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Mosul and Its Officials

“The view of Mosul as one first sees it is wonderful: it lies low, on the Tigris, in the midst of the . . . valley and is approached by a long straight road on the level. Beyond are hills, and beyond these snow-capped mountains of Kurdistan looking very imposing,”¹ enthused one of the British administrators on seeing his new assignment in 1919. “Mossul is a fine large town and one of the cleanest I have seen in my travels: The houses are well built of a kind of white marble, and the streets paved.”² By the beginning of the twentieth century, most people arriving in the city had first to cross a long stone bridge over the Tigris River to arrive at the city walls, nearly two feet thick and “of considerable height. . . .” There were eight gates to the city, allowing access by both land and water. From the bridge, looking backward, were the ruins of Nineveh; to the north was the tall minaret attached to the “new and graceful mosque of Nebi Sheth.”³

Europeans reaching the city seem to have had strong responses, both admiration and abhorrence for this old city. Sir Mark Sykes had nothing good to say about Mosul. But Ely Bannister Soane claimed that even those who detested the city had to admit that it was a place of

importance. “Despite its filth, the meanness of its bazaars, its unpleasant climate, and the Turks, it is a very important place, and a populous one, counting 90,000 souls. . . . If this book were to talk trade, it were possible to descant upon its leather craft, its cigarette-paper manufacture, its carpenters and masons.” Indeed, it was Mosul’s trade that earned the city wide respect from both travelers and from the British conquerors in 1918.⁴

Before the long stone span had been built over the Tigris, the nineteenth-century visitor would first have to cross a bridge of boats. The Umayyad caliph Marwan in the ninth century had built a bridge from Nineveh across the Tigris to the Bridge Gate by placing planks on boats and tying the boats together. The bridge remained on the same spot until after the Ottoman Empire had ended its rule over the city, though it needed intermittent repair.⁵ Trade was so important to Mosul that the bridge was enlarged and made more substantial in 1863 by the addition of a stone approach on the low-lying plains. The governor hoped that, with the longer span, the bridge would still function even when floods over the alluvial plains would have made the previous bridge inaccessible. By 1910 one traveler estimated that the bridge spanned 300 yards with masonry and an additional 150 yards on the old wooden boards on boats.⁶

Entering Mosul through the Bridge Gate, the traveler would find himself inside Mosul’s busy commercial center. This commercial center was shaped like a cone, extending from the wide part at the river to the point where the currency exchange was located close to the geographic center of the city.⁷ In ordinary times a visitor would find himself caught in tremendous currents of noise, smells, and movement, as people walked about the markets and the shops in which goods were both manufactured and sold. The plethora of shops (estimated at more than 2,600)⁸ opening onto the street were generally quite small, only about eight square feet. Most were roofed, but some had awnings made of cloth or wood for protection against the elements. Precious goods were sold in special secured buildings posted at the entrances to the seven gates of the central market. Depending on where his wanderings took him, the visitor might find himself in an area specializing in fabrics and clothing, one purveying leather work, an area for spices, or yet another displaying metalwork.⁹

The ellipse of the wide cone was the site of officialdom. At the southern tip, just inside the Palace Gate, the governor and his staff did their work. Immediately south of the palace, the law court held regular sessions. Presided over by the qadi, the judge appointed by the Ottoman central government at Istanbul, the court heard cases brought by all classes of the population: contract issues, divorce, criminal trials, and inheritance. At the northern tip, separated by a trench from the rest of the city, the citadel and parade grounds (*meydan*) marked the military presence in the area.

The mosques were the most familiar institutions for a majority of Mosul's population. Located both in the central business areas and throughout the city and the province, the mosques welcomed people not only for the special community prayers on Friday afternoons, but also for daily worship. Mosul's mosques had been built over the centuries by members of the elite or the ruling families. Some were monumental structures, reflecting the grandeur and position of the patron, with elaborate and ornamental facades and large interior spaces. Many had been built in underpopulated areas of the city as the beginning of an infrastructure to encourage new residents.

Other structures were usually built alongside the mosques as part of a complex, and the whole was then endowed as a charitable trust, or *vakif* (*waqf*). Until late in the century, most of the schools which Mosul's children attended were connected with a *vakif*. In the 1880s the province boasted 175 schools attached to mosques, ranging from schools for small children to advanced schools of Islamic law and theology. The *vakif* could also include other charitable institutions, a hospital, dispensary, or soup kitchen. The commercial establishments nearby provided the endowments for their services and upkeep.

The city of Mosul was the economic and administrative capital of a large and diverse region. Being the provincial capital, the city drew to itself those interested in the law, learning, influence, or wealth. As the military headquarters and the administrative center, the government handed out many jobs and disbursed a large revenue. As the legal center, the religious judges dispensed decisions to all those who came to the city seeking justice. The officials and the institutions centered in the city gave it a vitality and prosperity not evident outside the capital cities.

The Ottomans and Mosul

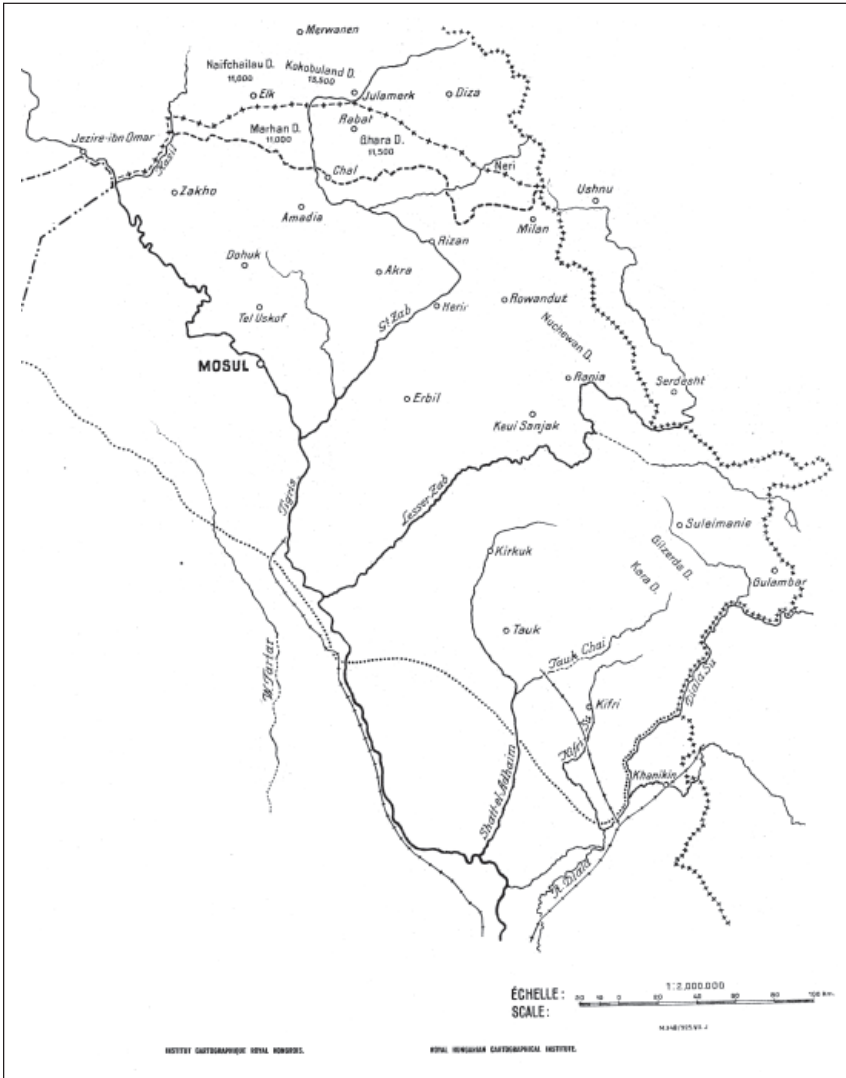
During the nineteenth century the city of Mosul was the provincial capital of the province or district of Mosul, an administrative division of the enormous Ottoman Empire.¹⁰ By this period, the Ottoman Empire had been in existence for nearly six hundred years; during part of that time the Ottoman ruler, the Sultan, had been the single most powerful world ruler west of China. At the geographic height of the empire, the Sultan ruled over territories on three continents, Europe, Asia, and Africa. At its most powerful, he intervened in the affairs of the greatest of the European states, competed with the neighboring Hapsburg dynasty, and dictated terms to the King of France. The nineteenth century found the Ottoman borders in the process of contracting, as the European powers defeated the empire in war, and as some of its outlying populations fought for independence.¹¹

The Sultan ruled from his capital in Istanbul with the support of an enormous bureaucratic institution, a large military force, and an extensive network of religious teachers and judges. Although the Sultan's post was always held by someone descended from the family of Osman, those who populated the bureaucratic, military, and religious ruling institutions changed over time. During the nineteenth century, the Sultans were striving to establish strong centralized control over both their own governing apparatus in the imperial capital in Istanbul, and over the rest of their extensive realm.

In the province of Mosul, as throughout the Ottoman empire, the nineteenth century brought transitions, changes that elites and the general population in both the city and its surrounding countryside often viewed as threats to their livelihoods or prerogatives. These reforms, imposed by the Ottoman central government, provided the occasions for appeals to the Ottoman government, and less frequently, to direct action. The outline of the political history of the province during the nineteenth century therefore provides the base for understanding the struggles waged throughout the period between the central government and the provincial administration, and between both governments and the population. Three broad issues provide the backdrop for the events of this era:

Centralization

Mosul's return to direct Ottoman rule in 1835 was itself the result of reforming efforts. Istanbul's campaigns to reclaim outlying provinces



Mosul Province

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was a central part of its program to revive the tax base, restore Ottoman law, and rejuvenate the military. Baghdad's ruling dynasty fell shortly before Mosul's Jalili family was dismissed from its nearly hereditary control of the province. İnce Bayraktar Mehmet Pasha was the central government's choice, and the goal was clearly to restore not only law and order, but also a secure tax base for the government.¹² Immediately after the restoration of direct control over the provincial government, Ottoman armed forces subjugated the Kurdish mountain tribes, demanding that they pay their allocated tribute, provide military service, and exhibit their loyalty to the Ottoman state.

Tanzimat

Once a component part of the empire under the direct rule of the Ottoman central government, the province of Mosul was expected to comply with the far-reaching Ottoman reform legislation of the nineteenth century. The first sweeping change was promised by the commercial treaty of 1838 between the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain. The new treaty promised standardized tariff rates, the ending of internal monopolies, and the consolidation of internal taxes and tolls. Mosul's merchants and officials, recognizing the potential threat of the new standards to their own livelihoods and influence, showed how tenuous the central government's hold on power actually was. A battle of wills and ingenuity ensued, in which some, often including the provincial government, sought to minimize the enforcement and effects of the new legislation while others, chiefly merchants with foreign ties, resorted to the central government to demand that the new policies be observed.

The reform period officially began with the proclamation of the *Tanzimat*, literally the reordering, in 1839. The new program promised equality to all subjects regardless of religion, and promised political and economic change for the benefit of the population. For Mosul's citizens, *Tanzimat* was confusing and perhaps unwelcome. While the business elite was optimistic about the economic provisions, in Mosul as elsewhere the religious notables and their flocks felt threatened by the promise of equality to the unbelievers. Those two elements together, recentralization and the promise of equality, led to a revolt in the mountains by Bedr Khan Bey in 1843 and the rebellion in the city in 1854.

The Land Laws of 1858 created new opportunities for Mosul's elites. Instituted to either rationalize the land tenure system, increase tax revenues, or provide land security to the yeoman farmer (according to alternative interpretations), the land law reform in the Mosul province merely accelerated the process of ownership. This alienation of state control over land allowed Mosul's affluent to have more direct access to agricultural revenue, not only a traditional source of wealth, but also a frequent road to power.

Administrative change was another element in the *Tanzimat*. Seeking even greater control over the provinces, the Ottomans introduced the Vilayet system in Mosul in 1870. Mosul alternated being a provincial and a district (sanjak) capital during the second half of the nineteenth century. Ironically, one of the last administrative changes of the reform era, the elections to and convening of the first Ottoman parliament, soon gave way to the creation of increased autocracy under Sultan Abdulhamid II. Mosul's deputies hailed from traditional elite families in the city.

The Revolution of 1908

When the Committee of Union and Progress came to power in Istanbul, Mosul's people responded out of uncertainty. Elites worried about maintaining their status and wealth, partisans of the former government feared losing their power, and populations worried about the sorts of dislocations in the economy and social structure previously threatened in earlier reform efforts. In Mosul, people took to the streets in a riot that left a large number dead, including the leader of one of the most prominent religious families of neighboring Sulaymaniyah.

Thus, the nineteenth century brought with it dramatic change for the province of Mosul. It was reincorporated into the Ottoman Empire as a result of the central government's self-strengthening campaigns, expected to conform with far-reaching new policies on trade, religious equality, and land reform. Mosul was reorganized as part of the Vilayet system experiment, and sent representatives to the first Ottoman parliament. It was the scene of rioting on the occasion of the Young Turk revolution, and shared the ultimate fate of all of the other Ottoman lands after World War I. Yet while Mosul rocked with the changes of the last century of Ottoman rule, the province's people sought to oppose, adapt,

or ignore the new policies as necessary for what they perceived to be their own interests. Their tools were the telegraph, the local administrators, disorder, and, in some cases, urban riots. The Ottoman central government's struggle to make the provincial governments had only intermittent success in Mosul, as the provincial elites alternated between acquiescing to new programs and insisting on their traditional prerogatives. The governments' efforts and Mosul's responses are the story of this chapter.

Mosul's Government

Mosul's ruling institutions paralleled those in Istanbul. The most important person in the city was the governor, with the rank of Pasha,¹³ who was appointed by the Sultan to enforce Ottoman rule. He was the chief executive, overseeing an extensive administrative machine and disposing of a budget that grew from almost four million piasters in 1845–46 to more than twenty-two million piasters in 1892–93.¹⁴ On one hand, he was the representative of the central Ottoman government at Istanbul; on the other, he was the supervisor of the heads of all of the districts (sanjaks) attached to the province of Mosul. The governor was not responsible to the people of the city, but only to the central government in a system resembling that of other empires and of modern France, where the central government determines who will rule the provinces, and the provincial population has little input into the choice of their local government.

During the eighteenth century one local family, who had attained wealth as merchants, achieved predominance and made themselves indispensable by helping the central government with provisioning during wars on the eastern Ottoman frontier.¹⁵ The Jalilis were people from the city and of the city, tied to its other notable families and working in the interests of their family and others of their class. Jalili governors, although officially ruling through the positions and titles the Ottoman Sultans gave to them, identified with their local constituents. They commissioned massive building projects, constructing schools, mosques, shops, and a large khan where merchants could stay, store their goods, and quarter their animals. Their buildings were not only a way to make money on the rents that accrued to them, but also a way of signifying

their commitment to the city and its institutions. Despite the Jalili family's preeminence, Mosul had many other notable families involved in governing the province during this period of local autonomy, and they also invested their large fortunes in public construction, building mosques, khans, markets, baths, and schools. Between 1700 and 1834 Mosul's great families constructed at least 390 new shops.¹⁶ These families worked to create support in the city and to both display and legitimize their great wealth by their creation of new infrastructure.

In the nineteenth century, when the Ottoman government began to reassert central control of its far-flung provinces, they saw these local governors and ruling elites as a threat to their interests. Seeking to enforce imperial power, they wanted to neutralize local families such as the Jalilis and their class. The new governors they appointed would attain power and legitimacy not by their connections to the people of the city or their sponsorship of urban life and local economies, but exclusively from their appointments by the Ottoman Sultan.

In 1834, when the Ottoman government was finally able to reinstitute direct rule in Mosul, the Sultan appointed his own governor, İnce Bayraktar Mehmet Pasha, who ruled autocratically for four years. Mehmet Pasha managed to alienate many in the city, and when he died the claims against his estate were so great that the Ottoman government stepped in to try to sort them out.¹⁷ After his death, the imperial government faced a dilemma. Worried on one hand about the consequences of a powerful local family too strong to control, the Ottoman government appointed a rapid succession of governors for the rest of the century. These appointees expected to stay in the city for only a brief period before being sent somewhere else to govern, making it impossible for any of them to achieve a substantial local power base. On the other hand, these new conditions under which some of the nineteenth-century governors of Mosul were appointed presented the central Ottoman government with a different problem: the potential ravages of an outsider too disconnected from the local population.

Despite the Ottoman government's efforts to reclaim control over the province of Mosul, many of the city's prominent families retained their influence, wealth, and power. As Albert Hourani suggested, the coming of the Ottoman reforms in the provinces actually reinforced the power of the provincial notables. The new governors were appointed for very short periods; in order to accomplish even their most basic

tasks of collecting taxes and providing security, they would be dependent upon those in the area who could intercede on their behalf.¹⁸ But the revolving governors, especially when the holders of the office had no knowledge of the situation within the city, also provided an opportunity for new families to attain power and wealth. Ambitious individuals could gain the ear of new administrators, and be rewarded for their aid and advice not only with land rights and access to wealth, but also with the power that was available to anyone with access to the governor.

At the same time, the new communications technology, especially the telegraph, allowed other concurrent means of access. While both the old and new elites could lobby the provincial governor and his retinue, disgruntled competitors could have the immediate ear of the central government or its agents in Istanbul through the telegraph. Over the course of the century, then, a two-track simultaneous process of appeal both confused the enforcement of the government's writ, and at the same time maintained in place a variety of local forces competing for power in the province.

Traditional Elites

The city's first family, as it were, was the powerful Jalili family. Governors for many of the preceding decades of autonomous rule, the Jalilis lost their official positions with Ottoman recentralization, but not their lands and connections. The first prominent Jalili, Abdul Jalil, was a Christian employed in the Pasha's household during the late seventeenth century. His eldest son, Ismail, was appointed governor in 1726.¹⁹ The rise of this family seems to have been directly connected with its ability to conduct regional trade. Dina Khoury cites government orders showing that, during the Ottoman wars against Nadir Shah, the central government ordered local officials to provide provisions which the sons of Abdul Jalil were to send to Baghdad. Within two months, local officials received an order to give money to the sons of Abdul Jalil. These entrepreneurs would then buy the provisions for the army and send them by raft down river to Baghdad. The Jalili family's fortune seems to have been the result of their effectiveness as grain merchants and contractors. With their wealth they successfully acquired leadership in the Janissary corps, the right to collect certain taxes, property in the city and countryside, the government's gratitude for their help in winning the war, and continuing alliances for access to local resources.²⁰

Over the course of the century between 1726 and 1834, seventeen Jalilis held the office of governor.²¹ They held other positions in addition, creating a powerful political dynasty with the acquiescence of the central Ottoman government. Although the government decided to rein in the family and appoint others without a local base of power, the Jalili family retained its influence not only within local circles, but also within the central government apparatus. The British in 1921 considered Sulayman al-Jalili to still be the head of the “first family in Mosul.” Sulayman owned extensive lands, but remained aloof from political or business circles.²²

Competing with the Jalilis for preeminence, the Umari family attained its power through its religious leadership.²³ The family’s very presence in the city came as a result of its perceived sanctity. Around 1572, Mosul underwent a series of catastrophes. The first Mosul member of the family, which is descended from the pious second caliph, Umar ibn al-Khattab, was called to the city because the notables hoped his presence would save it from further calamities.²⁴ Like the Jalilis, the Umaris had wealth diversified in both urban and rural real estate, and in the rights to collect certain taxes.

Like the Jalilis, the Umaris retained their influence beyond the end of the Ottoman period. Sami Pasha al-Umari was both an official and a military officer. He served as Military Attaché in Berlin, a member of the Senate, commander of the Hawran expedition in 1918; his uncle ‘Abdullah was an Ottoman inspector of justice and an appeals court judge. Under the British, one group of Umari brothers served variously as Revenue Officer in Mosul (Amjad), Notary Public (Akram), Manager of Religious Endowments (Asad), and Municipal Engineer (Arshat). While some of the Umaris worked for the British, others earned their suspicion because of their sympathies for and activities with various anti-British groups.²⁵ Moreover, under the Iraqi monarchy the Umaris were among the five families who received more than half of the ministerial appointments.²⁶

Rising Elites

Some of the powerful within the city of Mosul did not, however, come from these expected sources. Muhammad Chalabi Sabunji provides the best example of how the new reforming administration could

make room for new elites. By the end of the nineteenth century, Sabunji owned extensive lands, collected large amounts of revenue, was present on the provincial advisory body, and played host to most of the dignitaries traveling through the region. He had thus acquired both the major bases of power and the clearest perquisites that accompanied them. Son of a soap hawker at the city walls, Sabunji started out with only the small inheritance that his very able father managed to provide. More important than his investments, however, was his savvy recognition of the importance of connections. Sabunji seems to have parlayed hospitality into a powerful political tool, as he arranged to house all the visiting dignitaries of any sort who traveled through the city. His charm must have been substantial, for he was later able to leverage guests into partisans.²⁷

Christian families also attained affluence and influence by the 1850s, using the same methods and achieving the same ends as Muslim notables.²⁸ Although some derived a part of their power through their official connections with the French or British establishments, others acquired wealth through purchasing villages, and power through coalitions with Mosul's elite. Beginning in the 1850s, for example, Hanna Binni played a role similar to Sabunji. He began to become wealthy by making himself indispensable to transient governors. Many of Hanna Binni's business arrangements involved partnerships with the elites of the city. His positions and connections allowed him not only to purchase tax farms and agricultural lands, but also to protect himself in the majlis from accusations of unfair practices. The Rassams had long been merchants. Their wealth grew during the nineteenth century, in opposition to the local power structures, as representatives of British merchant houses and the British government. Christian Rassam was both related by marriage to Hanna Binni and in nearly continuous, vehement competition with him for both power and wealth.

Religious Elites

An important Muslim religious hierarchy existed alongside the political and social leadership of the city and province. Collectively referred to as ulema, these people taught in the religious schools, led worship, preached, administered religious endowments, judged legal cases, and issued rulings on matters of religious importance. The ulema

did not exist as a class apart from the rest of Mosul's society. Many were involved in trade, and they came from the same families as the socially, economically, and politically most important local notables.²⁹ They played a very active role in politics, usually on the side of Mosul's interests and only rarely acting to legitimize Ottoman policies.

Religious leaders wielded great power and acquired wealth partly because of the respect accorded their position, but also largely through the same methods as the political leadership: their ability to intercede on behalf of their flocks and their access to revenues. Leaders of the minority Christian, Jewish, and Yezidi communities interceded with the government regarding law, taxation, and, later, conscription. They also controlled certain revenues in order to maintain themselves and their establishments.

Rural Elites

Leadership in the countryside was both religious and military. Tribal elites held influence within their groups partly because of their leadership skills. With Ottoman centralization, however, they became increasingly tied to the Ottoman governments, who provided or withheld not only recognition, but also the opportunity to profit from land holding and tax collecting. Both the provincial and the central governments engaged in legitimizing the leaders of the great Arab tribal confederations. Leadership in the Kurdish mountains reflected elite origins and religious connections. The Ottoman government recognizing its dependence on the Kurdish sheikhs in the mountains provided them with opportunities to grow wealthy from tax revenues and privileges. At the same time, it sought to remain in control by stripping them of their power, resorting to military force, and bringing them before tribunals when they became too powerful.³⁰

The Ottoman government, electing to rely on officials appointed from the center without ties to the local community, was ultimately unable to dispense with reliance upon Mosul's elites. The new policy did allow the emergence of new families into positions of prominence as they learned how to provide services to the strangers expected to take control over the province. At the same time, new communications technology facilitated the competition between local elite groups, as those spurned by the provincial administration sought redress from the Imperial

government. Even at the end of the reform period access to the government was both a symbol of and a vehicle to power and affluence. Many of Mosul's elite families managed to ride with the new circumstances, emerging at the end of the Ottoman period still in positions of prominence.

Institutions of Government

For controlling the province, the governor had the assistance of a large administrative machine. Working under him were heads of the departments of the police, the judiciary, the population, tax collection, the post and telegraph, public works, education, accounting, trade, agriculture, and religious endowments. Each of these officials was responsible for a number of clerks, scribes, and assistants.³¹ In addition, the department heads supervised subordinates in offices in the other provincial sanjaks. The *defterdar*, or financial head of the province, was the governor's most powerful subordinate, often even administering the province when the governor was absent.

Of all the institutions in the city, the courts and the mosques held out the most attraction and the most hope to the common people of the city and the countryside. Even the poor had access to the judicial system of the Ottoman Empire, and throughout the nineteenth century they took their grievances and their demands for justice to both local and regional courts for redress. The court supervised the writing of contracts and the dispersal of assets at a person's death. At a time when the fees were nominal and the people had confidence in the justice dispensed by the law courts, all sectors of the population sought redress from the qadi. Women went to the court to obtain a divorce, or to fight for their share of the inheritance when their relatives tried to deny it to them. Peasants went to the court to contest injustices when someone tried to take too much of their crops, or when someone charged too much interest. Merchants went to the court to contest the way someone observed a contract.³² The qadis made their decisions based on a body of Islamic law that had developed over the centuries. It addressed not only matters of religious practice, but also family law, commercial law, and penal law.

Because Mosul was the capital, the judicial system for the province was centered in the city, just south of the bustling marketplace. The

judge, or qadi, who was appointed by the government at Istanbul, headed a group of twenty-seven subordinates. He was also in charge of the departments of judicial administration, the administration of penalties, a contract office, and the court clerks. Like the other departments, the court system extended throughout the province, with the sanjaks (districts) and the *kazas* (subdistricts) likewise having judges.³³

After 1869 the Ottoman government instituted a system of advisory councils (*majlis*). Mosul's governor was to be assisted by a collection of the city's elite: the chief judge, the chief accountant, the chief scribe, the highest religious notable, and seven members chosen by the community. Each of Mosul's three sanjaks had a similar council, which assisted its governor (*mutasarrıf*), and each *kaza* (subsection of the sanjak) had its own council to assist its governor (*kaimmakam*). In the best of cases, through these assemblies the high officials could both learn the thoughts of the city's notables and achieve some support for their own plans. At the same time, the notables could attempt to exert their influence for the benefit of the province.³⁴ Although intended to serve in a consultative capacity for the local governors, these councils also provided an official place for the struggles between the governor and the local notables to be played out. In periods of conflict, the *majlis* was the place where the struggles between the governor and the council led to mutual recrimination and hostility; where the powerful in the city used their influence simply to achieve their own ends; and where the elites could obstruct the plans of the government or the justice of the courts.

Mosul's governor had a military force at his disposal to enforce his demands. Although under a separate provincial commander, the military was financed and, therefore, partly controlled by the provincial governor. The commander was in charge of military establishments in each of Mosul's three sanjaks. Troops in Mosul lived and drilled in the area of the citadel and the parade ground to the south separated by a deep trench from the city's busy commercial center. Military reorganization was one of the major projects of the Ottoman Sultans during the nineteenth century, and the transition in military institutions created animosity among some in the city. The older corps, the Janissaries, had long since ceased being the scourge of Europe. Janissaries were still enrolled in the corps, but spent most of their time practicing trades. Although living throughout many parts of the city and its provinces, they

were particularly concentrated in certain quarters of Mosul which became identified with them. During the eighteenth century their partisan loyalties to one or another of the ruling families had led to riots in the city. Even in the nineteenth century their presence provided a threat to those seeking major change. The new troops were the *nizam-i cedid* forces, intended by the government to regularize and revitalize the military might of the centralizing empire. The number of troops in Mosul varied, as soldiers were frequently transferred into and through the city. During the nineteenth century, war on the Persian borders kept troops continually moving through the province, presenting lucrative opportunities for merchants with the provisions to supply them and great hardships for the peasants asked to house and feed them. More distant Ottoman wars with Russia and the Balkans did not have as much impact on the city and province of Mosul.

When they were not being sent to the borders to make war, the Pasha of Mosul relied on the troops to keep the peace and chase refractory tribes. Commerce was crucial to the economy of the empire, and many soldiers were stationed along the major trade routes to protect the roads. In 1854–55 in a typical campaign, the government sent a large force of thirty-four officers and 756 soldiers to a border area, at a cost of 77,880 piasters, to stop nomadic incursions that were compromising agriculture and trade. After the foray ended, the government sent a temporary force of 150 soldiers to keep the peace.³⁵ The century saw countless incidents when the Pashas used military power to recover stolen property or try to collect taxes from noncompliant tribes within the province. Some tribes were intermittently engaged on the government's side as well. Whenever the governor or the commander needed additional forces, they called on tribal irregulars.³⁶ Already skilled in horsemanship and weapons handling, the tribes supplemented their traditional income from animal raising both by raiding and by guarding the roads against the raids of others. Their skills and their own economic interests made them useful for many military campaigns.³⁷

During Ottoman times, the major threat to general political and economic security was not incursions by tribal forces or the threat of foreign war, but a lack of the food and raw material supplies that the population would need to survive and carry out their work. The non-military officials in Istanbul were most concerned to avoid the major

famines and want that could lead to internal upheavals. Unlike in the twentieth century, when governments are obsessed with increasing exports in order to promote wealth, the Ottoman government was most anxious to restrict exports and encourage imports as the best way to avoid internal challenges to their rule. Mehmet Genç calls this Ottoman policy “provisionism,” which he defines thus:

[T]he maintenance of a steady supply so that all goods and services were cheap, plentiful, and of good quality. With respect to foreign trade, provisionism sought to keep the supply of goods and services to the internal market at an optimal level. Export was not encouraged, but rather curtailed by prohibitions, quotas, and taxes. Imports, by contrast, were fostered and facilitated.³⁸

One of the government’s major jobs, then, was to protect food supplies and the supplies of cotton, wool, and other items the craftsmen must have in order to make a living.

As under most Middle Eastern regimes, the government took care that economic exchanges were transacted fairly. The Ottoman government was concerned with ensuring that weights and measures were accurate, that prices were fair, that goods were of the appropriate quality, and that trade was conducted according to standard practices. Each of the groups that engaged in trade and production also had supervisors who made sure that each member had enough materials and their work met minimal standards, and who negotiated with the government for changes in the way the work was to be carried out.³⁹

Tanzimat: Centralization

The *Tanzimat*, or reordering, officially began when Sultan Mahmud II’s Grand Vizier appeared in the palace rose garden (Gülhane) in 1839 to announce a set of major reforms in the basic organization of the empire. There were three principal parts to the *Tanzimat*. First, the empire would be centralized, with both power and authority belonging only to the central government and its appointed representatives. Second, all tax collection would be regularized, so that people would pay only specified taxes: arbitrary taxes would be ended, and all taxes would be collected

in an orderly way to help the government out of its financial straits. Third, under the new system, all Ottoman subjects would be equal under the law. Sultan Mahmud's successors introduced later reforms as part of the *Tanzimat*, emphasizing changes in land ownership, introducing conscription for all citizens, rationalizing the bureaucracy, and centralizing provincial administration.⁴⁰

Centralizing power and authority would be an enormous task. For the preceding century, local groups and individuals such as the Jalilis in Mosul had grown strong throughout the empire, and while still acknowledging their technical allegiance to the Sultan, the de facto rulers of many Ottoman provinces had ruled autonomously. Many of the Arabic-speaking provinces had been under the control of family dynasties who developed their own armies and enforced the laws as they thought appropriate.⁴¹ Beginning with the reforming Sultan Mahmud II at the start of the nineteenth century, the Sultans waged military campaigns to break the power of the local dynasties and reinforce Ottoman rule.

The *Tanzimat* was thus not the beginning of a new system of centralization in 1839, but a declaration of a process already begun. Henceforth all governors in Mosul were to be appointed directly by the Sultan, not merely given permission to remain in offices they held by their own power. Centralized power was to be enforced by a reorganized military. The new centralized authority would come not only from this power, but also from justice for all subjects, with a promised end to the seizure of property and a new protection from arbitrary imprisonment.

Many of the reforms of the *Tanzimat* were not implemented immediately in the Mosul province. Despite the letter from famed Ottoman reformer Midhat Pasha explaining that reorganization under the "Vilayet System" was to proceed, very little seems to have changed, except that Mosul lost its status as a Vilayet in 1850 and became a *mutasarrıflık* connected with Baghdad. Its status as a separate province was restored in 1878.⁴²

It was extraordinarily difficult for any of Mosul's governors to achieve the goals the central government had proclaimed in the *Tanzimat*, and it seems some were not convinced they should be trying. The next decades in Mosul saw frequent turnover in provincial governors as the central government tried to avoid allowing any of them to attain too much independent power. It was difficult for the governors to understand how to actually carry out the Sultan's orders if they knew little about the power structures that existed in the city.

The new conscripted military force that was to have helped implement the system was established late at Mosul. The military draft was met with resistance throughout the Ottoman Empire. During the nineteenth century in Beirut, for example, even the suggestion of conscription, the arrival of the district governor, or the appearance of recruits in the city convinced the population that they were in danger of becoming soldiers. In response, “the bazaars and the city are almost deserted and commerce is quite at a standstill.”⁴³ Conscription was so unpopular that it seems to have been common to transport new recruits to their first camp in chains to prevent desertion.⁴⁴ These precautions were taken with good reason. In 1907 the British consular representative reported that military officers were wandering around the streets and coffee houses of Mosul looking for potential recruits. They found 108 of them, and pressed them into service on the Persian border. But within twenty minutes of leaving the city, all but seventeen of them had run away.⁴⁵ In the past, military forces had been drafted only from among the Muslim populations of the empire; the non-Muslims had always paid a tax for protection instead of serving in the army. Beginning just after the turn of the twentieth century, all communities were liable to be conscripted, and in Mosul the Yezidis seem to have been the first minority community to be called up. By 1909 the military had begun to call on Christians and Jews as well, the city’s Chaldeans assigned to provide 200 men, the Jacobites 260, the Jews 240, and other groups a total of two hundred. More were to come from the countryside. Although some in the religious minority communities saw this as a way to finally achieve equality in the empire, the conscripts and their families seemed less convinced of the desirability of the new system. Many tried to emigrate to America, some attempted to buy their way out, others simply deserted.⁴⁶

New forces were stationed in Mosul’s citadel, but were often as poorly paid as previous troops had been.⁴⁷ It seems there was a constant shift in the number of troops in the city, and the army corps from which they were taken. At one point, the Ottoman government sent a message to the governor of Mosul, who had asked for assistance in a campaign against marauding tribes. The Ottoman government responded that the Sixth Army was involved in reorganization and its reserves had been demobilized. The Fifth Army was involved in fighting in the Hawran and helping around Aleppo. Instead, they would send some forces from the Fourth Army stationed at Viranşehir.⁴⁸

In the days before telegraphs, telephones, and good roads, it was a continual challenge to make certain that the demands of the central

government were actually being enforced in the far-flung provinces. Centralization took place only gradually, a few steps forward and many back, until the autocratic centralizing Sultan Abdülhamid II took power in 1876. Using a system of spies and the newly installed telegraph, he was able to exert more control over the Ottoman provinces, but at significant cost.

Struggles for Power

Despite the governor's hold on official power and his access to the institutions of provincial government, he still found his control contested by local actors. Moreover, the governor's efficiency could be compromised by disagreements with neighboring governors. When the governors of Mosul and Baghdad diverged over the crucial appointment of the Paramount Sheikh of the Shammar tribe, violence resulted in both areas. At times, both the governors of Baghdad and Mosul denied responsibility for raids or plunder, each claiming the incidents took place in the other's jurisdiction.

The governor of Mosul had to fulfill the aspirations of many. The government in Istanbul that appointed him expected him to keep peace, provide resources in times of war, encourage the prosperity of the region, carry out all the orders they sent to him, and observe all the decrees about change promulgated in the capital. From the start, then, the governor of Mosul had to maintain a precarious balance between enforcing the rule of the Sultan and respecting the sentiments of the population. Being neither of the city, nor expecting continuing ties with it, many of the governors found it difficult to carry out the new policies.

When the local people were frustrated with the provincial government, they resorted to direct petitions to Istanbul.⁴⁹ In some cases, the population engaged in direct action to challenge the local governor, who found himself caught between the people of Mosul and the orders of the central government. Twice during 1906 the governor of Mosul's efforts to carry out orders from Istanbul led to massive demonstrations in the streets. The first, during January, came when he tried to levy the new personal tax on the people of the city, who responded by taking to the streets and closing the markets.⁵⁰ The second rebellion, in October, lasted six days. The Ottoman government was attempting to take a census of the population, including women. This effort to "register"