Such reference as will be made to cultivator tribes will have to do with those in immediate proximity to the marshes and for comparative purposes.

The terms generally used to denote the marsh population as a whole have been "Ma'dan" and "Marsh Arab." Writers have commonly used these terms interchangeably and synonymously. Thesiger, who knew them best, did not distinguish between Ma'dan and Marsh Arab, though he adduced much that is evidential of difference. According to Buxton and Dowson, "The name Marsh Arab in Arabic is Ma'dan,"⁴⁴ an assumption still assumed by some. Although Ibn Battuta spoke of the Ma'adi of the marshes,⁴⁵ academic linguists find that the word

⁴³ S. M. Salim, *Marsh Dwellers of the Euphrates Delta* (London, 1962), p. 11. J. Dauphin estimated the population to be from 50,000 to 80,000. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴⁴ P. A. Buxton & V. H. W. Dowson, "The Marsh Arabs of Lower Mesopotamia," *Indian Antiquary*, L (Nov. 1921), p. 293. Fraser suggested that *ma'dan* was "a term compounded of two words signifying *not wise*." *op. cit.*, p. 293.

⁴⁵ *Tuhfat al-Nuzzar fi Ghara'ib al-Amsar wa 'Aja'ib al-Asfar*, Vol. I (Cairo, 1938), p. 113.

is of quite ancient derivation and its etymology unknown.⁴⁶ The anthropologist Salim tends toward the view that the distinction was occupational rather than ethnographical.⁴⁷ However, in answer to a question put to an inhabitant, Dauphin got an emphatic reply: “We are not Arabs. Our origin goes very far back. God gave the marshes to the Ma’dan. Our ancestors, like us, were masters of the marshes, as we always will be.”⁴⁸ But in response to queries about their ancestry put by Dr. Wesphal-Halbusch, most Ma’dan could not recall beyond three generations. The stories they told generally referred to some decisive event that occurred “100 years ago,” but in nearly all other respects varied. They conflated time and related much that was fantasy.⁴⁹ On the one hand, the Arab pedigree of the Bani Asad tribe that resided in the marshes of al-Chibayish can be reasonably authenticated by their oral tradition and continuity in legal and customary practices.⁵⁰ The Ma’dan, on the other hand, had no written records and very little by way of oral tradition or folklore. E. L. Ochsenslager, an archaeologist with a special interest in ethnography and who was involved in diggings at Tel al-Hibra from 1968 to 1990, did a study of the material culture of the people living in the vicinity of ancient Lagash. He observed three communities, each distinctive; Bani Hasan, “Mi’dan”, and Beduin.⁵¹ From his descriptions, the latter were neither a marsh people or true Beduin, but one of the *shawiyya*, the shepherd tribes that pastured their flocks for a great part of the year in the steppe interspersed between the marshes and each spring at the time of the floods crossed the Euphrates and

⁴⁶ Dauphin, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁴⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 38

⁴⁹ “Die Kultur Ma’dan in Gegenwart und Vergangenheit” (Arabic translation by M. al-Amin), *Sumer*, Vol. XII, Nos. 1 & 2 (1957), p 52.

⁵⁰ This is evidenced in the findings of S. M. Salim. See his *al-Cibayish and Marsh Dwellers of the Euphrates Delta*.

⁵¹ *Iraq’s Marsh Arabs in the Garden of Eden* (University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2004).

wandered deep in the desert of what is now western Kuwait and beyond.⁵² The “Mi’dan” he described were clearly a marsh people, while the Bani Hasan were an Arab cultivator tribe that lived on the fringes of the marshes and to some extent depended on its resources and typified what may be called the Marsh Arabs. Thus, in keeping with usage among the marsh population, one can say with greater precision that the terms Ma’dan and Marsh Arab denote differences in occupation, attitudes, culture, and nature of adaptation to the marsh environment.

Matters were not quite so simple, however, since many within the marshes did not entirely fit into either of these categories. Thus, many clearly Ma’dan clans were incorporated within the great Albu Muhammad Confederation that dominated the eastern marshes. This needs explanation. The Arab tribes within the marshes, though relatively newcomers, in establishing their hegemony imposed tribal customary practices in regard to the use and disposition of lands held collectively by the tribe. This effectively meant that those not members of the tribe were denied usage of its lands. It is ironic that the Ma’dan whose forebears had been cultivators and had developed the techniques for farming such land, notably so in the case of the ancient Sumerians, no longer could do so. Only through the procedures known as *kitba* (adoption) were Ma’dan enabled to become cultivators on the rich rice lands held by Albu Muhammad.⁵³ This accommodation largely took place during the nineteenth century. The dual effects, however, were a blurring of the distinctions between Arab and Ma’dan in this region and a diminution in the sense of tribal cohesion within Albu Muhammad.

⁵² On the *shawiyya* see H. R. P. Dickson, *The Arab of the Desert* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949), pp. 545-49; Major J. I. Edie, “Note on Nomad Arab Tribes” (MM, dated 11 August, 1919 [Iraqi] Ministry of Interior, Land Settlement Department).

⁵³ These factors will be detailed in my forthcoming work on *Land and Tribal Administration of Southern Iraq under the Ottomans*.

Indeed, Sousa maintains that Semitic elements were present in the marsh region before the coming of the Sumerians.⁵⁴ The ethnicity of the Sumerians who dwelled in the marshes in antiquity remains a mystery for scholars and is a matter for speculation. Semites continued to infiltrate the region over the millennia. The presence in Mesopotamia of a population with close affinities to the desert beduin spans at least three millennia, since they had become firmly established by 1200 B.C. during the late Kassite period. Moreover, in the course of settlement they assimilated much from the indigenous population, as one finds much in their culture of great antiquity.⁵⁵ The marshes being inaccessible have always been a haven for the oppressed and a hiding place for robbers and rebels. Concerning the destruction of Babylon, Sennacherib caused it to be recorded in his Annals, “I hurried after him (the king of Babylon) and sent my warriors into the midst of the swamps and marshes and they searched for him for five days, but his hiding place was not found.”⁵⁶

Arab writers called the Aramaic population of Mesopotamia at the time of the Moslem invasion by the name Nabatt. Many of them found refuge in “the swamp of the Nabatt.” Renowned as cultivators, it was likely that the Nabatt transmitted the farming techniques of antiquity. Ibn Khaldun mentioned several Arab tribes that made their home in the Bata’ih before the Arab conquests. Apart from the Nabatt, Balathuri noted that there were also al-Andughar, originally from Karman, and numbers of al-Zutt and al-Sayabijah whose origins were in the Indian sub-

⁵⁴ A. Sousa, *Tarikh Hadharat Wadi al Rafidayn*, Vol. I (Baghdad, 1983), pp. 26f. Cp. S. Lloyd, *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia from the Old Stone Age to the Persian Conquest* (London: 1978), pp. 136f.

⁵⁵ See J. A. Brinkman, *A Political History of Post-Kassite Babylonia, 1158-722 B.C.A.* (Rome, 1968), pp. 246ff, 255f; ‘A. al-‘Azzawi, *‘Asha’ir al-‘Iraq al-Qadima-al-Badawiyah al-Hadira*, Vol. I (Baghdad, 1937), pp. 41f.

⁵⁶ D. Luckebeill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, Vol. 2 (New York, 1968), p. 131. See the bas-relief showing the warriors of Sennacherib searching for the King of Babylon in the marshes in 703 B.C. in Young, *op. cit.*, pp. 62f.

continent. These peoples were brought by the Sassanids to Iraq where some worked on land reclamation, others served in the army, and some held lower echelon government positions.⁵⁷ There were also the Asawira who had been brought from Daylam.⁵⁸ Following the Moslem conquest these peoples lost status, became impoverished and discontented, and retreated into the marshes from where they disrupted commerce by brigandage. Thus there were already many elements present in the delta before the Moslem conquest.

During the Umayyad period al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf al-Thaqafi, governor of Iraq, brought a large number of additional Zutt and their buffaloes and put them in the marshes.⁵⁹ During the Abbasid period large numbers of blacks were brought from East Africa for the clearing of salts from depleted lands.⁶⁰ The marsh population at large became impoverished and embittered and more than once rose against their masters and government and would then retreat into the marshes. In the late ninth century the Zandj, black slaves, under the leadership of ‘Ali bin Muhammad fomented a formidable rebellion against their Abbasid overlords and dominated the marshes for fourteen years. Some of their descendants may have survived, since there is a black section called al-‘Abid within the Albu Salih tribe that inhabited marsh on the northwest of Hor Hammar.⁶¹ Ibn Battuta, al-Qalqashandi, al-Masudi, and others give the names of tribes living in the bata’ih in their time.⁶² Ibn al-Athir, Ibn Khaldun, and others wrote of their lawlessness and how problematic

⁵⁷ A. Y. Al Balathiri, *Futuh al Buldan*, Vol. 2 (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 459ff.

⁵⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 344.

⁵⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 463

⁶⁰ Al-Tabari, *Tarikh al-Tabari: Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk*, Vol. IX (Cairo, 1968), p. 410.

⁶¹ Baghdad Embassy of Great Britain (records deposited in the Indian National Archives in New Delhi, India), file 24/44, ///reg. No. 19, under Ghazzi; Arab Bureau, Basra Branch, *The Muntafik, 1917* (Calcutta, 1917), pp. 56,78; ‘A. ‘Azzawi, *‘Asha’ir al-‘Iraq; al-Qadima-al-Badawiyya al-Hadina*, Vol. IV (Baghdad, 1937/1365H), pp. 33, 61.6 .

⁶² Bani Asad, al Shadda, Bani Khayqan, al Fartus, al Shaghamba, and Fraigat.

they were for government, since they would retreat into the thickets of the marsh and could not be followed.⁶³ According to Ibn al-Athir, in 1162 Caliph al-Mustanjid ordered the severe punishment of the Bani Asad of Hilla who following their defeat moved to the marsh of al-Chibayish.⁶⁴ In 1218 Caliph al-Nasir's army punished other tribes that escaped to the marshes.⁶⁵ Al-Futi records two similar expeditions by the Mongol Ilkhanid, one in 1293 and the other in 1298.⁶⁶ It is no wonder the Ottoman army rarely ventured near the marshes. Even the British encountered great difficulty in coping with the marshes and their unruly inhabitants during the Mesopotamian campaign. They eventually innovated the first use of aircraft in the surveillance of a civilian population in an attempt to impose their authority over this remote and troublesome region.⁶⁷

Of special interest were the Sabaeans, sometimes called Subba or Mandaeans, a people with an unquestionably ancient pedigree and who have been well studied by Lady Drower. They lived in small colonies along the banks of the marshes and were also scattered in small numbers within the marshes. They spoke their own language, a dialect of Aramaic, followed their own eclectic religion, a survival of ancient Gnosticism, and had their own holy books and a priestly clan. Reputed to be followers of St. John the Baptist, they always resided near running water, essential for the performance of their rituals of ablutions and had a diet largely of

⁶³ 'A. 'Azzawi, *Tarikh al-Iraq Bayn Ihtilalayn* (Baghdad, 1935), Vol. I, p. 457.

⁶⁴ Abu Hasan Ibn al-Athir, *Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh* (Cairo, n.d.). Bani Asad were interfering with the pilgrimage to Mecca.

⁶⁵ Ibn al-Athir, *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ *Al-Hawadith al-Jami'a fi al-Ma'a al-Tari'a* (Baghdad, 1351H), pp. 476f.

⁶⁷ See J. L. Cox, "A Splendid Training Ground: The Importance to the Royal Air Force of its Role in Iraq, 1919-32," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. XIII, No. 2 (Jan. 1985), esp. pp. 157, 164, 167f, 171f, 175.

fish.⁶⁸ They plied trades, using primitive tools, and were essential to the economy of the marshes.⁶⁹

That the ancestry of the marsh population included other than Semitic components is attested by the anthropomorphic surveys of Henry Field and corroborated by the observations of the Westphals.⁷⁰ The latter detected differences between the ethnographic mix of one Ma'dan clan and that of another. Thus, the ethnography of the marsh population was mixed and the mix was uneven throughout the region. Visitors to the marshes have commonly noted how different in appearance the inhabitants were from those in neighboring, predominately Arab, areas. Their faces were rounder and the shapes of their eyes, noses, jaws, and chins were different. Some children were fair and there were those with blue or green eyes and lighter colored hair. Many have recalled how handsome they were and how beautiful the women, though they tended to age young.⁷¹ C. J. Edmunds told of "that magnificent body of men, the 1st Marsh Arab Battalion of Iraq Levies...of whom a British officer has recorded that not a man in his company measured under 6 feet."⁷² Gavin Maxwell, however, was struck by their short, stocky stature and by the incidence of disease and deformity.⁷³ One medical expert found them

⁶⁸ The definitive work on the Sabaeans is Lady Drower, *The Mandaean* (Oxford, 1938). See also her *The Secret Adam: A Study of Nasoraean Gnosis* (Oxford, 1960).

⁶⁹ Cp. Ainsworth, *op. cit.*, p. 73; Loftus, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

⁷⁰ H. Field, *Anthropology of Iraq*, Part 1, No. 2, 1949; S. Westphal-Hellbusch & H. Westphal, *Die Ma'dan: Kultur und Geschichte der Marschenbewohner im Sud-Iraq* (Berlin, 1962), *passim*.

⁷¹ Maxwell, *op. cit.*, p. 139; Young, *op. cit.*, pp. 69, 145. For vivid descriptions of certain of the *ma'dan* in the mid-nineteenth century, see Loftus, *op. cit.*, pp. 120ff; Fraser, *op. cit.*, pp. 292f.

⁷² "The Marshmen of Southern Iraq: [Review of] *A Reed Shaken by the Wind*," *Geographical Journal*, Vol. CXXIV (1958), p. 93. For the similar views of the early nineteenth century travelers Keppel and Fraser, see Young, *op. cit.*, pp. 68f.

⁷³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 39f. Cp. Thesiger, *Marsh Arabs*, pp. 104ff; Young, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

typically to be a “living pathological specimen.”⁷⁴ Certainly, it was not a healthy environment. Diseases prevalent in the marsh region were malaria, bilharzias, hookworm, dysentery, and trachoma. In their chronic forms malaria and bilharzias were debilitating, while hookworm was endemic.⁷⁵ The region was also subject to the periodic epidemics which afflicted Iraq generally and which decimated whole communities.⁷⁶ Clearly, disease contributed to high mortality rates and had serious demographic ramifications.

The differences in societal structure between Ma'dan and Arabs were striking and had political ramifications. That of the Ma'dan was minimal and consisted of little more than families and clans, any affiliations with larger tribal entities quite loose. They lived in scattered communities and many of them, dependent on water buffalo for their livelihood, led a nomadic existence for a great part of each year. In small groups they moved about within the marshes to pasture their herds on tender, young shoots of marsh growth. Thus, devoid of larger unites and lacking a hereditary ruling class, they were disunited and politically weak. In contrast, Arab society was highly stratified, closely-knit, with clear lines of authority, and time-honored tribal codes of justice that gave a measure of legitimacy to tribal actions. However, the history of Arab tribes has been that of the rise and fall of great tribal formations and, once decline set in, a tendency toward fragmentation. In the vicinity of Madina at the northeast of the Hor al-Hammar the inhabitants had ceased to identify themselves by clan or tribal affiliation, but rather by place names.

⁷⁴ Quoted by P. Sluglett, “The Marsh Dwellers in the History of Modern Iraq,” in E. Nicholson & P. Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 237 n9.

⁷⁵ Fisher, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-12.

⁷⁶ *E.g.*, in the malaria epidemic of 1849 an estimated 12,000 died out of the Baghdad population of 70,000 – Loftus, *op. cit.*, p. 8. No data exists pertaining to mortality rates from epidemics among marsh dwellers, but given their vulnerabilities it was likely very high. *Cf.* Fisher, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-12.

Following the fall of the Abbasids in 1258 Iraq became a peripheral Province, the center of Empire being elsewhere. Management of the canal and irrigation systems on which the prosperity of southern Iraq depended was inept and often neglected entirely. Under these circumstances the marshes became ever more isolated and a strife ridden cauldron in which men living within the marshes dared not venture beyond the narrow limits controlled by the faction to which they belonged. Arab tribes fared somewhat better. Within their own tribal diras, the areas over which they held sway, they could repair bunds, clean canals, supervise agricultural enterprise, and arbitrate disputes. They became the only indigenous agencies capable of maintaining some semblance of order within the countryside.

The Bani Lam, a powerful tribal Confederation, established authority over the lands of the lower Tigris below Kut, including most of the eastern marshes. They included both pastoral and cultivator sections. Noted as warriors, their black tents woven from goat hair were considered the best in all of Arabia⁷⁷ and they were famed for their horses, in demand as far away as India. In the nineteenth century the Albu Muhammad wrested from Bani Lam control of much of the eastern marshes and over which they were dominant until recent times.⁷⁸ Throughout the Ottoman period the central and southern belts of marshes fell largely within the domain of the al-Sa'dun. They were not a tribe, but rather a princely family. They were skilled arbitrators and warriors who gained authority over the tribes of the southern Euphrates and Gharraf regions, inclusive of the marshes. Their domain included three very large and powerful tribal Confederacies consisting of Ma'dan,

⁷⁷ H. R. P. Dickson, *op. cit.*, p. 73n.

⁷⁸ Memorandum of Group Captain, Air Staff to Air Headquarter, Iraq, 8th November 1922, No. 1/1989 of 8/11/22, enclos. Tribal Lists of the Amara Liwa (Military Report Area No. 7).

Marsh Arab, cultivator, *shawiyya* (shepherd tribes), and true Beduin (Ahil Ba'ir) constituents.⁷⁹

The socio-economic differences among the marsh dwellers were reflected in their attitudes toward the resources of the marsh habitat and the ways in which they used them. Resources indigenous to the marsh were severely limited and did not include wood, stone, and metals. Resources that existed in abundance in the marshes were mud, generally clay-like in nature, and reed.

In settled communities on the fringes of the marsh, and throughout southern Iraq generally, mud was used in the construction of their domiciles and other architectural structures. There were two kinds—sun-dried brick and pisé. Bricks were manufactured in moulds and allowed to dry in the sun from twenty to thirty days, a procedure followed in antiquity. Kiln dried bricks were known, but were expensive and rare. Pisé consisted of hand-formed mud admixed with a temper of organic matter (generally finely chopped reed or rush). Roofs were generally made by ingenious use of reed and mud, since wood was scarce and costly.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ The Al-Sa'dun lineage derived its name from that of an early seventeenth century warrior who in turn was of al-Shabib lineage. A member of the latter lineage independently ruled Basra when in 1534 Suleyman the Magnificent took Baghdad. See Ya'qub Sarkis, "*Mashyakhat Al-Sa'dun fi al-Muntafiq*," *Lughghat al-'Arab*, V, No. 1 (1927), p. 25; *Mabahith*, Vol. 1 (Baghdad, 1948), pp. 722f; A. Jwaideh, "The Al Sa'dun Emirate and Its Decline," *Arab Historical Review for Ottoman Studies*, Nos. 13-14 (October 1996), p. 77. Cp. 'A. all-Sharqi, *Dhikra al-Sa'dun aw Tarikh Batal al-Tadhiya wa al-Ikhlâs* (Baghdad, n.d.), p. 28. According to Loftus, in mid-nineteenth century Fahad al-Sa'dun could raise a body of 50,000 well-armed men within a few hours, *op. cit.*, p. 145. See also W. Heude, *A Voyage up the Persian Gulf* (London, 1819), p. *Administrative Report for the Muntafiq Division for the year 1920* (Baghdad, 1921), pp. 66f.

⁸⁰ Oschenslager, *op. cit.*, pp. 98f. Kramer attributes the invention of the mold for shaping and baking bricks to the Sumerians. See *op. cit.*, p. 4.

The ancient Sumerians manufactured from mud such items as sickles, pots, and jars.⁸¹ Until recent times sun-dried mud continued to be used in making cooking and heating devices, such as ovens for the cooking of meat and fish and particularly for the baking of bread (*tannur*). Specialized items made of sun-dried mud included incense burners, various kinds of dishes, storage containers and chests, heavy covers for the protection of food, mortars of every shape and size, and even a grain grinder. Musical instruments made of mud were the drum and the whistle. They also made mud jewelry, and toys of every sort, even baby rattles. Lacking stones, boys fashioned round missiles of mud for use in their slings. Many of these items were quite similar to those found in archaeological digs.⁸²

Baked pottery and ceramics were known and there were those skilled in the manufacture of such items, but they were expensive and uncommon. Ochsenslager has suggested that this was probably obtained in antiquity as well.⁸³

Reed was the resource most distinctive of the marsh. Correctly cut and split they made an excellent writing pen. Indeed, they were probably the original instrument for cuneiform writing and, as Ibn Sa'id al-Mughribi tells us, the reed pens of medieval Wasit were considered the best in the east.⁸⁴ Reed was used to dam water and prevent the inundation of land and reed mats have long been used to shore up and repair bunds.⁸⁵ Domiciles made of mud were rare among the Ma'dan who lived on the fringes of the marshes and nonexistent among those living in the interior; they instead relied on the reed. Their huts, known as *sara'if* consisted of

⁸¹ Kramer, *ibid.*, p. 3.

⁸² Oschenslager, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-73.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-28.

⁸⁴ Cl. Huart, *Les Calligraphes et les miniaturists de l'Orient Musulman* (1908), p. 13.

⁸⁵ Loftus, *op. cit.*, pp. 7, 38.

reed mats propped on bundles of reed or on the paddles of their canoe.⁸⁶ Wellsted stated that they mostly were oblong in shape with a sloping roof and could be “broken down and converted into rafts, upon which, with their women and children, they embark.”⁸⁷ The more permanent huts of reed-gatherers and cultivators often consisted of mats attached to a reed frame consisting of three or more arches. Fraser stated that the largest of them did not exceed ten feet long by eight feet broad.⁸⁸ It was commonly divided by a bench made of a tied reed framework and a reed bundle top which separated the women’s area or the kitchen from the rest of the quarters.⁸⁹ In times of flood their belongings would be stacked on this bench to keep them dry. As Ainsworth witnessed in the mid-nineteenth century, “I have seen a baby swinging in a cradle suspended from the top of a reed hut, while the waters were flowing in an unimpeded current through the hut itself.”⁹⁰ The adaptability and temporary nature of these domiciles is well expressed in the the story of the flood in Epic of Gilgamesh from 3000 B.C.:

Reed-house, reed-house! Wall, O Wall,
harken reed-house...O man of Shuruppak,
son of Ubaru-Tutu; tear down your home
and build a boat...⁹¹

Reed huts were by no means confined to the Ma’dan of the marsh, however. Among cultivator tribes of the lower Tigris entire villages of reed huts were

⁸⁶ In the eastern marshes the housing of the *ma’dan* were “no more than insignificant appendages to the huge buffalo-shelters, or *sitras*. – Maxwell, *op. cit.*, p. 135. Cp. Salim, *op. cit.*, pp. 99, 101.

⁸⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 207.

⁸⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 293. Cp. Salim, *op. cit.*, pp. 95, 97, 106, 108.

⁸⁹ Maxwell, *op. cit.*, pp.. 33, 61f.

⁹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁹¹ As quoted by Young, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

common.⁹² In Ottoman times, many distant from the marshes preferred reed huts to more permanent mud ones. The ease with which they could be taken down and reassembled facilitated shelter during planting and harvest and quick exit when the revenue officials appeared. They provided temporary shelter when the family home was destroyed by fire, a not infrequent occurrence.⁹³

Within the marshes huts were commonly built on individual, man-made islands (*chibayish*, from the Arabic root meaning “to tread down” or “to press”). These were formed by enclosing an area of marsh with reed mats within which layers of reeds, bulrushes, and earth were compressed.⁹⁴ In the beginning, in the Sumerian story of creation, Marduk, the great god, built a reed platform on the surface of the waters and thus created the world.⁹⁵ These platforms tended to compress after a while and it was necessary from time to time to add further layers of bulrush, reed, and earth. The beautiful village of Chibayish consisted of some 1,600 man-made islets, each the domicile of a separate household. As Gavin Maxwell vividly said, “It was like a fleet of lit boats at anchor in a calm sea.”⁹⁶

The Ma’dan used fewer artifacts made from mud than did the Arabs. They did not use sun-dried mud cooking and heating devices nor did they use the tannur for baking, while their containers were of woven reed basketry. For their whistles they used reed and their drums were made from the pendulous pouch of skin below the bill of pelicans.⁹⁷ They had a sunken hearth in the floor of their hut in which they

⁹² In the mid-nineteenth century, Fraser found that below Hillah mud huts gave way to those built of reeds. *Op. cit.*, pp. 27f.

⁹³ Salim, *Marsh Dwellers*, p. 12; Young, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁹⁴ Salim, *op. cit.*

⁹⁵ Quoted by Young, *op. cit.*

⁹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p.

⁹⁷ Maxwell, *op. cit.*, pp. 67f.

made their fires. Mud bricks or narrow walls of pisé were used to support vessels for cooking and heating. On a concave iron plate placed over a fire of reeds or buffalo dung, they baked their thick, flat loaves of bread. Unlike the Arabs, Ma'dan men and women ate together.⁹⁸ They generally had only one substantial meal each day at sundown which usually consisted of boiled rice over which was poured hot clarified butter. They might add fish or wild fowl, both of which were plentiful in the marsh. Fish was cooked by splitting it open and propping it against reed and heating it by burning reeds held in the hand. For salad they had watercress and a pink-flowering plant called *igat*. From an edible rush called *ageyl* and the fluff of a bulrush they made a sweetmeat called *khurrait*. For drink they usually had water, since they could ill afford the luxury of tea and coffee.⁹⁹ The early and midday meals consisted of unleavened bread (*khobaz*) made of great millet. Alternatively, they might have rice bread instead, the two kinds of which were *siha* and *risa*. Barley bread was seldom eaten and wheaten bread not at all.¹⁰⁰ The Ma'dan made little attempt to keep their women apart from visitors. Unlike shepherd and cultivator Arabs beyond the marsh, their huts could be approached from either side. A male visitor could sit and talk with the women. At night the entire family and any guests would sleep together either on the men's side of the hut or in the open on the platform on which it was built, since the woman's side was piled high with cooking utensils, sacks of rice and often was occupied by young buffalos.¹⁰¹

Ma'dan women were freer and more independent than their Arab counterparts. They were known to slip away from their homes in order to meet their paramours.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁹⁹ Buxton and Dowson, *op. cit.*, p. 296; Lady Drower, "Marsh People of South 'Iraq," *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society*, Vol. XXXIV, Part 1 (Jan. 1947) p. 87; Thesiger, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

¹⁰⁰ Buxton & Dowson, *op. cit.*, p. 296; Lady Drower, *op. cit.*; Thesiger, *Marsh Arabs*, p.165.

¹⁰¹ Thesiger, "The Ma'dan &c.", pp. 12f. Cp. Fulanain, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

They were adept in the art of flirtation, knowing well the limits beyond which they dared not go. With the flash of their eyes accentuated by *kohl* (antimony), the jangle of their bracelets, the sense of mastery of a body well covered, and the confidence that young men dared not overstep, they could torment their prospective suitors with abandon.¹⁰² Despite the risks, elopement occurred. Thus, Makiyya, the beautiful sister of the famed Shaykh Sayhud of Abu Muhammad defied her father who wished to match her with the shaykh of an allied tribe. She instead eloped with the handsome son of a rival shaykh. It led to the death of her love, but by sheer dent of will she lived to have six other husbands. She became in her own right the shaykheh of her own tribe and ruled with an iron fist that rivaled that of her male peers.¹⁰³

Marriage was an imperative and the primary occupation of women. This sentiment was expressed in the ancient Sumerian saying, “May all your young daughters marry.”¹⁰⁴ It was also expressed in the Babylonian proverb, “A house without an owner (is like) a woman without a husband.”¹⁰⁵ The Arab attachment to purity of bloodlines was demonstrated in the pre-nuptial agreements of the Bani Asad. As an incentive for endogenous marriage, it was common for the father of a prospective bride to accept a lower dowry. This had the additional advantage that his sons could obtain brides at lower rates also. But to insure the blood purity of the tribe, any lineage man could prohibit the marriage of any lineage girl to a man outside the lineage and no marriage arrangement could be made without the

¹⁰² Azzawi, *op. cit.*, pp. 339-42; Fulanain, *op. cit.*, pp. 2f; Fahmi, *op. cit.*, p. 16. In contrast, for the quite different desert ways see E. S. Stevens, *By Tigris and Euphrates* (London, 1925), pp. 275-78.

¹⁰³ Fulanain, *op. cit.*, pp. 183ff.

¹⁰⁴ Kramer, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* (Oxford, 1960), p. 232.

consent of the shaykh.¹⁰⁶ Among the Ma'dan, however, such restrictions were not so hard and fast, as is illustrated by the story of Makiyya.

Marriage was the great event of a girl's life; wifehood and motherhood her only career. In its essential elements the ceremonial traditions of marriage were fairly uniform in southern Iraq and were strikingly similar to those of antiquity.¹⁰⁷ A procession would form at the bride's home which was accompanied by the beating of drums, the ululating trilling and rhythmic clapping of the women, in modern times the firing of rifle shots by men, and lanterns winded its way by boat in a roundabout fashion. This display was known as *hosah*, the same word used for celebratory display of warriors before they went to battle. There were the occasional stops where refreshments were served along with much gaiety. Eventually the procession would arrive at the nuptial home, generally a temporary structure erected for the occasion. It was then that the marital vows were made in the presence of relatives and guests. Bride and groom then retired, while the guests remained outside. Once the consummation of the marriage was announced by firing off of a rifle shot the celebration renewed, after with the guests dispersed. On the second day one of the relatives would come and lay a cloth on the ground in front of the nuptial home and exclaim "shobash," whereupon the guests came forward with their wedding presents.¹⁰⁸ The newly united couple remained in the nuptial home seven days during which the bride was exempted from all labor. On the seventh day they moved to the household of the groom where they were received as integral members. Thus with marriage a bride crossed over to a new

¹⁰⁶ Salim, *Marsh Dwellers*, pp. 50, 66. Cp. 'Azzawi, *op. cit.*, pp. 331f, 336f.

¹⁰⁷ I. Seifert, *Women in the Ancient Near East* (New York, 1974), pp. 15, 25, 43, 75.

¹⁰⁸ Maxwell, *op. cit.*, pp. 113, 122; Young, *op. cit.*, pp. 147f; *Extract from the Persian Gulf Gazetteer* (Confidential) (Calcutta, 1917), p. 109; Salim, *op. cit.*, pp. 50f. Cp. H. R. P. Dickson, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

household and a new existence, this being the most important happening in her life.¹⁰⁹

It was a common practice in the marshes for women to be given as *fasl* in the settlement of disputes, particularly those regarding murder. In *swani*, traditional tribal law, *fasl*, literally “settlement,” was the payment of the offending party to that of the aggrieved.¹¹⁰ The giving of women as *fasl* was done in one of two ways, either by handing over immediately mature women of marriageable age or by the earmarking of young girls called *machafit* to be handed over later at their maturity.¹¹¹ *Fasl* was thus not merely a substitute for the blood required by retributive justice, but was also a means of restitution and reconciliation.¹¹² Among the *Firairat*, the *fasl* for murder was six women the first of whom, known as the *fijairiyah*, had to be a virgin of marriageable age, i.e. between fourteen and sixteen, and be from the family of the killer. If they had no suitable daughter or sister, the *fijairiyah* came from the nearest relative. The other five were known as *talawi*, to follow, for which the aggrieved family could choose a money payment instead.¹¹³ Women given in marriage in this manner afforded the means of restoring manifold the lost member of the aggrieved family. Sometimes, owing to the premature death or barrenness of a woman, the aggrieved family might demand another woman of her value in money. Children born of such unions, especially sons, established blood ties between the contending families and tended to lessen

¹⁰⁹ Thesiger, *Marsh Arabs*, 185; Dickson, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

¹¹⁰ Iraqi Archives, Land Settlement Department, Ministry of Interior, File No. 60/N/11, Part 26, Ref. No. 34/953, 22/12/1953; Administrative Report, 1919, Part I, Basra, p. 155; Salim, *Marsh Dwellers*, p. 52; *Chibaiyish*, pp. 140-46; Fulainain, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-58; F. M. Far’awn, *Al-Qada’ al-‘Asha’iri* (Baghdad, 1941), pp. 40f; letter from Shaykh Fariq al-Mizher Al Fir’awn, shaykh of al-Fatla Tribe, dated 1/1/1958, to A. Jwaideh; *Persian Gulf Gazetteer*; *ibid.*; A. Fahmi, *Report on Iraq* (Baghdad, 1926), pp.17f; W. Thesiger, *op. cit.*, pp. 65ff; Maxwell, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹¹¹ Administrative Report, 1919, p. 57.

¹¹² H. R. P. Dickson, *op. cit.*, pp. 148, 530. *Cp.* Stevens, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

¹¹³ Thesiger, *op. cit.*

the strains between them. In some cases women given as part of a *fasl* agreement, once they had borne a son (*lo abzerat fusalaf*; “if she seeded she has paid *fasl*”) were permitted to return to their families. But such marriages were rarely terminated once consummation had taken place.¹¹⁴ *Fasliyah* (a woman taken for compensation) suffered cruelly. Cut off from her family and all with whom she identified, in status she was only slightly above that of a slave. She was forced to live in a tribe hostile to her own and hence hostile to her. She became the absolute chattel of the one to whom she was allotted and could not demand a divorce.¹¹⁵ Apparently women could also be demanded as a part of the *fasl* in the resolution of boundary disputes as well.¹¹⁶

A practice distinctive of southern Iraq was tattooing, particularly so among the Ma’dan. The practice dates from the time of the Sumerians (4,000 to 2,000 B.C.). Indeed, many of the geometrical and stylized designs of modern times duplicate those found on ancient potsherds. Tattooing was known as *daqq*, the root meaning of which was to strike or knock, and hence implies tattooing by puncture. Tattoos were of two kinds; those the primary object of which was ornamental or decorative and those done for therapeutic or magic reasons. W. Smeaton has postulated that, whatever the evolution of the practice, the original purpose was probably “magico-religious.” Magical tattooing was applied to bring about some desired contingency. Three kinds of magical tattooing stood out: first, to induce pregnancy; second, to protect children against death, especially boys; and third, as a charm for the sake of love or to insure against some magic. Among the Albu Muhammad men liked women who were tattooed and would refuse to marry those who had not had it done. The designs followed were geometrical and stylized and

¹¹⁴ Salim, *Marsh Dwellers*, p. 52; *Chibaiyish*, p. 145.

¹¹⁵ Fulanain, *op. cit.*, pp. 55f.

¹¹⁶ Administrative Report of the ‘Amarah Division for the Year 1920-21 (Baghdad, 1922), p. 3.

quite similar throughout the delta. But each tribal unit had its particular markings by which its women could be easily identified.¹¹⁷

Ma'dan especially were amphibians from infancy. It was common for a man to strip and swim rapidly across a stretch of water with his belongings held in one hand high above his head. A British officer has related how during World War I a man one night swam submerged, breathing through a hollow reed, climbed aboard a British gunboat, ransacked the belongings of sleeping crew members, swam away with his loot held high in his hand to the safety of a clump of reeds before he could be apprehended. Ma'dan pirates in the same way would storm river-craft. Their primary mode of transportation was by means of a *mashuf*, a canoe with a narrow beam and a tapered stem which they, regardless of gender or age, skillfully poled or paddled, depending on the depth of the water, and which moved with speed, cutting through the reeds.¹¹⁸ They resembled those of antiquity as can be seen from the silver model discovered at Ur and until recently preserved at the Baghdad Museum.¹¹⁹ A beautiful version, called *tarada*, could convey as many as twelve warriors, and be as much as eleven meters long and a meter wide at its widest beam.¹²⁰ The Ma'dan used a small, shallow canoe called *mataur* for shooting wildlife. These crafts were made of wood and waterproofed with coats of bitumen brought from the bitumen springs at Hit. The Sabaean were the boat builders in the marshes. They used tools and modes of construction of primitive origin. Since wood was lacking in the marshes, here was an element in the marsh

¹¹⁷ L. al-Khaffaf, "*Washm Jism 'Imra'a*," *Al-Turath al-Sha'bi*, v. 8 (1974), pp. 209-18; W. Smeaton, "Tattooing Among the Arabs of Iraq," *American Anthropologist*, n.s., v. 39 (1937), pp. 53-61. Among the findings at Ur are clay figurines that suggest tattoo marks – S. Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹¹⁸ Buxton and Dowson, *op. cit.*, p. 293; Thesiger, *op. cit.*, pp. 13f; Lady Drower, *op. cit.*, pp. 84, 86; Fulanain, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, this 5,000 year-old model was one of the items lost in the plunder of the Museum following the American invasion.

¹²⁰ Thesiger, *op. cit.*, pp. 22f; Loftus, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

economy in which they were dependent on the outside world. Of interest is the small primitive boats often used by Ma'dan children called *shasha*.¹²¹ They consisted of bundles of bulrushes tied together. A canoe using indigenous resources was the *zaima*. Built of reed and willow wands, it was similar in design and appearance to the *mashuf*. By the 1950s, however, they had nearly disappeared and few remained who were knowledgeable in their construction.¹²²

The Ma'dan were closely associated with water buffaloes on which they depended primarily for their livelihood. Their buffaloes were pampered, young ones freely sharing their living quarters. They even slept together, the buffaloes supplying comfort during chilly winter nights. Each morning a herder, generally a Ma'dan youth, led the buffaloes to a choice pasture within the marshes where they were left on their own and each evening he would follow them back, each buffalo knowing to which household it belonged. Sometimes Ma'dan harvested fodder from the marsh that was brought back in their canoes and off-loaded onto the platforms on which their huts were built. Each evening they would light smoke fires to keep the midges and mosquitoes away from the animals and themselves. Women were not allowed to milk cows. This contrasts with practice among shepherd tribes where the women milked the sheep and goats and, while men might hold them, would never milk them. And unlike the shepherd tribe who tethered their animals each night, the Ma'dan left their buffaloes unfettered.¹²³ The standard dowry for a woman was three buffaloes. Since most Ma'dan had only five or six buffaloes, it prevented early marriages.¹²⁴ From the milk of the buffalo the women made excellent cream, curds, clarified butter, and a braided cheese very little of which

¹²¹ Parsons tells of boys crossing a river astride a single bundle of reed – *op. cit.*, pp. 147f.

¹²² Thesiger, *ibid.*, pp. 126f

¹²³ Thesiger, "The *Ma'dan* &c.," p. 11. *Cp.*, Thesiger, *The Marsh Arabs*, pp. 58f; Maxwell, *op. cit.*, pp. 65.

¹²⁴ Thesiger, "The *Ma'dan* &c.," p. 11.

they consumed themselves.¹²⁵ From the buffalo they also made dung cakes for fuel.¹²⁶ In addition to their buffaloes, nearly every Ma'dan household had a few chickens and a ferocious dog or two against which their bitumen tipped clubs were needed. Each morning Ma'dan women would go off to peddle their wares of *ghi*, clarified butter, and braided cheese made from the milk of their buffaloes, and perhaps a water fowl and some eggs for sale in a nearby market. Their produce in great demand, the Ma'dan women would go alone by canoe, sometimes as far as Basra, and without fear, secure that they would not be harmed owing to the taboos against the molestation of women.¹²⁷ In contrast, Ma'dan men, especially during Ottoman times, dared not go beyond familiar surroundings.

During the spring flood season some Ma'dan made large rafts or floating platforms (*al-dibun*) of reeds, bulrushes, and earth. It would be large enough to hold a hut, or a few buffaloes, and could be poled from place to place. It was used as a temporary residence. A group of such rafts would form a settlement that sometimes even had its own shop. These floating islands were found only in Hor al-Hammar and Hor al-Huwaiza.¹²⁸

Other marsh dwellers that followed occupations adapted to the marsh habitat were the reed-gatherers. According to Salim, they belonged to one of two tribal groupings: the Bani Asad and certain of the Albu Muhammad clans, namely, the Butabta, Nuwafil Ahl Irthayil, Albu Ghannam, and Ishshada.¹²⁹ The latter clans

¹²⁵ Lady Drower, *op. cit.*, p. 87; H. St. John Philby, "The Eastern Marshes of Mesopotamia," *The Geographical Journal*, v. CXXVs (1959), p. 67.

¹²⁶ Maxwell, *op. cit.*, p. 63; Thesiger, *The Marsh Arabs*, p. 59. Lady Drower noted that the "flat, thin discs" were made by mixing chopped reeds with buffalo manure. *Op. cit.*, p. 86

¹²⁷ Dorothy Van Ess, *Fatima and her Sisters* (New York: John Day, 1961), pp.17, 81; Mora Dickson, *Baghdad and Beyond* (London: Dennis Dobson, 1961), p. 137; Loftus, *op. cit.* p. 5.

¹²⁸ Salim, *Marsh Dwellers*, p.12. Maxwell, *op. cit.*, p. 53

¹²⁹ Salim, *op. cit.* p. 10.

have not been scrutinized as Salim has done with the Bani Asad. Moreover, some Bani Asad were cereal cultivators and a few sections derived their livings from salt mines and seasonal labor. Owing to their profitability, a number of Bani Asad families owned water buffaloes. Indeed, some owned herds larger than that of most Ma'dan. But they tended to have a disdain toward buffalo herding and hence would hire out this onerous task to Ma'dan who received cereals in exchange, a needed item they did not have. Vegetable cultivation was deemed onerous as well. In this case they rented out some of their land each season to *hasawiya* who raised vegetables for sale in the local markets.¹³⁰

Many marsh dwellers engaged in reed gathering and in the manufacture of reed mats, known as *bawari*, and artifacts of reed. Soon after dawn men, women, and children indiscriminately set out in their canoes to gather reed, sometimes traversing great distances to reach the best places. They cut the reed with a saw-edged sickle called *minjal*, wading about in the water up to their waists, men and children naked, women clothed, and piled the reed in their canoes, amid much shouting, laughter, and song. It was a common practice for one singer to take the lead and the others to join in with a refrain. Many of the songs were spontaneous. They tended to have a blues quality about them and frequently spoke of unrequited love. They generally worked in pairs with one doing the cutting while the other measured, tied, and loaded them. It took about four hours to collect a canoe load of about fifteen bundles. Once an adequate supply was accumulated, the canes were split and both men and women worked at weaving mats. Women did the finer craft work such as decorative fans. They would sit and weave using their toes as well as their fingers. They also employed looms made of reed and clay.¹³¹ There was a market for their work throughout Iraq. In earlier times large quantities of

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 89.

¹³¹ Salim, *op. cit.*, pp. 105f; Thesiger, *op. cit.*, p. 87; M. Dickson, *op. cit.*, pp. 135f. Cp. Stevens, *op. cit.*, p. 259; D. Van Ess, *op. cit.*, p. 116; Lady Drower, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

mats would be accumulated and transported by large boats or reed rafts which were poled in open water and pulled with ropes in narrow waterways, the women working alongside the men. From the 1970s, once the marshes had been penetrated with causeways large truckloads of mats left the marshes daily.

Fish was another resource of the marshes that should not be forgotten. As did the Sumerians in antiquity, the Ma'dan speared fish with a *falah*. This was an iron harpoon with three or five barbed prongs attached to a bamboo shaft about ten feet long. In the spring, men collected in parties of forty to fifty canoes. In a line four to five yards apart they would sweep up and down a lagoon. The spearmen would try to impale the fish as they broke under the canoes. In summer they fished at night using reed torches spearing the fish as they swam through the clear, lighted water. In recent times they used dry-cell torches rather than flaming ones. Although netting was used in antiquity, the Ma'dan had a strong aversion to nets. They fished only for their own consumption. There were commercial fishermen called *barbera* who did fish with nets, but they were despised and considered the lowest caste.¹³² However, a growing demand for fresh fish in the latter half of the twentieth century was accompanied by a weakening of fishing taboos. But once the Ma'dan broke through the barrier to the sale of fish, they found that their traditional fishing methods were not competitive, for by that time the Marsh Arabs were using nets. They resolved their dilemma by entrapping fish by net and then spearing them. Such are the marvels of cultural change.¹³³

Arab culture was supremely blended with that of high antiquity in the *mudhif* (guest house). It closely approximated the earliest representations of proto-Sumerian temples in the fourth millennium B.C. and many of the traditions

¹³² Salim,, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-03; Thesiger, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-12; Maxwell, *op. cit.*, pp. 45f; Young, *op. cit.*, p. 122; Oschenslager, *op. cit.*, pp. 228ff.

¹³³ Oschenslager, *ibid.*

associated with it certainly pre-date the Arab incursion. It was a permanent structure made of reeds, stylized in form, invariably with an odd number of supporting columns, and sometimes architecturally impressive. Its construction was a cooperative venture and always began on a Sunday. Large columns of tightly bound reeds were placed in parallel rows. The opposing columns were then spliced together to form horseshoe-shaped arches. Struts were then tied in place. The entire frame was then bound. Lattice walls were then added and the roof strengthened. The roof consisted of giant mats specially woven for the *mudhif* and placed in several layers to protect against the elements. At the ends were placed large columns made from palm trunks and reeds to which were attached mats and lattice, sometimes artistically arranged in a beautiful pattern. Lady Drower captured the airy sense of spaciousness of these cathedral-like structures,

Light comes from the entrance and in hot weather from the lattice-work at the sides, and it is a soft amber light that filters into the great coolness and dimness of...(the *mudhif*), sometimes varied by a shaft of brilliant blue sunshine without which, if it falls on a brightly coloured rug, makes a pool of emerald and ruby in the sober interior.¹³⁴

Among the Arabs of the marshes the *mudhif* was the tangible center of tribal life. Always sited to face Mecca, these reed cathedrals assumed the same functions as the great tented *mudhifs* of the nomadic and shepherd tribes. Its size and the generosity of the hospitality offered in it were considered a measure of the prestige, wealth, and power of the tribe. The *shaykh* was responsible for its maintenance and for its support he received a substantial share of the tribe's wealth. In a larger sense, it was the property of the whole tribe. Apart from being the place where the *shaykh* received guests and the indigent received meals, it was the council chamber where tribal policies were debated and where social and business matters were

¹³⁴ Drower, *op. cit.*, p. 86. Cp. Layard, quoted in Young, *op. cit.*, p. 71. For impressive photographs of building and completed *mudhifs*, see *op. cit.*, pp. 104-15.

conducted. It was the hall of justice where disputes were resolved and lawsuits tried; the community center on festive occasions; the sanctuary in times of trouble and for the celebration of religious observances; the club and, not least, the coffee house.¹³⁵

The *mudhif* was a sacred place; tribesmen took oaths in the *mudhif* of their clan, taking hold of one of its pillars in the same way as a Bible is used in the west. Those who had some keen desire uttered their wish, exactly as they might do on the tomb of an Imam. An offender or culprit could take sanctuary in a *mudhif*, even in that of his enemy. During the last days of the Bani Asad Shaykh Hasan al-Khayyun, ten leaders of the Hisin tribe, came at dawn one day shrouded in white, winding sheets, and claimed sanctuary in the *mudhif* of the shaykh. Each tied himself to a pillar and demanded death or peace. They were forgiven, granted a truce, and returned safely to their tribe.

Nothing was more characteristic of Arab tribal life than the etiquette associated with the *mudhif*. To have a seat in it was a sign of status, and the order of seating was indicative of rank. Attire and forms of address were strictly followed, and the ceremonial making of coffee accompanied all deliberations. A shamed man would be refused coffee and he would not return to the *mudhif* until his honor had been restored. When the shaykh or the tribe was disgraced the *mudhif* was closed and no more coffee was brewed until the situation had been redeemed. In those villages or tribal sects too poor to maintain a separate *mudhif* the headman would have an *al rab'a*, a building with an opening at opposite ends, the one end serving as the dwelling of the headman and the other the functions of a *mudhif*.

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¹³⁵ According to Loftus, the *mudhif* of the head *shaykh* of Affej in the mid-nineteenth century was 40 feet long and 18 feet high – *op. cit.*, p. 92.

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Professor Wadie Elias Jwaideh had a long and distinguished career both within and outside of Indiana University. He received the degree of Licentiate in Law from the University of Baghdad in 1942. In 1960, he received his PhD from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University. During this time, he also held a lecturer position in Arabic at Johns Hopkins University.

His dissertation entitled “A History of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement” is the most comprehensive study ever made into the Kurdish question. This work established him as one of the world’s leading experts on the Kurds. It will be published in English in the spring of 2006 by Syracuse University Press.

Dr. Jwaideh joined the faculty of Indiana University in 1960 and became the founder and chairman of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literature and Professor of History until his retirement.

In 1972, Professor Jwaideh was given the Lieber Memorial Award for Distinguished Teaching. A number of his colleagues and former students contributed articles for a Festschrift in his honor. Dr. Robert Olsen edited this book, entitled *Islamic and Middle Eastern Society* (Amana Books, 1987).

After his retirement from IU in 1985, Dr. Jwaideh accepted an appointment as Adjunct Professor of History at the University of California at San Diego, where he taught until 1990.



Professor Albertine Jwaideh holds a B.A. from the University of Baghdad and M.A. from the University of Beirut. At Oxford University, she studied 18th and 19th century Ottoman Empire with a special emphasis on Iraq, receiving the B.Litt. and D.Phil. degrees. She was the first Arab woman to receive either of these degrees at Oxford. Prof. Jwaideh has taught at the University of Baghdad, the Inter American University of Puerto Rico, the University of California-Berkeley, and the University of Toronto where she is Professor Emeritus and continues to teach graduate courses.