

## **Epilogue**

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In more than six centuries which followed the fall of Baghdad to the hands of Hulagu and his Mongol troops in 1258 until the establishment of the modern state of Iraq in 1920. The timeline of the country cannot be described but only as a sequence of tragic events in which this once most prosperous land sank into unending bloodsheds, destruction, constant retrogression and deep poverty. Calamities such as flooding, epidemics, locusts and famines did not spare millions of its population, and to speak of Baghdad only, the 1,000,000 who used to live there in the golden days of the Abbasids dwindled to merely few thousands at the turn of the twentieth century.

The early stage of this severe collapse was due to the interference of the Mongols with the irrigation systems on which the life of people had depended. Admitting that the damage that was sustained during the Buwayhids and Seljuks times left these systems in dilapidated and bad conditions, but the Mongols managed to add more destruction so that agriculture diminished to small plots of lands, which could not keep up the large population anymore and made any effort of reform nearly impossible. Borrowing from the words of Stephen Hemsley Longrigg in his book "Four Centuries of Modern Iraq" he says:

"Most ruinous of Holagu's acts had been the studied destruction of the dykes and head works, whose ancient and perfect system had been the sole source of the wealth. Disordered times, and the very silting and scouring of the rivers once let loose, soon made the restoration of control the remote, perhaps hopeless problem today still unsolved"<sup>[1]</sup>.

The repeated occupations of Iraq during the following centuries by various competing external forces of il- Khans, Jalairs Mongols, two short lived Turkoman dynasties, Persians and the Ottomans made of Iraq the theater of violence and lawless land where proper management and administration were lost. It became possible for any peasant to make a breach in the bank of a canal to irrigate his plot of land even without thinking of his next door neighbor, which had in many

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instances triggered fighting and bloodshed between two clans. In so doing, this peasant was unconscious of breaking any law and maybe not even thinking of the danger of not being able to control the breach leading to the complete failure of the dyke and letting loose of the stream.

The absence of central government overlooking the affairs of the country, which had become now in the periphery, led to negligence of basic requirements necessary for the upkeep of its environment. Recurrent flooding of the two rivers had become beyond the control of the local authorities. The added silting and scouring of their beds made these rivers unmanageable, while existing control structure was ruined and any attempt to construct new barrages or weirs became impossible; to this, the example of the Hindiya Barrage on the Euphrates may be cited. As the attempts of construction of this Barrage at the late days of the Ottoman occupation were met with many failures in spite of the need to keep agriculture in the middle Euphrates region going<sup>[2]</sup>.

Such situations were becoming possible due to either lack of competence and resources, or just indifference and carelessness. Security conditions became precarious throughout the country, and vast lands were depopulated while cities and towns shrunk into clusters of humble dwellings and shabby markets enclosed within narrow boundaries where the splendors of the palaces and lively centers of the previous times were lost forever. Foreign travelers passing through the country during these times witnessed to this and recorded their impressions of the wide stretches of barren lands and poor towns. An example may be given from the narrative of the Frenchman Tavernier in the 17th century, who in his journey from Aleppo to Esfahan by the way, of desert, which he made in 1638, passed through Kufah and described its water supply which as he mentioned was of three wells of brackish and stinking water and a dry canal<sup>[3]</sup>.

The open and deserted lands of the country were so much inviting to the nomadic tribes from the steppes of Nejd who were under pressure from the Wahabi religious movement at the beginning of the 18th century forcing them to cross the Euphrates to pasture in Iraq. The grazing grounds turned then to open fields of inter-tribal feuds on one hand, and to fight with the Ottoman Phashas on the other.

Late in the nineteenth century, Felix Jones and Dr John Ross, the two British travelers who traversed the land between Kut and Samarra, which had been the most fertile lands of the old Nahrawn project, described the area as decaying and uninviting barren land<sup>[4],[5]</sup>.

Iraq was long since it became habitual to disorder; to poverty and bloodshed, in which time the country had sunk into tribalism, insecurity and dependence when change occurred again. The fall of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century and the occupation of Iraq by the British in 1918 opened window for the country to come in touch with civilization again. The establishment of the modern state of Iraq in 1920 made this possible, and a new phase of revival began, not in agriculture and construction of irrigation schemes only, but in all other aspects of life.

By the end of the seventies of the last century, Iraq was ranked at the top of the so-

called developing countries list surpassing even Turkey and Iran in the standard of living. It is regrettable. However, that wars and economic embargo that took well over two decades since 1980 followed by what was erroneously called “the Libration of Iraq” in 2003 brought a new era of chaos, anarchy, corruption and disagreements between the new political parties which threaten the country and may revert it back to yet another cycle of retrogression.

The humble intention of the author of writing this book is to invite the reasonable people of Iraq to read their history well and to learn from its lessons, and as already been said in the dedication in the first page recalling the words of Confucius “Study the Past if you define the Future”.

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