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Iraqi-Iranian Border. History – Politics – Culture

The issue of Iranian-Iraqi border as a historical and cultural phenomenon has not been yet closely analysed by orientalists. This very question would appear in politological considerations in the context of the Iraqi-Iranian War only. A number of attempts by Arab authors (especially Iraqi ones) has been undertaken, but some nationalistic flavour of these analyses prevent us from considering them objective.

The problem, however, is of great importance. In the course of time the border demarcated Semitic from Indo-Iranian elements, later on – the Arab world from Persia, then Sunnite Ottoman Empire from Shi'ite Safavids and their successors, and, eventually, two nation-states – Iraq and Iran. In the 19th and 20th centuries the border became a subject of almost twenty bilateral treaties. Repeatedly it has caused prolonged military conflicts, among them the most spectacular – the Iraqi-Iranian War in 1980.

In this context one is justified to say that the character of the border has changed and varied in different historical periods. Not always marked on the political maps, it has constantly divided the Middle East territory, constituting an inter-national or inter-religious frontier.

In the present considerations these issues will be thoroughly presented and analysed, since the border constitutes not only a geographical and political phenomenon, but also a historical and cultural one. Sometimes the boundary enables cross-border contacts, sometimes it creates an impassable barrier. Sometimes it delimits ethnic groups, while at other times it cuts through the territories inhabited by the same nation. It is possibly that for this reason the border has become subject of so many treaties, as well as a source of numerous conflicts, echoed in our times.

S. Otok states: "even a rough review of the stability of political borders supports the conclusion that in the historical perspective there are more or less unstable territories termed by S. Cohen, an American geographer – *shatter belt*. (...) *Shatter belt*'s instability is induced – among other factors – by: a. a lack of natural barriers; b. ideological controversies and differences as to the level of development of the bordering countries; c. divergences between political and ethnic borders."[1]

[1] S. Otok, *Geografia polityczna* (Political Geography), Warszawa 1996, p. 79.

In this article I will try – among others – to answer the question, why Iraqi-Iranian border is to be regarded as a *shatter belt*.

The term *border* has become a subject matter of many considerations in humanities, among them law, geography, political history and philosophy, where the term *peratology*[2] has been introduced. Further on I will refer to some extent to all these fields.

The basic concept which stands behind *border* is *territory*. Borders in international relationships have been known only since the 13/14th centuries, while the linear concept of boundary appears not earlier than in 1797.[3] These data refer to Europe. As far as the Middle East is concerned, the process of creation of nation-states, which requires a detailed delimitation of the territory, goes back to the time after World War I. In international law *border* is referred to as a plane, on a map marked by a line, encircling the state's territory.[4] According to another definition, border is a factor determinig a territory, under the power of a state.[5]

"In ancient times [...] a political border had a shape of a strip and was three-dimentional with a changeable width. It was usually represented by a desert, mountains, forests or swamps."[6] In the Muslim world border was perceived similarly: "in contrast to the modern western concepts of border, the state theory in Islam is connected with community rather than with territory. It is for this reason that, traditionally, the Islamic world has not been overly concerned with precise boundary delimitation or with territorial sovereignity. [...] Spheres of different political authority were usually separated by border areas, rather than by precise boundary lines. It was only with the explicit introduction of the concept of the nation-state that concepts of territorial sovereignity and boundaries began to emerge in the islamic areas. The boundaries between most of the Islamic states and between them and the outside world were mainly established not by local rulers, but rather by external forces which shaped the world during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As most lines were demarcated for the needs of colonial and imperial powers, they often cut through peoples, tribes etc. and have left legacies of boundary conflicts for successor and newly-established states."[7]

This opinion is shared by J. Bohdanowicz and M. Dzięcielski who "state that *border* as a result of negotiations or simply imposed only rarely corresponds with physical, linguistic or cultural boundaries, and in consequence induces political tensions and conflicts."[8]

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[2] Comp. for example G. Liiceanu, *De la limitée, petit traité à l'usage des orgueilleux*, Paris 1997; in Polish translation the considerations of the Romanian philosopher are avaliable in his work *Dziennik z Paltinişu* (Paltinişu Diary), Sejny 2002, mainly pp. 117–119, 125.

[3] R. Bierzanek, J. Symonides, *Prawo międzynarodowe publiczne* (International Public Law), Warszawa 2002, p. 207.

[4] Ibid. p. 207.

[5] J. Bohdanowicz, M. Dzięcielski, *Zarys geografii historycznej i politycznej cywilizacji* (An Outline of Historical and Political Geography of Civilisation), Gdańsk 1996, pp. 75–76.

[6] Ibid., p. 77.

[7] G. Biger, *Takhtīṭ al-ḥudūd*, in: *The Encycopedia of Islam* (further: *EI*) Leiden from 1960, vol. 10, p. 127.

[8] Bohdanowicz, Dzięcielski, op. cit., p. 77.

According to a commonly accepted view, international borders are natural or artificial. Although nowadays the classification remains without legislative significance, it may be essential for an analysis of the Iraqi-Iranian border, which partly is natural, while conflicts concerned mainly the intepretation of the borderline, among others, marked by the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab river. The artificial boundaries on the African and Asian continents, are called "the scars of history"[9], the term especially relevant in the case of Iraqi-Iranian border.

1. Iraqi-Iranian borderline

The Iraqi border with Iran is the longest borderline of the former borders – it is 1458 kilometres long. It runs from the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab to the tri-fold border point (Iraqi-Iranian--Turkish) on Kūh-e Dalanpār (cf. map no. 1). For descriptive purposes, I have proposed a division of the Iraqi-Iranian border into five fragments of different nature.

(I) The first one runs along the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab river (the total length of the river is c.a. 200 km[10], the borderline running along the river is 100 km long; the average width of the river being 548 m).

In antiquity the river did not exist at all. The famous Sumerian cities, Ur and Eridu, lay almost on the coastal area of the Persian Gulf, while Tigris and Euphrates joined the gulf's waters separately (cf. map no. 2). Only later the swampy areas of southern Iraq and the surroundings of 'Abādān/Ābādān[11] in Iran come into existence out of the silt depositions left by the waters of both rivers. The Šaṭṭ al-'Arab was formed at the place named Qurna by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates. The Arabic name of the river means "the Arabs' bank", though it refers to the river itself. In the Middle Ages the Arab and Persian authors used the name *Diğla* – Tigris (for example Al-Iṣṭaḫrī, died 951 and Al-Muqaddasī, died 988). Ibn Baṭṭūta (died 1369) called the river "Euphrates and Tigris" (*Al-Furāt wa-ad-Diğla*), also the name "One-eyed Tiger" (*Diğla al-'Awrā'*) was used. In the Middle Ages in Persian the river bore the name *Erwand Rūd* ('the perfect river'). The name Šaṭṭ al-'Arab was introduced in the Ottoman period, while in the European sources this name appears for the first time in the work of British traveller J.S. Buckingham *Travels in Assyria, Medina and Persia*, London 1829.[12]

The Šaṭṭ al-'Arab as a border became a matter of controversy only in the 16th century, parallelly with the rivalry over the hegemony in the Middle East between the Safavid

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[9] Ibid., p. 83.

[10] The data as to the total length of the river are inconsistent. *Encyclopedia of Orient* (http://lexicorient.com/eo/shatt ar.htm) proposes 170 km, A. Baram in an item *Shaṭṭ al-'Arab*, in: *EI*, vol. 11, p. 368 states 180 km, *Nowa encykopedia powszechna PWN* (New Popular Encycopedia of PWN), vol. 6, p. 168, Warszawa 1997 – 195 km.

[11] If two different geographical names are in use in Arabic and Persian for the same object, I provide both of them when mentioned for the first time, Arabic first and Persain next, but not so when the differences in pronunciation appear, for example – Zuhāb – Zohāb.

[12] Baram, op. cit., p. 368.

Persia and the Ottoman Empire. The border on the river, however, was not mentioned and described in first treaties between the two empires (Zohāb 1639, Kurdān 1746 and Erzurum I 1823 treaties). Only in Erzurum II (1847) Šaṭṭ al-'Arab appears *explicite* as a frontier river.[13] It may be assumed that only then the course of the river started to draw attention; by the way, the fact was strictly connected with the presence of two competing European empires – namely, of Great Britain and Russia – in the Middle East.

Nowadays the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab is a typical international river. "The concept of an *international river* in the field of international affairs is linked with the notion of free navigation. Thus, traditionally, for the recognision of any river as international its navigability was demanded, along with its crossing the territories of a number of countries and joining a sea; free navigation for ships of different banners had to be guaranteed."[14]

The Iraqi-Iranian border runs from the mouth of the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab along the river. Near to the eastern, on the Iranian bank of the river there is an island Al-Ḫiḍr, also called 'Abādān. The island was formed by the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab and the Bahmanšīr river, which at Ḫurramšahr (Arab. Al-Muḥammara) falls into the Kārūn (also: Qārūn), again a tributary of the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab. Up to 'Abādān, on the Iranian bank, swampy areas spread. The border on the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab ends with the mouth of the Al-Ḫayīn river, at Ad-Duwayğī. Both banks of the river are inhabited by Arabs (the province of Ḫūzestān or 'Arabistān, Al-Aḥwāz on the eastern, Iranian bank). On this segment the border is natural (physical), but its detailed run belongs to most complex problems in the bilateral relations between Iran and Iraq. "Since the 19th century it has been assumed that if the territories of two countries are separated by an unnavigable river, the border runs along the middle line of the streamflow. If the river is navigable, the border runs along the line marked by the most profound points, which is reflected in the English term *farwater*, or German *Talweg*."[15] Those settlements, however, are not recognized by Iraq and Iran. According to the Algerian Agreement (1975), essentially respected till now, the border runs as follows: along the middle line of the streamflow, then closer to the western bank, leaving on the Iranian side two small islands; a little further the line leaves the whole bed of the river on the eastern, Iranian side. Furher still two small islands, among them Aš-Šuṭayṭ and one bigger, called Al-Muḥalla, are left on the eastern side. Starting from Ḫorramšahr, the whole bed of the river belongs to Iran while, where it flows into the Persian Gulf, the border turns northward along the meridian. Then it changes its character from physical into geometrical one, or – more precisely – "astronomical"[16] (cf. map no. 3).

(II) The segment is 60 km long. The border runs along the 48° 2' meridian and reaches the 31 paralel of the northern latitude, then it turns at a right angle westward

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[13] Baram, op. cit. pp. 368–369.

[14] Bierzanek, op. cit., p. 214.

[15] Bohdanowicz, Dzięcielski, op. cit., p. 82; also: *Thalweg*.

[16] The astronomical border, according to some classifications, is a subgroup of the geometrical borders, the latter do not necessarily correspond to meridian or parallel, ibid.

(approximately at Al-Qurna) and runs on for another 30 km straight to Baghdad. On the Iranian side of the border there spreads a lowland, while the Iraqi side is covered with the swampy region of Al-Ahwār.

(III) Further the border turns again at a right angle northward, crossing the swampy region. At this point, as it seems, the border loses its geometric character – runs through lowland and crosses the border of Ḫūzestān province (here also is the crossing point between the border and the river of Ṭīb/Meyte, which flows into the Tigris at Al-'Amāra). Here the border ceases to be 'inter-Arab', since it leaves the areas inhabited by the Arab minority in Iran. At the same time the border becomes natural (physical).

(IV) The border divides the mountainous (upland) region from the lowland. Here is the former *sanǧak*[17] of Zohāb, divided by the borderline according to Erzurum II treaty. The border stretches then up to Ḫāniqīn. On the Iranian side the Iranian-speaking tribes of Lurs (Luristanias) have settled, while on the Iraqi side, approximatelly up to Badra, there live Arabs, and further to the North – Kurds.

(V) Further to the North the border crosses the territory of Kurdistan, rising through the mountain ridges up to Kūh-e Dalanpār summit (3496 m), where it reaches the tri-fold border point of Iraq, Iran and Turkey. In that segment the border briefly covers the streams of Diyālā/Sirwān (close to Ḥalabǧa), the Little Zāb and Bāne rivers. Other features of that division are: the Pass of Šinek (785 m, on the way from Rāwandūz to Ūrmiya lake) and the highest summit of Iraq – Būz Dāġ (3612 m) placed slightly to North.[18]

2. History

The characteristic features of the Mesopotamian-Iranian frontier are described by B. Składanek as follows: "In the West the border was marked neither by a river-line, a lake district nor by any sharply sketched massif. The Zagros mountains fence out the Iranian plateau West of Mesopotamia and form a serious obstacle to pass, but the strip is wide – sometimes 200 km – and then it can hardly be regarded a distinct borderline. Therefore the borderline runs along the line separating drainage areas – the western slopes of the mountains belonged to the Semites, while the eastern ones – to other peoples, later on to Iranians."[19]

The geographical factor, discussed in details in the previous section, since antiquity had influenced the history and culture of Mesopotamia, which – except the moments of glory during the reign of Sargon and Hammurapi – also suffered the pressure of the Iranian people.

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[17] *Sanjak*, Tur. *sancak*, in the Ottoman Empire an administrative unit, a part of vilayet (*eyalet*), i.e. province.

[18] According to another classification of the borders, fragments I, II, III and V are the imposed borders, while part IV – a "subsequent" one; the latter type of border is usually analysed in detail and draws particular interest and attention of researchers.

[19] B. Składanek, *Historia Persji* (The History of Persia), vol. 1, Warszawa 1999, p. 17.

Antiquity

In the most remote period of the colonization in the Middle East one can hardly discern any cultural or political demarcation line on the present Iraqi-Iranian border. The range of different cultures which developed in the region, for example the cultures of Halaf or Ubayd, were – in modern terms – of cross-border character.[20] The region area gained some importance when the Semitic tribes from the neighbouring areas of the Arab Peninsula and Syria started to penetrate the territory. That process had been completed with the Sargon the Great's victory over the Sumer c.a. 2370 BC. Then the first Semitic political organism emerged – Akkad. The Sargon's state, based mainly on power and a highly trained army, streched out from Elam (western Iran – I am of course aware of the conventional character of this name) up to the Upper Mesopotamia or even further – to the Lebanon mountains. The cultural influence of Elam reached the eastern territories of Mesopotamia, at the same time, a reverse, far more persistent influences of Mesopotamia were exerted on Elam. Consequently, the process of creating a frontier between Semitic Mesopotamia and Iran had then begun.

The subsequent ages witnessed the strengthening of the Semitic presence in Mesopotamia, while the Iranian highlands were penetrated by the Aryan peoples, who gradually conquered the territory in the 20-10 centuries BC and started to create their own political organisms. In "The Land Between the Rivers" there rose and collapsed great Semitic ancient empires (Babylon, Assyria), which spread their undivided rule over the region till the final collapse of Babylon (Khaldea) in 539 BC. Subsequently, the control over the region passed on to the Persians, who exerted their power for the next two ages. Some Iraqi historians claim this event to be the first sign of the Persian-Arabic – or precisely Iranian-Semitic – hostility.[21]

During the Achaemenes' reign (559–330 BC, and in The Land Between the Rivers – up from 539), Mesopotamia was divided into some satrapies (districts) and had rather a peripheral character in the Persian Empire. However, as an administrative unit, it was autonomous and the Persian ruler assumed the title: "King of Babylon, Sumer and Akkad". The inhabitants of Mesopotamia were quite dissatisfied with the Persian ruling, which gave rise to anti-Persian rebellions in 520, 484 and 479 BC. During the reign of Cyrus's successor, the satrapies were deprived of autonomy. The majority of the land was transferred to Persians, which aggraviated the situation and caused a material decline of the region.

In the 6th century BC, weakened by the conflicts, the Achaemenes' state was defeated by Alexander the Great. After Alexander's death his empire broke up into a number of smaller political organisms. One of his generals-successors, called *diadochoi*, Seleucus I Nikator, established a new state, incorporating Persia, Mesopotamia and Levant with the

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[20] Cf. For example the map *Zasięg kultury ubajdzkiej* (The Range of the Ubayd Culture), in: M. Roaf, *Mezopotamia* (Mesopotamia), Warszawa 1998, p. 53.

[21] N.A. al-Ḥadīṯī, *Al-'Ilāqāt al-'arabiyya al-fārisiyya*, Baghdad-London 1982, p. 81.

capital in Mesopotamian Seleucia. The territories of present Iraq were divided into two provinces: Mesopotamia and Babylon. Politically speaking, the border did not exist. The Seleucian Empire was defeated by the Parths, who invaded the empire from the north-eastern Persia. During that period The Land Between the Rivers became a buffer region, where military confrontations between Iran and Rome took place. Only with the Sasanids gaining power at the beginning of the 3rd century (they ruled 225–651), the Romans completely withdrew from the area of the present Iraq. The Sasanids built a new capital in Ctesiphon, close to the Seleucide capital, near to the present Baghdad, which testifies to an integral position of the Land Between the Rivers and, on the other hand, to the central status of that province in Persia. In 628, the Byzantines captured Nineve, while in Mesopotamia there appeared tribes that may be considered as Arabs.

On the turn of the 5th century, on the border between the Arabian Peninsula and Mesopotamia, the formation of an Arabic Laḫmide's state was completed (Arab. Banū Laḫm)[22] with the capital in Al-Ḥīra, near to An-Nağaf. The beginings of the Laḫmid's kingdom were marked in the 3rd century CE, and were connected with the influx of a confederation of the Tanūḫ tribes from the Arabian Peninsula. The rising of the Laḫmid's state may be considered as a birthdate of the Arab Iraq, but not – of course – of the Muslim one. This buffer state was a vassal of the Sasanian Persia. Laḫmids provided their troops to both sides of the Byzantine-Persian wars in the periods between 572–579 and 604–628.

The Laḫmids achieved the height of their power when Al-Munḏir III ascended the throne (c.a. 505, according to some sources 512–554). He was known as Ibn Mā' as-Samā'. The trials of Al-Munḏir are stormy. After a dozen years he was deprived of authority by the Persian king Qawād II (498–531), when he had refused to accept Mazdakism. When in Persia Khosrow I Anūširwān (531–579) came to power, Al-Munḏir gained his reign back. The last representative of the Laḫmid dynasty was An-Nu'mān Ibn al-Munḏir. He was aware that the Sasanian state was weakening as a result of the conflict with Byzantium and internal dynastic problems. An-Nu'mān tried to avail himself of this opportunity to shake off the yoke of the Persian sovereignty. The Persians, however, noted the subtle efforts of An-Nu'mān and decided to get rid of him. An-Nu'mān had to flee from Al-Ḥīra. He sought far shelter on the Ṭayy"s tribe territory, but his request met with a rejection. Then he turned to Bakr Ibn Wā'il tribe, but on the way he was caught by Persians, then transported to Ctesiphon and executed there in 602. The Laḫmids had lost their autonomy and up to the Arab-Muslim invasion in 633 the power in the region was exerted by a governor appointed by the Persians. The reason for such an attitude of the Persians to the Laḫmids was probably the fact that the inhabitants of the region – together with the sovereign – were Christians, which might have led to their tightening bonds with Byzantium against Persia.

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[22] For the history of Laḫmids cf. for example 'Abd al-'Azīz Sālim, *Tārīḫ al-'Arab fī 'aṣr al-ğāhiliyya*, Beirut, p. 242–311; M.M. Dziekan, *Historia Iraku* (The History of Iraq), Warszawa 2002, pp. 27–32. Some rather scarce, usually short sections concerning Laḫmids are available also in the majority of works dedicated to the history of the Arab world.

During the king Iyās's reign (602–611[614]), an event of great consequence took place – it is perceived as such at least by Arabic historiography. A battle, known as "The Day of Ḏī Qār"[23] was fought in 610 at the horse-pond near Al-Ḥīra. According to an Arabic historian, Al-Maydānī (died 1124): "It is placed among the greatest battles of Arabs. It brought about the greatest defeat of Persians. For the first time the Arabs won over the Persians."[24] The importance of the battle in the history of The Land Between the Rivers is confirmed by the fact that one of the present *muḥāfaẓa* (Arab. equivalent of 'province'), with the capital in An-Nāṣiriyya, even nowadays bears the name of Ḏī Qār. The direct Persian occupation did not last long – only up to the Arab-Muslim conquest.

Thus during the Laḫmids' period the whole territory of the present Iraq bore the features of a borderland, being a buffer area between Sasanian Persia and Byzantium. However, one can hardly discern a precise borderline fencing the region, considering the fact that the Laḫmids' state was not completely independent.

Caliphate and the Mongolian reign

After the Arab-Muslim conquest (completed in 642) the situation reversed – Iran was annexed by the Arab-Muslim Empire. There could not be any international border on the Mesopotamian-Iranian borderland, which accorded the Muslim opinion that religious divisions are more important than national. The concept of *unity* was connected with *umma*, a religious community, rather than with *ša'b*, a nation.

Of great importance for the Mesopotamian-Iranian bordeland was the Persian-Arab battle at Al-Qādisiyya in 637 (Arab. *Yawm al-Qādisiyya* 'The Day of Al-Qādisiyya') and the victory of the Muslim army.[25] Al-Qādisiyya is located ca. 30 km South-West of Al-Ḥīra. The battle was preceded by some rounds of negotiations which were held in Ctesiphon by a delegation of Arabs and representatives of the Persian king, Yazdgird, or the commander in chief, Rustam. Arabs clearly presented their aim, namely the conversion of Persians to Islam and, simultaneously, the liberation of the territories inhabited by Arab tribes. In accordance with the *Qur'ān*, Arabs presented Persians with a choice – they can converse, and pay a poll tax (*ğizya*), or a military action will be taken against them. The exact date of the battle is debatable, and even in classical Arabic sources it is discussed, but the battle presumably took place on June 16. In June 637 the Arabs captured the summer capital of the Sasanians, Ctesiphon, located North of the present Baghdad, on the Tigris river. Eventually, Iran was defeated in the battle at Nihavand (642).

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[23] "The Days of the Arabs" (*ayyām al-'Arab*) – this term was used in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods to designate the battles fought by different Arab tribes and by Arabs and other people; comp. for example E. Meyer, *Der historische Gehalt der Aiyām al-'Arab*, Wiesbaden 1970.

[24] Al-Maydānī, *Mağma' al-amṯāl*, vol. 2, Cairo 1959, p. 431.

[25] For a more detailed description of the battle – cf. Dziekan, op. cit., pp. 40–42.

For the caliphs the border with Iran practically did not exist. Historically relevant was for them the frontier with Byzantium (northen and north-western Syria), since it delimited *dār al-islām*, the territories under the Muslim rule, and *dār al-ḥārb*, an area in the possession of non-Muslims (in this case Christians). The latter was called *al-'awāṣim*,[26] while the former – *ṯuġūr*.[27]

The boundary between Iranian and Semitic people was of inferior political relevance in the Muslim Classical period, which is confirmed by the system of governance implemented during the reign of the "righteous", "perfect" caliphs. In the area under discussion there were two provinces (*wilāya*), ruled by governors called emirs (Arab. *amīr*), and with the capitals in Al-Kūfa and Al-Baṣra respectively. The emirs governed also the territories which were conquered by the armies of the capitals. To the province of Al-Kūfa belonged central and northern Al-'Irāq and northern Iran, including Hamadān, Qazwīn, Ar-Rayy and Iṣfahān. The emir of Al-Baṣra ruled southern Iraq as well as Al-Aḥwāz, Fārs, Kermān, Mukrān, Siğistān and Ḫurāsān. The distance to the capital of *wilāya* was long, therefore in the course of time Ḫurāsān became a separate province; this part of Iranian territory, hovewer, is beyond our interest. These provinces were of great importance for the caliphate, which is confirmed by the policy of caliph 'Umar who would appoint his relatives as governors. As the first emir of Al-Kūfa 'Umar's cousin, Al-Walīd Ibn 'Uqba, was nominated, and afterwards – another cousin, Sa'īd Ibn al-'Āṣ. Yet another relative of 'Umar – 'Abd Allāh Ibn 'Āmir – was appointed governor of Al-Baṣra.[28]

Emir was responsible for all the affairs connected with the governed area. Because of the extensiveness of the provinces and the difficulties in the communication with the capitals, emir appointed his representatives (deputies, Arab. *wālī*) in the more remote areas. Thus the emir of Al-Kūfa had his deputies, among others, in Azerbaijan, Hamadān, Qazwīn, Ar-Rayy and Iṣfahān; the emir of Al-Baṣra delegated his deputies to Al-Aḥwāz, Fārs, Kermān, Mukrān, Siğistān. During the Umayyad reign this type of governance was retained and, for example, the sovereignty of the famous "vice-king" of Iraq, Al-Haǧǧāǧ Ibn Yūsuf, covered Persia as well.[29]

During the Abbasides' rule a new scheme of governance was introduced, and the borderland character of the provinces in the present Iraq and western Iran became distinct. The present Iraq's territory was divided into two provinces (starting from the North): Al-Ğazīra and As-Sawād (the central province of the caliphate with Baghdad), while in the western Iran there were three of them: Šahrizūr (with Kurdistān), Mihragānkadak (with the capital in Saymara) and Al-Aḥwāz.[30]

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[26] *EI*, vol. 1, p. 761.

[27] *EI*, vol. 10. p. 446.

[28] M.A. Shaban, *Islamic History A.D. 600–750 (A.H. 132). A New Interpretation*, Cambridge 1971, p. 66.

[29] Dziekan, op. cit., pp. 55–59.

[30] Cf. the governance in the caliphs' empire in: A. von Kremer, *Kulturgeschichte des Orients unter den Chalifen*, Aalen 1966, vol. 1, pp. 286–355.

Although from the 9th century up caliph's sovereignty became only nominal, sultans from the Persian family of Buwayhid (Buyyid), ruling "in the name of the caliph" (945–1055), and their Seljuq successors (1055–1194) ruled the area, including Mesopotamia and Iran. Again, one can hardly discern a border here, unless in the ethnic sense (between Semitic and Iranian peoples).

The situation was similar after the collapse of Baghdad (1258), when Mongols gained power. Mesopotamia and Iran became part of the extensive Ilḫān Empire, administratively, however, Iranian and Iraqi provinces were separated. Iraq was divided into Mesopotamia, Diyār Bakr and Diyār Rabī'a, while western Iran – into Ḫūzestān, 'Erāq Fārisī and Kordestān.[31] That divison was, however, of lesser importance even during the sovereignty of the Mongolian dynasty of Ğalā'irids in Iraq (1340–1393). Any changes were implemented in the system of governance during the reign of the subsequent Turkmen dynasties.

Turkish-Persian Rivalry

Of crucial importance were the first years of the 16th century, when at the same time two empires emerged – the empire of the Safavids in Persia and the Ottoman Turks. The battle over the hegemony in the Middle East flared up. The Safavids appeared in 1501, claiming the emergence of a new state with the Shi'ite Islam as an official religion. Meanwhile, in 1516, the Ottomans began to conquer the Arab lands. The conquest of Iraq was completed in 1534.[32] Only till the beginning of 16th century can the real existence of the Iraqi-Iranian border be traced back. According to G. Biger, "it is one of the oldest established boundaries of the world, but its exact course is still unsettled."[33]

"On April 23, 1514 on the Çaldıran plain in Kurdistan a decisive battle took place, when the Turkish army smashed the Persian troops. [...] The state of Ḏū al-Qādir independent until then became part of the Ottoman possession. Thus the process of unification of Turkey was completed. After five centuries the Turkish-Persian border on the Kurdish highland acquired a shape similar to its present run."[34] But this does not mean that the border was really determined. For the first time the Turkish-Persian boundaries were sketched in the Zohāb treaty in 1639. Nonetheless, in the region of Kurdistān arguments over the border would occur in that period. The Ottomans aspired, among others, to gain Sardast and Zohāb inhabited by the Kurds. Iran, on the other hand, tried to gain control over Kyul Albar valley, the Hawramān mountains and the region around Ḫāniqīn. Another problematic region was also Al-Aḥwāz, inhabited by the Arab tribesmen, tending on their part to autonomy.

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[31] Cf. the map *Skizze Irans zur Mongolenzeit* added to the work of B. Spuler, *Die Mongolen in Iran*, Berlin 1968.

[32] For a detailed description of the Turkish conquest of Iraq cf. for example N.A. Ivanov, *Osmanskoje zavoevanije arabskikh stran 1516–1574*, Moskva 1984, p. 48–58.

[33] Biger, op. cit., pp. 127–128.

[34] J. Reychman, *Historia Turcji* (The History of Turkey), Warszawa 1976, p. 66.

When the Ottoman-Persian frontier was delimited, "the subject of main concern was basically to gain an equilibrium between the Persian standpoint, namely – that the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab make a natural barrier between the two states – and the Ottoman view – claiming that ethnically and historically the area inhabited by the Arab tribesmen on both sides of the river creates a natural unity, and as such falls under the sultan reign in Stanbul."[35]

H. Fürtig divides the history of the conflict into three stages: 1639–1823 – Persian-Ottoman conflict; 1847–1917 – Russian-British rivarly; 1917 until now – the rivalry between two nation-states of Iraq and Iran.[36]

On April 17, 1639 Ottomans and Persians signed an agreement in Zohāb (called also the agreement of Qaṣr-e Šīrīn), determining the borders between the two states. "It was the first treaty joint boundaries between the two powers, and it became the basis of all later treaties negotiated between the Ottoman and the Persian states. The treaty was significant since it formally incorporated Iraq into into the Ottoman Empire and obligated one nation not to interfere in the domestic affairs of the other."[37] It was not, however, as thorough as the previous treaties were, since it did not regulate the issues concerning the political attachment of the nomad tribesmen, wandering across the borderland, or the delicate problem of Al-Aḥwāz, regarded by both sides as a buffer territory.[38] That treaty, however, was the most complete ever signed by both powers. The Iranian-Turkish borderline, as determined by the treaty, was retained in almost the same shape for the following two centuries. "True, under the Treaty of Zuhab (...) no clear boundary line was drawn to separate one territory from the other (...). For this reason, Persia and the Ottoman Empire called the Treaty of Zuhab a *sulh* (truce) and not *silm* (peace), since the latter meant premanent conditions of peace among believers, while the former was a short span of peace with the unbelievers – a truce that should not exceed ten years. Indeed, neither the Ottoman Sultan nor the persian Shah intended that the treaty concluded between them last too long, since both were anxious to resume fighting at the earliest possible moment in order to reestablish the unity of the house of Islam under one supreme authority."[39]

In 1733 the ruler Nādir Šāh besieged Baghdad, but finally did not succeed in capturing it. Peace negotiations began in An-Nağaf in 1743 and were accomplished in Kurdān (a town close to Teheran) in 1746, where a treaty was signed. Essentially, this agreement confirmed the statements of the Zohāb treaty, but it had some important religious aspect (a Shi'ite school of the Muslim law, *ğa'fariyya*, was recognized as the fifth among the traditional schools of the Muslim law). This aspect, however, is beyond the scope of the present considerations.[40] The treaty was not ratified by the sultan, particularly because of its religious

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[35] H. Fürtig, *Der irakisch-iranische Krieg 1980–1988. Ursachen. Verlauf. Folgen*, Berlin 1992, p. 3.

[36] Ibid.

[37] J.M. Abdulghani, *Iraq and Iran. The Years of Crisis*, Baltimore 1984, p. 5.

[38] Fürtig, op. cit., p. 15.

[39] M. Khadduri, *The Gulf War. The Origins and Implications of the Iraqi-Iranian Conflict*, New York-Oxford 1988, p. 33.

[40] Ibid., p. 34; *Selections from the Iraq-Iran Dispute*, Baghdad 1984, p. 40.

settlements. In 1736 Persia signed with the Ottomans in Stanbul an agreement confirming the settlements of the Zohāb treaty.[41]

The 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries

In 1796 the dynasty of Qāğārs ascended the throne in Persia. During some following decades, however, the borderline had not been changed. In the period between 1821 and 1823 the Turkish-Persian struggles for the domination over the Kurdistān continued. At the beginning Persian army captured Sulaymāniyya, Kirkūk and Mosul and almost reached the capital, but a sudden attack of cholera in the Persian army, combined with a military action undertaken by the brave Baghdad's governor, Dāwud Paşa (1831–1869), created serious obstacles for the Persian offensive. The bone of contention was supposedly formed by the difficulties in access to the holy places of the Shi'ites in An-Nağaf and Karbalā', created by the Ottoman authorities for the Persian inhabitants.[42] The conflict came to an end with the Erzurum treaty (28.06.1823), maintaining the previous run of the borderline.[43] This treaty is called Erzurum I agreement, and the settlements from the previous treaties (of Zohāb and Kurdān) were confirmed there. A significant step to the so called Erzurum II agreement was then made. Nevertheless, this step did not put an end to the forthcoming controversies, leaving the problem of Ḫūzestān unresolved. Moreover, the borderline between two provinces – the Iranian one of Šuštar and the Turkish (Iraqi) one of Al-Baṣra – was not established.[44] In the same year 1823 a special commission was appointed to delimit the boundary, but its activity ended in failure.[45] The statements of the treaty were not honoured by both sides and, in 1837, the Ottoman army attacked Persian Ḫorramšahr, while the Persians captured As-Sulaymāniyya in 1840. In both cases the invaders claimed controversial areas under their jurisdiction. According to M. Khadduri, Zohāb and Kurdān agreements defined borderlands rather than borderlines.[46]

The second Erzurum ageement was signed on 31 May 1847, but the history of the negotiations goes back to 1843. On May 15, 1843 a conference in Erzurum was summoned, with the participation of four countries (Persia, Turkey, Great Britain and Russia) seeking a solution to the problem. Iran was represented by Mirzā Taqī Ḫān, while, on behalf of the Ottoman empire, Anwar Efendi attended the conference. The tough negotiations were interrupted by different unexpected events, which stopped the final delimitation of the border and continued for the following four years.

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[41] *Al-'Irāq fi at-tārīḫ*, Baghdad 1983, pp. 590–599.

[42] Y. 'Izz ad-Dīn, *Dāwud Bāšā wa-nihāyat al-Mamālīk fi al-'Irāq*, Baghdad 1967, p. 46 ff.

[43] E. Gombár, *Moderní dějiny islámských zemí*, Praha 1999, p. 136; 'A.S. Nawār, *Tārīḫ al-'Irāq al-ḥadīṯ. Min nihāyat ḥukm Dāwud Bāšā ilā nihāyat ḥukm Midḥat Bāšā*, Cairo 1968, p. 28.

[44] S.A. Nijazmatov, *Irano-iranskij konflikt*, Moskva 1989, p. 6.

[45] *Selections...*, op. cit. p. 41.

[46] Khadduri, op. cit., p. 34.

In 1846 an argument concerning the port of Al-Muḥammara broke out between the representantives of Turkey and Persia. It nearly led to a military conflict. The Ottomans sent to the port their warship and forced the vessels trying to enter the port to moor in Al-Baṣra, where they had to pay border taxes. Persians strongly opposed this practice. Eventually, Britons mediated in the conflict and as a result of their arbitration, and as a response to the letter sent to the *wālī* of Baghdad, Nağīb Paşa, Ottomans withdrew their warship.[47]

The second Erzurum agreement contained 9 paragraphs, and the second one was dedicated to the entire problem of Ottoman-Iranian borders.[48]

The settlements of this paragraph were as follows:

- Persia was obligated to transfer to the Ottoman authority the lowland territories of the *sanğak* of Zohāb, i.e. the western part of the region, in accordance with the geographic, cultural, social and economic factors prevailing in the area. Turkey for its part bestowed on Persia the power over the eastern, upland area of the province. Thus the argument which had lasted for almost four centuries found its resolution.[49]
- Iran relinquished its claims to As-Sulaymāniyya and the neighbouring areas, from then on passing completely under the Ottoman jurisdiction, and was obliged not to interfere with the affairs of those areas.
- Iran took power over the city of Al-Muḥammara, Al-Ḫiğr island (‘Abādān), the city of ‘Abādān and all the land on the eastern, i.e. left bank of the Šaṭṭ al-‘Arab, remaining under the control of the tribesmen admitting their relationships with Persia – from the river's mouth up to the point of the international border crossing on the level of the Al-Ḫayīn river. The small island of Al-Muḥalla remained within the borders of Iraq. Whereas Ottoman empire received the whole of the river's bed, Persia retained the right to navigate there.

Other settlements dealt with, among others, the cooperation in conflicting situations and the facilities in the pilgrimages of Persians to An-Nağaf and Karbalā'.

When the agreement gained its final shape, both sides first refused to ratify it. Eventually, they agreed to do so, but under the pressure of Russia and Persia. The Persian representative first signed the agreement, without consulting this government. When that fact was dicovered by the authorities in Teheran, Persia renounced the treaty. Subsequently, after the final shape of the agreement had already been determined, Ottomans sent a *note explicative* demanding that the issues of the inhabitation and rule over the Šaṭṭ al-‘Arab banks should have been left open.[50] The problem concerned especially the tribesmen of Ka‘b and

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[47] ‘A. al-Wardī, *Lamaḥāt iğtimā‘iyya min tārīḫ al-‘Irāq al-ḥadīṯ*, Baghdad 1971, vol. 2, p. 127, Nawār, op. cit., pp. 339–340.

[48] The matters of the particular statements are discussed in: Nawār, op. cit., pp. 340–342; Al-Wardī, op. cit., pp. 124–130; the whole of the document, available in the Russian translation in: Nijazmatov, op, cit., pp. 140–142; English translation in: *Selections...*; op. cit., pp. 127–129.

[49] Nawār, op. cit., p. 341.

[50] Fürtig, op. cit, p. 4.

Muhaysin, who formally remained under the Ottoman sovereignty, but in fact wandered along both banks of the river. Such a delimitation of the borderline created a serious obstacle in establishing their political identity, especially important when conscription for the army was attempted.[51] One should not be surprised, therefore, that as soon as the agreement had been signed, subsequent arguments rose, as a result of different interpretations of some particular issues. The interested countries were induced then to appoint a special demarcating commission. A detailed demarcation was to prevent any prospective frontier conflicts. The following members of a "mixed commision" were designated: Darwīš Paşa as an Ottoman representative, Mirzā Ğa'far Ḫān on behalf of Persians, and col. Wiliams and Čerikov as British and Russian representatives, respectively.

The commission based its proposal of the borderline's run on official documents, taxes registers, the division between rivers' drainage and mountain summits. In many cases relations of the inahabitants were taken into consideration, as well as their tribal identity and the reports of ancient times. 'Alī al-Wardī states that in the process of finalising the run of the borderline an important role was played by the representatives of Russia and Great Britain, who mediated between Persian and Turkish sides. Without their mediation the problem would not have reached its final resolution. The borderlands were inhabited by Shi'ites and Sunnites. In many cases the population of the former tended to Persia, while the latter – to the Ottoman empire. An example of the conflicting tendencies may be Qawtar in northern Iraq. That village was located on the route leading from Hōy and Tabrīz in Iran. Its inhabitants preferred to live in Iran, while the Ottoman representative, Darwīš Paşa, demanded that the village should be attached to Turkey on the basis of some obscure settlements in the previous frontier treaties. Under the influence of Darwīš, four elderly inhabitants of the village turned to the commission, claiming that from ancient times on their village had belonged to Turkey. Finally, Darwīš decided to reach his goal by means of military occupation of the village.[52] The negotiations about the issue of the borderline continued for several years, up to 1851 when the outbreak of the Crimean War put an end to the activity of the commission.

The settlements of the Erzurm II agreement were confirmed by both sides in the following frontier treaty of 1869.[53] It was signed as a result of the Ottoman-Persian conflict concerning the Kurdish and Arabic tribesmen inhabiting the borderlands. The tribes (for example Hawramān – the most famous in that conflict) had been devided by the borderline, on the basis of the settlements of Erzurm II. The tribesmen attacked the neighbouring territories, violating the international agreement.

"When in 1907 London and Russia signed an agreement on the division of the spheres of influence in Iran, Britons undertook new efforts to guarantee free navigation in the South. The Kārūn, as well as the Tigris and Euphrates, whose mingled waters flow further as the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab, served as a convenient transportation route for oil supplies not only

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[51] Abdulghani, op. cit. pp. 7, 108.
[52] Al-Wardī, op. cit., pp. 128–130.
[53] Nawār, op. cit., p. 436.

from Iran but also from Iraq, then part of the Ottoman Empire. The problem, however, was the borderline between Turkey and Iran, which was not precisely marked. The negotiations about free navigation had prolonged up to 1913, when a preliminary agreement was reached enabling free navigation.[54]

Despite the settlements of the agreement, disputes continued. The fruitless Turkey-Persian negotiations, undertaken in 1911, finally led to an intervention of Russia and Great Britain. In March 1912 a quadrilateral commission was appointed, where Turkey and Persia were represented only nominally. Under the pressure of Russia, on August 15, 1912, Persia had to recognize *note explicative* of Erzrum II. As a final result of those efforts, on November 17, 1913, Turks and Persians signed the so called Istanbul (Constantinople) Protocol. According to this document, $^3/_4$ portion of the borderline was defined, while the rest was to be delimited by the demarcating commission. The commission worked from 8 January 1914 in Al-Muḥammara up to its last, 27th session, on 26 October 1914 in Bazargān. The commission delimited the border along about 1900 km[55]; as many as 126 border stones were embedded (or – according to other sources – 227), the last one being fixed on the day before the outbreak of the Turkey-Russian War. Those statements did not essentialy differ from Erzurum II.[56] The Ottomans gained power over the whole of the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab river and the small islands on the river, except those enumerated in the Protocol. The border was defined in paragraph no. 21. Starting from the mouth of the Nahr Nazalī channel, the border was to run along the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab up to the point where it joins the sea, leaving under the Turkish reign the river bed together with the islands, except the following: Al-Muḥalla and two small islands between Al-Muḥalla and the left bank of the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab; two small islands between Aš-Šuṭayṭ and Ma'āwiya, and two others, opposite Mankūhī and next to 'Abādān; all existing or future islands, which during a low tide adhere to the island of 'Abādān, or to the Iranian bank, below the Nazalī channel. The Turkish jurisdiction was not to extend onto those parts of the Iranian territory which during a high tide are temporarily under water. On the other hand, Persia is not allowed to claim its reign over the parts of the land accidentally not covered by water, when the water level is lower than normal.[57] Opposite Ḫorramšahr, the border ran through the *talweg* at ca. 4 miles beyond and 1 mile below the mouth of the Kārūn.[58]

Independent states – Iran and Iraq

The outbreak of the World War I prevented the ratification of the agreement. After the war the situation changed, with the emergence of the formally independent kingdom

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[54] L.W. Korbut, Yu.Ya. Baskin, *Meždunarodno-pravovoj režim rek. Istorija i sovremennost'*, Moskva 1987, p. 62.

[55] Demarcation referred not only to the present Iraqi-Iranian border but Turkish-Iranian as well (M.M.D.).

[56] Fürtig, op.cit., p. 4; Nijazmatov, op. cit., pp. 10–11.

[57] Nijazmatov, op. cit., p. 10; Abdulghani, op. cit., pp. 110–111.

[58] Baram, op. cit., p. 369.

of Iraq. In mid 1920s some changes took place in the political situation in Teheran – the Qāğār dynasty was overthrown by a new one of Pahlavi. When the first shah of the new dynasty had captured the autonomous Emirate of ʻArabistān (1925), he undertook to revise the Persian-Iraqi borderline, and consequently he waited with the recognition of the Iraqi independence until 1929. In 1922 on the grounds of the Istanbul Protocol, the frontier between Iraq and Iran was established, but its final shape was defined only in the treaty of 4 July 1937. Its ratification was preceded by a prolonged disscusion.

In 1932 Iran called for the revision of the borderline intending to draw it along the *talweg* of the Šaṭṭ al-ʻArab. The demand was, however, rejected by Iraq. Sporadic clashes on the borderlands ensued, and eventually, in 1934, Iraq requested the League of Nations for mediation, which, however, did not provide any solution. Therefore negotiations had started, resulting in the above mentioned treaty between both sides of the conflict.[59] Essentially, the new treaty was based on the demarcation of 1913. An exception was the frontier on the Šaṭṭ al-ʻArab – the borderline was to run mainly along the right bank of the river, except the 8-mile long fragment opposite ʻAbādān, where the border was to run along the *talweg*.[60] Paragraph no. 4 states: "the river will be available for navigation on equal basis for merchant ships of all countries."[61] Although ratified, the agreement brought about many protests in Iraq itself. Manifestations were organized in the streets of Baghdad and Al-Baṣra. The Iraqi signatory, Nūrī As-Saʻīd, was accused of selling off the Iraqi territory and ignoring the inhabitants of Al-Aḥwāz.[62] That treaty contributed to yet another *coup d'état* in Baghdad. Nevertheless, in 1938 a demarcating commission was appointed, but the outbreak of World War II interrupted its activity. The agreement of 1937 served as basis for the convention of ships traffic, signed in 1940. A new commission was appointed, with the participation of representatives of Iran, Iraq and of the country "whose ships constitute the major part of the ships traffic" – the passage obviously referred to Great Britain."[63] However, in 1941–46, the real control over the ships traffic on the river was exerted only by the Allies, the fact being opposed – fruitlessly – by the government in Teheran.

At the beginning of 1950s negotiations aiming at the solution of the problem of the border river continued. In 1957 it was decided that a mixed commission based in Baghdad would be appointed. Its aim would be establishing a convention which would allow forming a commission that could govern the Šaṭṭ al-ʻArab. The demarcation itself was transferred to a Swedish arbitration institution with headquarters in Teheran. However, the outbreak of the revolution in Iraq in 1958 ruined those plans.[64] Already in 1959 the leadership of Iraq started to express openly its territorial claims on Iran, undemining the

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[59] Ch. Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, Cambridge 2002, p. 90.
[60] Ibid., p. 90; Khadduri, op. cit., p. 40; Abdulghani, op. cit., p. 11.
[61] Korbut, Baskin, op. cit., p. 63.
[62] Tripp, op. cit., p. 91.
[63] Korbut, Baskin, op. cit., p. 63.
[64] Fürtig, op. cit., p. 8.

statements of the treaty of 1937. The conflict, however, did not develop into anything more serious than an argument, similarly to the conflicts of 1963 and 1966.[65]

When in Iraq the Ba'ṭ party (*Ḥizb al-Ba'ṭ al-'Arabī al-Ištirākī*, 1968) came to power, the mutual relationships with Iran were still marked with tensions, and the border issues led even to a minor confrontation in 1969. According to the agreement of 1937 the sovereignty over the whole bed of the river was handed over to Iraq. Meanwhile – quite illegally – on the Satt al-'Arab sailed ships under the Iranian banner. This was opposed to by Iraq, but not effectively, as Iran held military superiority in the region. The case was debated by the International Tribunal of Justice in the Hague, but Iran refused to accept the suggestions of the Tribunal. The official stand of the Ba'ṭ party as to the issue of the Iranian-Iraqi border has been based on the statement of Michel 'Aflaq, the ideologist of the party that "the borders of each region of the Arab world are at the same time the boundaries of the Arab nation, of the totality of Arabs' homeland, they are the frontiers of the Arab existence". From such a perspective the acceptance of the border along the *talweg* of the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab was perceived similarly to handing over of Palestine to Israel.[66] This context makes the Iraqi stand as to the question of the border's run understandable – here the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab marks the eastern limits of the Arab world, not only of Iraq. One could wonder why Al-Aḥwāz had been omitted, after all also a part of the Arab *umma*. In fact Iraq has frequently neglected that region of the Arab world, and would remember it only when it found it convenient.

Finally, in 1975 the border agreement was signed by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and the contemporary vice-president of Iraq Ṣaddām Ḥusayn. Its aim was to restrain the prospective revisionist claims and to create the foundations for peace in the region (cf. map no. 3). The agreement, drawn up by the Algerian president Houari Boumediène and signed in Algier on March 6, 1975 had been preceded by very dangerous incidents starting in January 1975. The Kurds' uprising in 1974/1975 backed by Teheran, and Iraqi aid to the Arab dissidents in Al-Aḥwāz could have led to an outbreak of Iraqi-Iranian war. It was the immediate reaction of Algeria that possibly saved the situation, even though only temporarily, as it proved five years later. The Algierian agreement was essentially based on the agreements of 1913 and 1914. The border on the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab was delimited along the *talweg*; both sides committed themselves to respect their mutual rights and to cooperate on the borderlands.[67] Iraqi concessions as to the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab were connected with Iran's promise to resign from aiding the Kurds.

The issue of the border soon recurred. It became the crucial and – moreover – the officially declared motive for the outbreak of the Iraqi-Iranian War. The long standing controversy, which in fact had never found a satisfactory resolution, referred to the border in Kurdistān and on the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab river, as well.[68] The rights of the Arab inhabitants

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[65] Abdulghani, op. cit., p. 20.

[66] Fürtig, op. cit., p. 11.

[67] For the English translation of the declaration and related documents see: *Selections...*, op. cit., pp. 177–197.

[68] For the details see: Nijazmatov, op. cit.

of Iran (mainly in Al-Aḥwāz) were not of lesser importance. In September 1979 Iraq officially claimed its demands for the revision of the border agreement of March 6, 1975, which was naturally rejected by Teheran. The first Iraqi attack on Iran took place on September 12, and on September 17, Iraqi Revolution Command Council nullified the Algerian agreement. The war took various turns, some territories were temporarily captured and than almost immediately abandoned by both armies; which confirms – by the way – that the military potential of the both sides was on a comparable level. The toll of the war was many people dead and missing, and serious economic damage. Yet it did not bring about any real change. The armistice took place in 1988, but the peace agreement was signed only on August 16, 1990. The longlasting and damaging war did not in fact provide any resolution to any of the problems – on the Iraqi-Iranian border the *satus quo* of 1973 was restored.[69] This situation has prevailed until today. The problem has not been resolved and still awaits negotiators.

3. Iraqi-Iranian borderlands

I. Ethnic borderlands

According to an encyclopedic definition of *borderland*, it is "an area, where two or more culturally different groups are in contact. The specific features of the borderland are the following: area, social contacts and cultural penetration."[70]

In the present considerations, the examined areas do not lend themselves precisely to the definition, since the case of the Iraqi-Iranian bordeline is quite complicated. The most important factor seems to be the ethnic situation. Where the border runs 'regularly', separating two cultures, the aspect of cultural interferences is less interesting. The interest is aroused by some sections of the southern border – where the borderline adheres to the frontier of the Ḫūzestān province – and of the northern border – where the the boundary crosses the area inhabitated by the Kurdish tribesmen. All the three sections deserve separate consideration.

A. Al-Aḥwāz

Al-Aḥwāz covers the area of ancient Elam and classical Susiana (cf. map no. 4). Already in the pre-Islamic period the region was inhabited by Arab tribesmen, who called it Al-Aḫwāz (the name goes back to the ethnic name: Al-Ḫūz), which later developed

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[69] For the description of the war course see also: W. Bukowski, *Iran-Irak. Islam, wojna i polityka* (Iran and Iraq. Islam, War and Politics), Warszawa 1981, and already quoted monographies of Nijazmatov, Fürtig, Khadduri and Abdulghani.

[70] I. Machaj, *Pogranicze* (Borderland), in: *Encyklopedia socjologii* (The Encycopedia of Sociology), vol. 3, Warszawa 2000, p. 125.

into Al-Aḥwāz and Al-Ahwāz. ʻArabistān and Ḫūzestān are other geographical names of the region.[71]

During the Achaemenian and Sasanian rule, the area was strictly controlled by the Persian state until the Arab conquest in 640. Up from then, the fate of the region was interwoven with the history of the Arab-Muslim caliphate.[72] In the Abbaside period the lowlands were inhabited by Arabs, who – according to Al-Iṣṭaḫrī (died 951) – would dress like inhabitants of Iraq. The upland on the other hand was inhabited by a population speaking Ḫūzi language.[73] After 1258 the region was incorporated into the Mongolian state, but in the 15th century it gained a kind of authonomy or independence under the rule of the tribe (and a dynasty at the same time) of Al-Muša'ša'a. In 1508, however, the ruler of Al-Aḥwāz was forced to recognize the Safavide authority, while retaining the title of sultan. Starting from ca. 16/17 centuries, the name of ʻArabistān started to be applied for the region. In the period of 1727–1728 ʻArabistān was occupied by the Ottomans, who always claimed the right to reign over all areas which would be ethnically Arab. Eventually, after their return to Persia, the Al-Muša'ša'a's position deteriorated to that of shah's vassals. Consequently, they started to lose their importance to the advantage of the leaders of two most important Aḥwāz semi-nomadic tribes – Ka'b and Lām. The tribes had reached the Ottoman-Persian borderland wandering from the Arab Peninsula in the 17/18 centuries. Banu Ka'b accepted the Shi'ite Islam,[74] married a Persian women, and even adopted some characteristic elements of the Persian dress, creating a kind of a typical bordeland culture. Later on to Al-Aḥwāz arrived Muntafiqs from the Tigris and Eufrates region. In the 19th century, then, the name of ʻArabistān was fully justified. All those tribes are represented also in Iraq and the borderline cuts their territories.[75] Up from the 18th century the hostility between Arab and Iranian population of ʻArabistān grew, coupled by economic decline of the region. The situation improved after the resources of oil had been discovered in 1908. Up to 1925 the power had been exerted by the *šayḫs* residing at Al-Muḥammara. In the same year, on April 20, Reza Shah occupied ʻArabistān, restoring the name of Ḫūzestān. Among the most important motives for the annexation of Al-Aḥwāz, the resources of oil were not of inferior importance. This very moment is referred to by the Al Aḥwāz Arabs as "the greatest tragedy in the history of their country". Since then Arabs have frequently rose against Persian rule, striving for the liberation of the region. Their incorporation into Iraq, however, has never been mentioned.[76] In this context some uprisings should be enumerated. The first one, headed by *šayḫ* Ḫaz'al, broke out some months after the annexation, and – as the following ones – was cruelly

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[71] For details cf. A.N. al-Ḥilw, *Bilād al-Aḥwāz. ʻArabistān. Dirāsa muwassa'a li-ǧuġrāfiyya wa-tārīḫ ǧuġrāfiyya li-al-iqlīm*, vol. 1, Cairo, without date, pp. 11–16.

[72] Comp. R.M. Savory, *Khūzistān*, *EI*, vol. 5, pp. 80–81.

[73] Von Kremer, op. cit., pp. 293–294.

[74] Al-Ḥilw, op. cit., p. 143.

[75] Much information about Al-Aḥwāz is available on the website www.al-ahwaz.com; cf. also Fürtig, op. cit., pp. 15–20.

[76] Iraqi government tries to broaden the rights of the Arab population; this problem seems to belong to most important reasons for the outbreak of Iraqi-Iranian War.

suppressed by the Iranian authorities. Among the most important militants in the struggle for ʻArabistān's liberation was ʻAbd al-Muḥsin al-Ḥāqānī. In the region many organisations have undertaken political activity, among others *Ḥizb as-Saʻāda* (Party of Joy), established in 1946. The most influential is *Al-Ǧabha al-Waṭaniyya li-Taḥrīr ʻArabistān* (Patriotic Front for the Liberation of ʻArabistān), led by As-Sayyid Rāšid Ḫalaf al-Kaʻbī. That organisation declares the unity of all Arabs; it claims ʻArabistān part of the Arab *umma* and Arabs of Al-Aḥwāz – part of the Arab nation.

The total number of Arab population in Iran is uncertain. Nevertheless, it may be safely assumed that the number exceeds some hundred thousand (not less than 300). The civil rights of the Arabs are limited, and the Arabic language is persecuted, the fact contributing to the strengthening of the separatist movements in the province. As Arabic is officialy banned, the language of the ʻArabistān inhabitants is strongly influenced by the Persian admixture.

The Arabs of Al-Aḥwāz boast of their culture, sometimes ascribing to themselves the heritage of other people who had been residing in the region from the ancient times (like Elamites). The same tactics as to the cultural heritage is implemented by the Iraqi state. The proof may be provided by an anthology – compiled and edited in 1989 by an Iraqi historian of culture, Ḥusayn Maḥfūẓ – entitled *Muḫtārāt min al-ḥamāsa al-aḥwāziyya* (The selections from Al-Ḥamāsa[77] of al-Aḥwāz). Side by side local poets, like ʻAbd Allāh al-Muša'ša'ī or Hāšim al-Kaʻbī, the leading figures of classical Arabic literature, like Abū Nuwās or Abū Hilāl al-ʻAskarī, are enumerated there. This fact may be considered as an anachronism, yet here it should be presumably regarded as a cultural retrospection. The works of that kind are clearly intended to justify the Arabic claims on the region.

B. The middle part

The part of borderline which runs further northward, i.e. from the Aṭ-Ṭīb/Meyte river to the settlement of Badra on the Iraqi side, induces the fewest conflicts, as it is delimited in the most natural way (cf. the Erzurm II settlements of 1847 referring to the sanjak of Zohāb). Nowadays the area on the Iraqi side is inhabited by Arab tribesmen, while on the Iranian side – by the Lurs. The Lurs are the Iranian people of rather obcure origin – similar to the Kurds, with partly common ancestors. Their language shares many features with Kurdish, while the Lurs themselves for centuries have lived in Persian areas, which bordered with Arab and Ottoman territories. They have intermingled with the Semitic (since 7th century), Kurdish (since the beginning of 12th century) and Turkish (mainly in the Safavide period) elements. Georgian and Armenian influences are also evident. In antiquity the area remained under the Elam infuence and then the following Iranian

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[77] Baghdad 1989. *Al-Ḥamāsa* i.e. 'bravery' that title is borne by some anthologies of the classical Arabic poetry, compiled among others in the Abbaside period by the poets Abū Tammām and Al-Buḥturī. The title clearly refers to the classical Arabic writings.

dynasties (Achemean, Part and Sasanian). Although from the 7th century (Arab-Muslim conquest), throughout the ages, different Arab and Iranian (Islamised) dynasties claimed the rule over Luristān, in fact they exerted power only nominally, as the tribal social sytem of the Lurs was extremely strong. Formally then, after the Muslim conquest in 6th century Luristān found itself within the borders of the Arab-Muslim caliphate. At the end of the Abbaside period (13th century) the power was exerted by the local Iranian dynasties, and afterwards by Mongolian, Timurid, Safavide, Afšaride and Qāğār ones. During those centuries, none of the rulers had suceeded in subduing the Lur tribes. Only Reza Khan, the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, achieved the goal, creating a centralized state and forcing the massive and compulsory sedentarisation of the Lur tribes.[78]

The Lurs are officially Shi'ite Muslims, though their faith considerably differs from the Shi'ite orthodoxy. Lur literature fits into the framework of typical Iranian folk literature. At the end of the 19th century forms typical for the poetics originating in the Arab traditional literature appeared, epos, however, continued to be the most popular.

In the area adhering to that part of the borderline in Iraq – close to the settlement of Badra – Sunnite Arabs prevail, whereas further northward the area is inhabited by the Sunnite Kurds. In fact, there is almost no information as to the intercultural relations in that area. The question calls for field research, but in a long perspective it seems impossible, regarding the present situation in the region.

C. Kurdistān

The Kurds are an Indo-Europen people, with ca. 30 million people. Important Kurdish minorities live in Iran – ca. 8 mln. – and in Iraq – ca. 4 mln, inhabiting an area, up from the 11/12th centuries called "Kurdistān" (cf. map no. 5). The situation of the present Kurdistān has been interwoven into the complex, bizarre history of the Middle East. The ethnogenesis of the Kurds is uncertain. They themselves trace their origins back to Media, where they appeared in ca. 2000 B.C. As the symbolic beginning of their documented history, the date of March 21, 612 B.C. is accepted, when the Medes defeated Assyria and established their empire, conquered afterwards in the 6th century B.C. by the Persians. In the 7th century B.C.A. the Kurds were subdued by the Muslim Arabs, who brought them into the framework of the Arab-Muslim world. Up to the 11th century the Kurds had fought – usually unsuccessfully – with the caliphate, nevertheless at the end of the Abbaside caliphate some independent Kurdish principalities emerged like those of Šaddādites, Ḥasanawayhides and Marwanides. Having suffered a temporary decline, those states revived after the Mongolian conquest. From the 16th century Kurdistān was reigned by Ottoman Turks and Persian Safavides. Persians attempts to forcefully subdue some autonomous Kurdish states brought about Kurdish participation in the battle at Çaldıran (1514) on the Ottoman side. In return Ottomans sultan Selim committed himself to maintain an autonomous status of the Kurds.

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[78] Cf. Minorsky; items: *Lur* (pp. 821–826) and *Luristān* (pp. 829–832) in: *EI*, vol. 5.

In the 19th century the situation changed: the Ottomans, anxious about the emergence of internal Kurdish opposition, started to liquidate Kurdish independence. Despite the Kurds' armed resistance, by the end of the 19th century they had lost their autonomy completely. Parallelly, the great Europen powers began to interfere in the Middle East affairs. Finally, in 1920 the spheres of infuence in the region were delimited: the southern Kurdistān (present Iraqi Kurdistān) fell into the British hands, a small part of the country was connected to the French mandate (Syria), whereas the largest part of the territory was incorporated into Turkey. A considerable area of Kurdistān was left within the boundaries of Iran. The European promises to grant Kurdistān independence remainded on paper. When the process of the borders' formation had been completed, the Kurds found themselves mainly within the boundaries of three nation states: Turkey, Iraq and Iran. In all those countries the Kurds have been involved, to various extent, into the process of assimilation. As a result, considerable divisions have appeared in Kurdistān itself. The Kurdish uprisings that followed did not bring about any positive results. The Kurds have involved themselves into different political games depending on the political conjuncture. Finally, they have managed to gain some political autonomy only in Iraq (starting from 1974), but because of the political situation it has never really materialized. Moreover, during the Iraqi-Iranian War (1980–88) the Kurds were exploited by both sides. The Iraqi Kurds were supported by Iran against the government in Baghdad. Iraq, in its turn, endeavoured to turn the Iranian Kurds against Teheran. When the war finished, this led to attacks of the Iraqi army against Kurdish militants. After the end of the Gulf War in 1991 in Iraqi Kurdistān an uprising burst out against the authorities, while parallelly a conflict between different political fractions among the Kurds themselves continued. That conflict, despite the following agreements, seriously injured, even if only formally, the Kurdish unity.

The Kurds speak their own language, differantiated dialectally. The boundary between the areas covered by two main dialects – sorani and kurmadji – crosses the Iraqi-Iranian border at the level of Ūrmiya lake. The coverages of the dialects do not correspond with the international borders. In Iraq Kurdish is recognized as an official language in the territories inhabited by the Kurds. Kurdish literature, the earliest evidence of which dates back to the 9th century, has been written in the literary variety of the language (court and 'high' literature) and created in different dialects as well (folk literature; in addition to the already mentioned dialects, created also in gorani dialect). Kurdish literature is of "trans-border" character. Iranian Kurdistān has never been the cultural centre of the Kurds – the centre fluctuated between Turkish (earlier period) and Iraqi Kurdistān (form ca. the 18th century). Nowadays the most active in the cultural sphere are Kurds from Iraq, writing in Kurdish and Arabic languages. As far as the formal aspect is concerned, classical literature is strongly influenced by Arab writings, while the most representative is the epos – not known among the Arabs. Kurdish writings are then typical for the borderland culture.[79]

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[79] The question of Kurdish liberation movements (like Mahābād Republic) is beyond the scope of the present considerations.

II. Religious borderland – Shi'a in Iraq and Iran

In 2001, the population of Iraq was over 23 mln. Muslims are 95.5% of the total population, while the adherents of Shi'ites account 61.5% of Muslims. Shi'ites inhabit mostly the rural South in governorates of Al-Baṣra, Karbalā', Al-Qādisiyya, Ḏī Qār, An-Nağaf, Wāsiṭ, Maysān and Al-Muṯannā.

Shi'ism is an indigenous element in Mesopotamia, and till today the most important holy places and theological centres: An-Nağaf, Karbalā', Sāmarrā' and Al-Kāẓimiyya are placed in Iraq. The history of Shi'ism on that territory goes back to the very beginning of Islam. 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, the forth "righteous" caliph, is connected with the history of Mesopotamia. He was murdered in the mosqe in Al-Kūfa, nowadays a part of An-Nağaf. Also the figure of Al-Ḥusayn, 'Alī's son, the third imam, killed in battle of Karbalā' in 680, is interwoven into the history of Iraq.

The Shi'ite inhabitants of Mesopotamia were ruled by the Sunnites, except the Safavide period 1508–1534. On the newly conquered territories Safavides supported only Shi'ite Islam, persecuting Sunnites and Christians.[80] Taking over the power by Sunnite Ottomans in 1534 was not marked by repressions against Shi'ites, although up from the 16th century, the history of the Middle East was marked by Persian-Turkish conflict over the hegemony in the region.

Shah Nāṣir ad-Dīn's visit in Iraq in 1869, during the governance of Midḥat Paşa, was bound to the question of the border. It was the first peaceful visit of a Persian ruler in Iraq. The primary purpose of the visit was a religious one, as the shah wished to make a pilgrimage to the tombs of the Shi'ite imams. The Sublime Porte regarded the visit to be of highest importance, therefore Midḥat Paşa was ordered to receive him with greatest respect and honor. Midḥat therefore set off as far as Ḫāniqīn to meet the shah. Nāṣir ad-Dīn visited holy places, always assisted by Midḥat. In An-Nağaf the shah wished to watch a local treasury. Its impressive contents inspired Midḥat in a new project – to invest this huge amount of money in a railway line that would connect Iran with An-Nağaf, which might serve Iranian pilgrims. The idea, however, was strongly opposed by the Shi'ite *muğtahids*. The visit afforded Midḥat an opporunity to talk over some affairs of his concern. Among them was the issue of transporting dead bodies from Iran to An-Nağaf, where each Shi'ite aspired to being buried. In the Middle-Eastern heat the corpses decayed quickly and were frequently cause of serious diseases. Shah promised Midḥat that from then on the ashes would be permitted to be transported one year after the death, i.e. as dry bones.[81] Although formally the question was solved, the worshippers tried to avoid the restriction. On the Iranian territories some smugglers appeared. In few hours they were able to "prepare" a dead body for transportation to An-Nağaf. They removed flesh from the bones, powdered them by some appropriate substances and exposed them to sunshine, so as to make them look like old ones. The

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[80] Ivanov, op. cit., p. 48.

[81] According to Al-Wardī, op. cit., p. 260, while according to Nawār: three years after death.

flesh was packed in sacks and then, together with the prepared bones, smuggled to Iraq, where a normal burial ceremony was held. According to the Muslim law a dead body should be burnt where one had died, therefore the whole operation was in direct opposition to the shari'a.

Despite the ups and downs in Persian-Ottoman political contacts, the cooperation between Shi'ite Persian and Arab *muğtahids* continued. Some unimportant conflicts and controversies would occur, but by and large the contacts between Iranian and Iraqi Shi'ites were friendly, and always very close. In An-Nağaf and Karbalā' a large Shi'ite community had lived for centuries, and most distinguished Shi'ite academics came from Iraq, e.g. Muḥammad Kāẓim al-Yazdī[82] or Abū al-Qāsim Hō'ī.[83]

Usually the cooperation between Shi'te and Sunnite religious representatives also went smoothly. An example of this can be addapted the anti-British uprising of 1920 supported by the Shi'ite theologians, in whose preparatory activities also participated the Sunnite theologians.

The cooperation of the two was initiated by the death of the Shi'ite leader, *muğtahid* Al-Yazdī, in 1919. Both Shi'ites and Sunnites ran propaganda campaigns among Iranian peoples in Mesopotamia, as well as in Al-Ğazīra, and Iraqi towns. The fall of the uprising meant a withdrawal of the majority of Shi'ite politicians from politics, which lasted until the republican revolution in 1958.

Up from 1964 *ayatollah* Rūḥ Allāh Ḫōmeynī, one of the most prominent political and religious leaders of the Iranian Shi'a, remained in exile in An-Nağaf. It was Iraq from where he ran his campaign against caesar's regime of Teheran. Naturally, meanwhile he influenced the Iraqi *muğtahids* who worked in An-Nağaf, especially those active in the realm of politics. Ḫōmeynī was expelled from Iraq by Ṣaddām Ḥusayn in 1978, which was viewed very critically by religious groups.

As early as the mid-70s, a serious increase in fundamental attitudes among Iraqi Shi'ites was noticeable. After the outbreak of the Iraqi-Iranian War it was attributed to the *ayatollah* Ḫōmeynī revolution. In fact, it was rather a response to the expanding secularisation tendencies in the society, as well as to the growing political repression from the authorities. However, the Iranian influences clearly cannot by ignored.[84]

The overtaking of power in Iran by Ḫōmeynī contributed to multiple arrests among Shi'ites, which happened in April 1980, still before the Iraqi-Iranian War. An Iraqi Shi'ite leader, Muḥammad Bāqir aṣ-Ṣadr[85] was then apprehended, and shortly murdered. This was strongly objected to by Iranian authorities, and Ḫōmeynī himself addressed Iraqi

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[82] H.A. Jamseer, *Geneza powstania narodowego w Iraku* (The Origin of the National Uprising in Iraq), „Przegląd Orientalistyczny" 1973, no. 4, p. 287.

[83] Cf. J. Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Oxford-New-York 1995, vol. 2, p. 423.

[84] S. Al-Khalil, *Republic of Fear*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1989, pp. 106–107.

[85] Cf. *The Oxford Encyclopedia...*, vol. 3, pp. 450–453; H. Batatu, *Iraqs Underground Shi'a Movements: Characteristics, Causes and Prospects*, "Middle East Journal" 1981, vol. 35, no. 4, pp. 578–580.

people, urging them to overthrow Ṣaddām Ḥusayn. This in turn, among other factors, caused the Iraqi president to make some more concessions on behalf of Shi'ites.[86]

During the Iraqi-Iranian War the position of Iraqi Shi'ites was not unequivocal. Nevertheless, Ḫōmeynī and the Muslim Iran enjoyed constant support of Iraqi Shi'ites, and to a larger extent than Ṣaddām had expected. Additionally, the endeavours to transform Iraq into a religious state, following the example set by Iran, were growing. The occasionally forwarded claims that the Iraqi-Iranian War was a religious one are mistaken. The causes of the war are not a subject of this study. It must be indicated, however, that some part in the conflict might have been played by the personal animosity between Ḫōmeynī and Ṣaddām, going back to the not far-off past, when Ḫōmeynī lived in An-Nağaf. As H. Batatu claims: "One of the side effects of the Iraqi-Iranian war was the growing sense of differences dividing Arabs from Iranians, at least among some Shi'ites, and especially among those who perceived their national identity as more vital than their common religious identity."[87]

Also the subsequent conflict brought about by the Iraqi president was connected with Shi'ites. After the war of Kuwait in 1991, in Iraq occurred riots against the hopefully weak regime in Baghdad. In the South of the country, a Shi'ite uprising took place, soon smothered by the army. This contributed to the "safety zones" being introduced in Iraq, one of which – South of parallel 32 – has been inhabited by the followers of 'Alī.

The institutional and personal relations between the Iraqi and Iranian Shi'ism are also worth pointing out. Currently the most important Muslim organisation in Iraq is the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq – SCIRI (*Al-Mağlis al-A'lā li-aṭ-Ṭawra al Islāmiyya fi al-'Irāq*),[88] headed by *ayatollah* Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ḥakīm.[89] The organisation was set up in Iran in 1982 and one of its main aims was to overthrow the regime of Ṣaddām Ḥusayn. For political and strategic reasons SCIRI was based in Teheran, but has several offices outside of Iran, among others, in Iraqi Kurdistān.

Of Iranian origin is the earlier mentioned, eminent Iraqi *muğtahid*, Abū al-Qāsim Ḫō'ī (1899–1992), one of the leading theologians of the Shi'ite world, and a spiritual leader of Shi'ites in Iraq, Pakistan, India and other countries. Hō'ī did not much dabble in politics, which led to a conflict with *ayatollah* Ḫōmeynī. He objected to the political theory of the Iranian leader (*wilāyat al-faqīh*[90]), claiming that the authority of the Shi'ite academics and lawyers cannot include the political sphere. Besides, he thought that the authority of the Shi'ite lawyers, when the twelfth imam is absent cannot be restricted to one or even several academics.

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[86] M. Farouk-Sluglett, P. Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*, London-New York 1990, p. 200.

[87] Batatu, op. cit. P. 594.

[88] The information on SCRI is based on the following websites: www.sciri.org and www.shianews.com/hi/middle_east/news_id/0000585.php.

[89] Comp. following websites: www.payandlearn.org/scholars/502.htm (in English) and – first of all – www.al-hakim.com (in Arabic).

[90] *Wilāyat al-faqīh*, pers. *welāyat-e faghīh*, lit. "the superior authority of a Muslism lawyer".

Strong relations can also be noticed between the Iranian Shi'a and *ayatollah* Muḥammad Bāqir aṣ-Ṣadr (1935–1980), also called the Iraqi Ḫōmeynī. Aṣ-Ṣadr was murdered together with his sister Bint Hudā, which was ordered by Ṣaddām Ḥusayn. One of the reasons for his apprehension was his intended visit to Ḫōmeynī, in order to congratulate him on the victory of his Muslim revolution. Aṣ-Ṣadr's support for Ḫōmeynī in his fight with the Al-Ba'ṯ party led Ṣaddām to think Aṣ-Ṣadr his enemy number one, who can provoke the collapse of the secular state of Iraq. In his writings Aṣ-Ṣadr much earlier expressed his wish that Muslim states be created not only in Iraq, but in every possible place. What happened in Iran proved to the Iraqi party Al-Ba'ṯ to be more than theological theories. At the moment of his death, Aṣ-Ṣadr was the only Arab among the eight living *ayatollahs* who were *marǧa' at-taqlīd*.[91] Since then the Shi'ite movement in the country has suffered conspicuous desintegration.[92] Aṣ-Ṣadr was also interested in the concept of a Muslim state and constitutional law, which in his political theory are very closely connected. His ideas seriously affected the real shape of the constitution of Iran, which was proclaimed a few months later.

Ayatollah Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ḥakīm (born 1939), many times imprisoned by authorities for opposition activity, shortly after the outbreak of Iraqi-Iranian War (1980) left Iraq for Iran to actively take part in the establishment of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. In 1993 he was a co-founder of *Markaz Dirāsāt Tārīḫ al-'Irāq al-Ḥadīt* (The Centre for the Studies of Contemporary History of Iraq), temporarily based in Qumm, Iran. The Centre possesses its research institute, a library, archives and printers.

Summary

"Every border is a result of evolution. [...] Its social function, joining, yet separating at the same time, is subject to changes depending on the international political situation, mutual relationships between neighbouring countries and their economic, political and ideological positions."[93] On the other hand, as a Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica claims in his conversation with a creator of modern peratology, Gabriel Liiceanu, "a border, however permanent or temporary, is crossable and can be "trespassed", while restrictions are not to be trespassed; when something grows, it is followed by restrictions. Ultimately, one can leave the border behind, but a restriction will always accompany one, even when there is a lack of any restriction."[94]

Due to its geographical location, Iraq constitutes a frontier territory of Arabic culture. Even though it was a political and cultural centre of the world (not only of the Middle East) when the civilization of the Arabic-Muslim Caliphate was at its highest, it has

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[91] Lit. "the source to be followed" – the title borne by the most distinguished Shi'ite theologians.
[92] Al-Khalil, op. cit., pp. 107–108.
[93] Machaj, op. cit., p. 125.
[94] Liiceanu, *Dziennik z Paltinişu*, op. cit., p. 125.

always remained under various strong influences from the East – from the Indo-European peoples of Iran. In the times directly following the fall of the caliphate in the Ottoman period, it was transformed into a typical borderland, with all the drawbacks of such a situation. Being a borderland means, among others, "a certain lack of self-sufficiency and a political and administrative dependence on a centre; some degree of negligence and economic backwardness, as well as a more lax contact with the constitutional culture."[95]

In the historical context three stages of shaping of the Iraqi-Iranian border can be distinguished. In antiquity it was an inter-ethnic, or, in a sense, an inter-state border. In the 7th century, under the rule of the Laḫmids, except for being an inter-ethnic border, it started to become an inter-religious border (Christianity versus Zarathustrianism). It seems that the Al-Ḥīra Kingdom can be generally defined as a borderland,[96] influenced by two, competing with each other, centres. The religious aspect indicates the influence on Byzantium, while the political one – on Persia.

After Islam conquered the Middle East in mid 7th century, this border started to be the primary inner border of the Arab-Muslim world, separating competing Iranian and Semitic (Arabic) peoples from one another. Since the beginning of the 16th century the Iraqi-Iranian border has also had a roughly religious character. Since 1501, when Safavides proclaimed Shi'a as the state religion in Iran, this border has separated the Shi'ite world from the Sunnite one in the Middle East. Obviously, it is a simplification, as, within the Sunnite state of Ottomans, Iraq, and especially its southern province Al-Baṣra, was Shi'ite (but not Iranian!). In the times when national states did not exist in the strict meaning of the word, sometimes the religious factor was prevalent on borderlands (Sunnites tended towards Turkey, Shi'ites towards Iraq). Later national identity started to take over the religious one.

To briefly characterise the type and role of the borderlands between Iraq and Iran the following could be stated: Al-Aḥwāz can be considered as a borderland under the foreign rule, remaining under the influence of two competing political and ethnic centres.[97] At the same time, its inhabitants identify themselves ethnically with one of the centres (Iraq), but with none of them do they identify politically, even though this territory is separated from the whole of the Arabic world. A. von Kremer characterised this territory as follows: "Here was the border between two different races – Semites of Babylon and Assyrians of Iran. These two came up against one another in Huzestan, which became their common ground. In the geographical sense it was also an area connecting the hot Babylon, with its lowlands and marshes, the Tigris and Eufrates and the cool and dry Iranian Highlands."[98]

From the point of view of cultural and historical analysis, the second (middle) fragment of the border, running in accordance with cultural division, is the least interesting, although

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[95] Machaj, op. cit., p. 125.
[96] Ibid., pp. 125–128.
[97] Cf. the classification of the borderland by G. Babiński, after Machaj, op. cit., p. 125.
[98] Von Kremer, op. cit., pp. 291–292.

it is a typical inter-ethnic border, besides being a religion – oriented one. It is difficult to apply here the classification of borders applied earlier, as well as below, since the territory of Iraq has its own cultural centre (Baghdad), while Iran – Teheran. Moreover, the actual influences should be treated as formal because of relatively independent lifestyles of the peoples inhabiting the territories on both sides of the border.

Kurdistān is a typical borderland ramaining under the influence of many centres competing with each other.[99] In this case, owing to the actual shape of the political borders, the division system recommended by I. Machaj cannot be applied. According to it, a borderland is itself as a separate state organism – a kind of enclave – which is not accepted as such for political, not cultural reasons.

Thus in the case of Iraqi – Iranian border, the purely geographic elements (except for the border on the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab) are of minor consequence. Much more serious is the characterisation of the border based on ethnic and religious contexts. This can be depicted by the following diagram:

	Arabs (Shi'ites)		Arabs (Sunnites)		Kurds (Sunnites)	
South	_____	( )	_____	( )	_____	North
	Arabs (Shi'ites)		Lurs (Shi'ites)		Kurds (Sunnites)	

In the classical period of Arabic-Muslim culture, although the border existed as an ethnic borderland, it was not a borderland of cultures and languages. The vehicle language being Arabic, the culture – Muslim and Persians co-creating the Arabic – Muslim civilization. This was summed up in 1965 by the minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran in the following manner: The "remnants of the Iranian genius in art and workmanship are still standing in Iraq; the Iranians have always been ready from time immemorial to make efforts towards the development of Iraq, the repairs of Holy Shirnes, and the construction of domes and scraphogi [sic! – sacrophagi] over and around the Holy Graves; hundreds of Iranians go in pilgrimage every year to Karbella, Najaf and other Holy places thus helping the Iraqi economy to a very considerable extent; hundreds of thousands of Iranians have residence in Najaf, Karbella, Kazemain and Samara through their love for the Imams, and are devoting all their spiritual and material energy towards the improvement of Iraq."[100] It is obviously a very pro-Iranian view – even a little chauvinistic, I would say – but in a further perspective, it proves the 'non-restricting' character of this border, not only in the classical period.

In fact, however, in the course of time the boundary has become a limitation, mainly beginning from the period when Neo-Persian literature started to emerge (from ca. 10th century), particulary after the caliphate disintegration and the fall of Mongolian dynasties. During the late Abbaside and Mongolian periods, Neo-Persian became the tongue of the

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[99] Machaj, op. cit.

[100] Abdulgani, op. cit., pp. 20–21.

Muslim culture of Persia, influencing the multilingual character of the Iraqi-Iranian border. After the Ottoman conquest of Mesopotamia and the Safavide state emergence, it became restrictive. In the 13th century the culture of the Arabic language collapsed and, roughly speaking, the boundary started to be transformed into the Shi'ite-Sunnite and Persian-Turkish, in the context of the official language as well. As an inter-religious boundary it became one of the conflict-generating factors because of the Ottoman (Sunnite) and Persian (Shi'ite) striving for hegemony in the Middle East. This conflict-generating tendency has been retained to this day as far as the southern and northern fragments are concerned, without the middle fragment (according to the quoted above classification of Iraqi-Iranian borderlands). The northern and southern borderlands (the S. and N. fragments of the Iraqi-Iranian border) have shaped the form of culture in contemporary Iraq, making it a multinational and multireligious state. On the other hand, (as I have shown it in the paragraph about the history of the border), what has, to a large degree, shaped the political scene of the country were the successive conflicts on the frontier. They were not so much related to the possession of territories, as were a matter of ambition since no division of land will ever satisfy either Iran or Iraq. The more so that the conflict might be joined by the nations aiming at separating from both or one of the countries (Kurdistān and Al-Aḥwāz). Another trans-border factor generating conflicts is Shi'a, sometimes used in political games, not only by Iraq and Iran, but also western countries, interested in the situation in the Middle East. The interference of the latter is often aggraviated by the lack of understanding of the religious situation prevailing on the Shi'ite-Sunnite borderland in the broad sense of the term. There are no indications whatsoever that the Iraqi Shi'ites might attempt joining the Iranian Shi'ites, even if they have on many occasions received help and moral support from them.

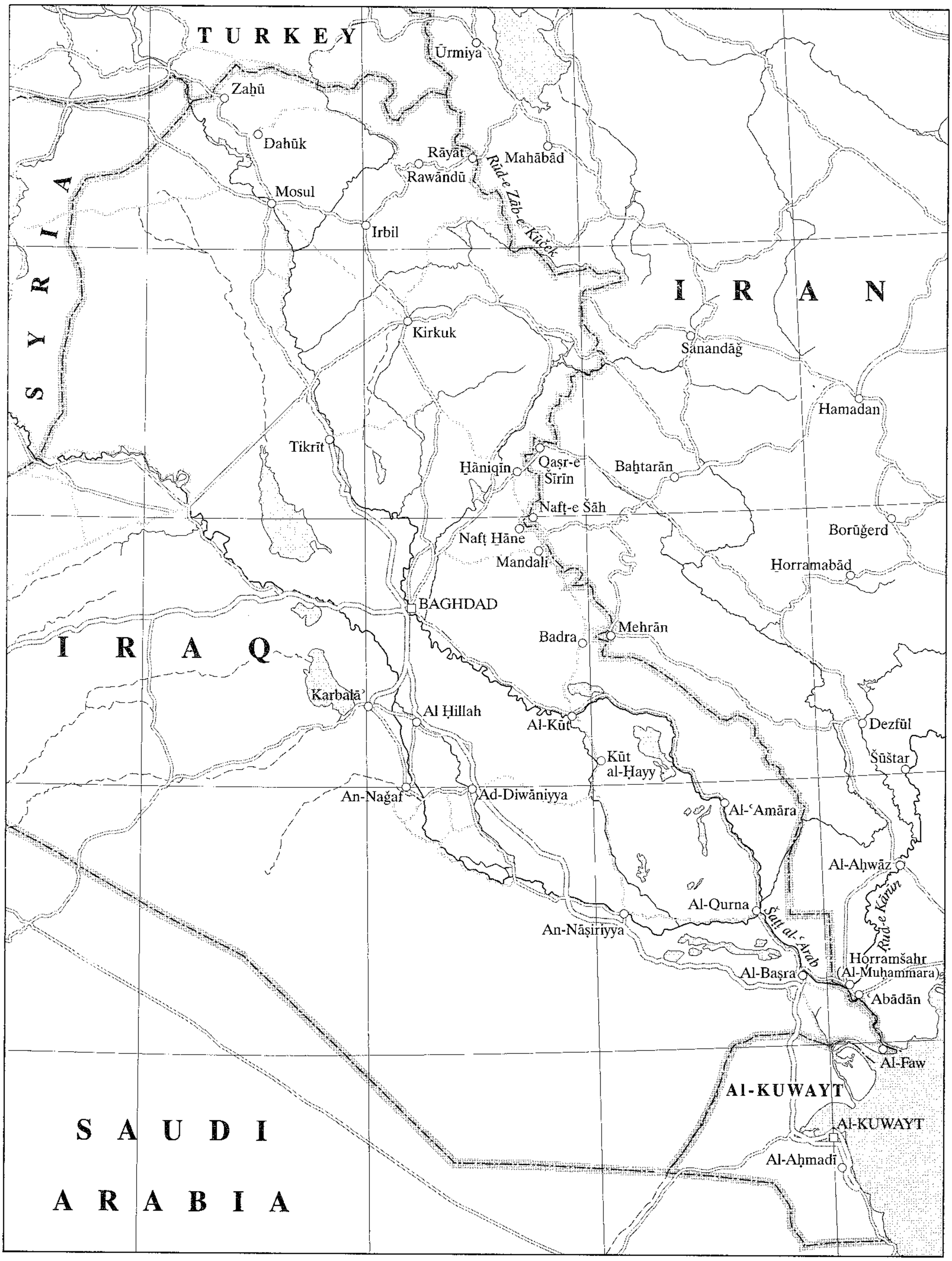
Contemporary Iraqi-Iranian relations in the context of Shi'ism and the border separating the countries do not impose any limitations on institutions and major representatives of Shi'ism. However there is a solidarity between Iraqi and Iranian Shi'ites, there have been conflicts between them. Without a doubt, the Iranian Shi'ism, supported by the state authority, is much stronger. Yet it does not follow that separatist tendencies of the Iraqi Shi'ites are anyhow connected with trying to join the Iranian Shi'ites. The far stronger factor here is the sense of identity, of being an Arab or a Persian (which is theoretically foreign to Islam). A situation when the Iraqi Shi'ites try to be absorbed in Iran is unimaginable, as is well-proven by the situation in Al-Aḥwāz – there are partly the same Arabic peoples. Their attempts to be liberated from the rule of Iran (Persians being a foreign ethnic element to them) are as clear and understandable as their tendencies to separate from Iraq governed by Sunnites. This problematic situation is obviously caused by the issue of borderland and the consequent political restrictions. On the other hand, it is obvious that for political and economic reasons (the borderland is a territory rich in crude oil, on both sides of the border!) this land inhabited by Arabic Shi'ites will never be allowed by either of the countries to detach itself and to form a separate state of Arabic Shi'ites. At the same time, there is no clear evidence that, even if it ever happened, this state would

follow the example of Iran and become a Muslim republic. One cannot, however, exclude such a possibility altogether.

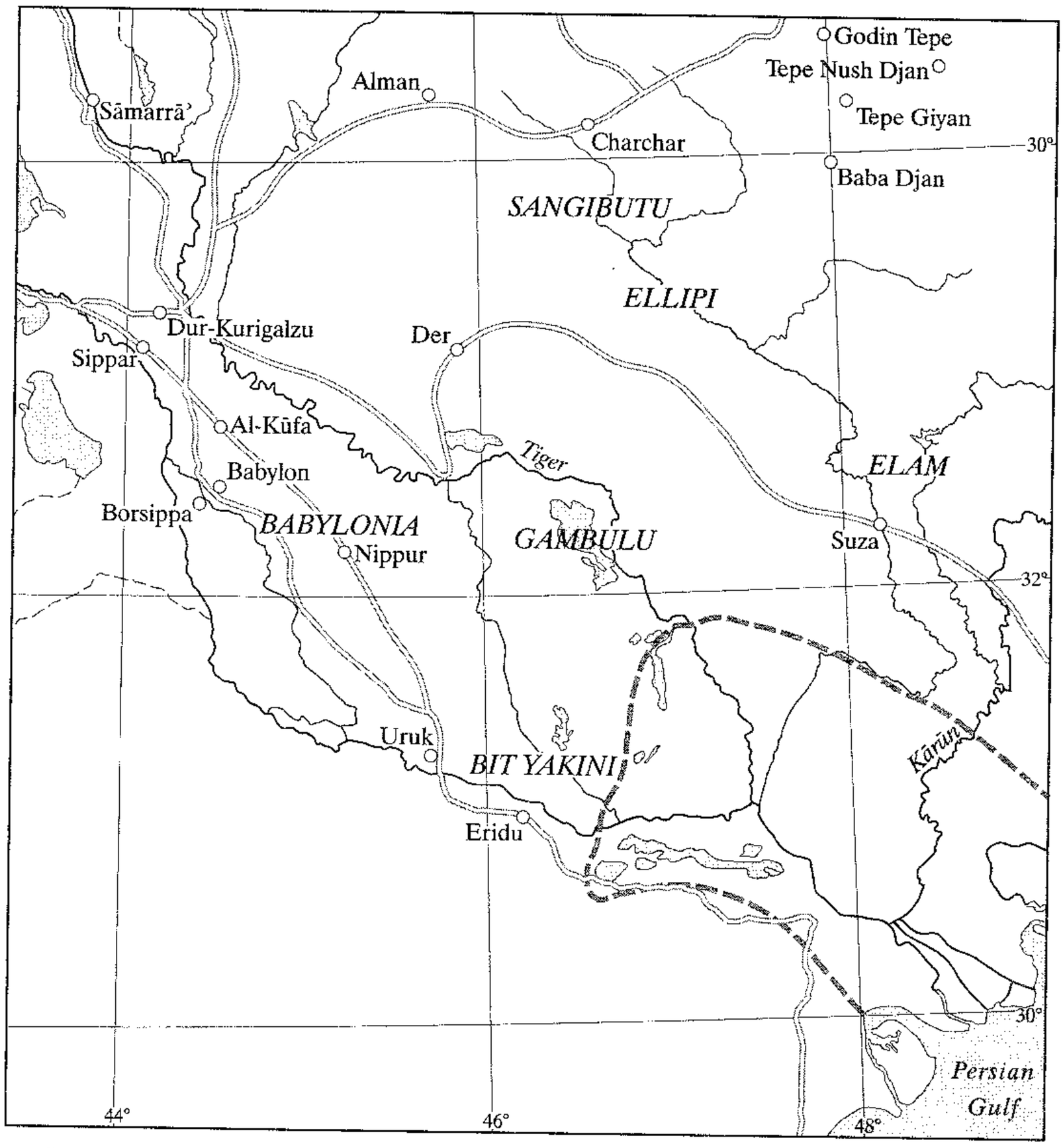
Such a political, ethnic, religious and economic (the oil) state of affairs on the borderland makes it impossible to imagine a system which could be regulated and improved, so that the borderland might stop being a *shatter belt*. The only chance would be to establish a state of Kurdistan in the North, which would embrace the Kurdish territories of Iran, Iraq and Turkey, and to create an independent Al-Aḥwāz in the South – but this is a very unrealistic solution. Therefore, it is difficult to ultimately and unequivocally define the Iraqi-Iranian border, whose complicated history and complex contemporary situation will probably continue to pose a constant threat to the peace in the Middle East.[101]

Maps:
1. Contemporary run of the Iraqi-Iranian border.
2. The northen coast of the Persian Gulf in Antiquity
3. The Iraqi-Iranian border on the Šaṭṭ al-'Arab established in 1975
4. Al-Aḥwāz
5. Kurdistān

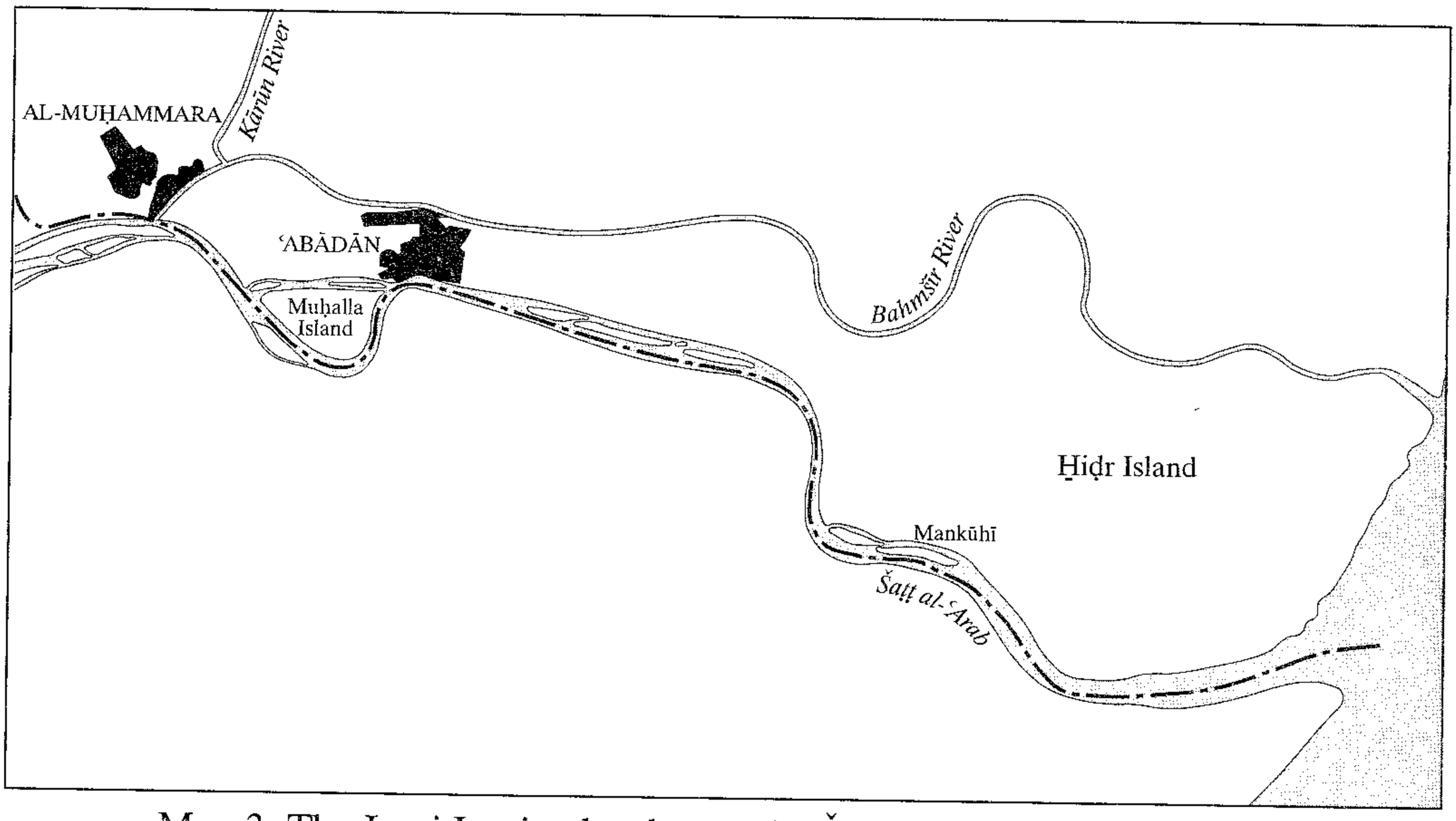
[101] The article was completed before the fall of Ṣaddām Ḥusayn, 2003.



Map 1. Contemporary run of the Iraqi-Iranian border



Map 2. The northern coast of the Persian Gulf in Antiquity



Map 3. The Iraqi-Iranian border on the Šaṭṭ al-ʿArab established in 1975

Map 4. Al-Aḥwāz

Map 5. Kurdistān