Between Arabs, Turks and Iranians: The town of Basra, 1600–1700*

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Introduction

Brought under nominal Ottoman control in 1546, in the course of the seventeenth century Basra turned into one of the principal port cities of the Persian Gulf, connected through overland trade with the main centres of the Ottoman empire via Baghdad, with Shiraz and Isfahan in Safavid Iran, and by way of maritime trade with commercial emporia throughout the western Indian Ocean basin, from Surat to al-Mūkhā. In early modern terms, Basra was a sizeable town with a population largely made up of Arab Muslims, 'mostly poor folk who dressed in black cloth and whose food consisted mostly of dried dates and unleavened bread',[1] but that also included a significant minority of Sabeans, or Mandeans, adherents to a Gnostic creed that honours John the Baptist, as well as a number of Indians and Armenians and quite a few Jews, who lived 'by Brokrage and exchanging Money'.[2] Pedro Teixeira in 1604 estimated the number of houses, inside and outside the fortress, to be about ten-thousand. This would have given Basra a population of some 50,000, thus making it the largest Persian Gulf port at the time.[3] The figure of 50,000 to 60,000 inhabitants given by the resident Carmelite fathers in 1660 is in line with this.[4] Besides being a sizeable urban centre, Basra was above all a commercial hub. The trade through Basra included the region's most significant export product, dates, and involved the import of such important commodities as sugar and coffee and, most significantly, enormous quantities of Indian textiles. To make up for its structural trade imbalance with India, the Ottoman Empire also exported large amounts of bullion and specie to the Subcontinent, and Basra also served as a major way station for this precious metal trade.

Despite its significance, we know precious little about seventeenth-century Basra. A large temporal gap exists between the scattered article-length studies that have been published on sixteenth-century Basra,[5] and Abdullah Thabit's

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[1] Pedro Teixeira, *The Travels of Pedro Teixeira*, trans. and annotated William F. Sinclair (London, 1902), 28.

[2] In the 1660s, the number of Sabeans for the city and its surroundings was estimated at 8,000 to 9,000. See Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, 2 vols paginated as one (London, 1939), 1148. Alexander Hamilton, *A New Account of the East Indies*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1727), I, 55, is the source of information for the presence of Indians and Jews in town.

[3] According to B. J. Slot, *The Arabs of the Gulf 1602–1784* (Leidschendam, 1993), 29, on seventeenth-century maps the Persian Gulf was sometimes called the 'Gulf of Basra'.

[4] Carmelite Archive, Rome, OCD 241a, F. Angelo dell'Annunziata, Basra, 9 April 1660; and Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 1148.

[5] See, for example, Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont, Viviane Rahmé and Salam Hamza, 'Notes et documents sur le ralliement de la principauté de Basra à l'Empire Ottoman (1534–1538)', *Anatolia Moderna* 6, 1996, 85–96; and idem, 'Textes ottomans et safavides sur l'annexion de Bassora en 1546', *Eurasian Studies* 3/1, 2004, 1–34.

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recent book, which examines the port and the town in the period between 1722, the year when the surviving documentation of the English East India Company becomes substantive, and 1795, the end of the period in which local forces were paramount in determining the commercial fate of the port and the region at large.[6] After eight decades, Stephen Hemsley Longrigg's *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* continues to be the obligatory study for the political history of Basra in the intervening period.[7] Well informed in its reliance on first-hand Turkish and Arabic sources such as the *Gulshan-i khulafā* and the *Zād al-musāfir*, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* offers a basic outline for the history of Basra under the Afrāsiyābs and the Ottomans. Longrigg's narrative is engaging and colourful but it is also allusive in containing many details that are as evocative as they are unspecified, and the book's chronology of events is not always clear. Also, many aspects of Basra's history in this period cannot be reconstructed on the basis of the material consulted by Longrigg and the mostly Arab authors who have since written on Basra's early modern history, and thus remain unexplored and unexplained.

This study supplements the outline of events and developments as presented in Longrigg's book by offering a more comprehensive account of Basra's political history in the seventeenth century on the basis of sources unavailable to him—the writings of European missionaries and the agents of the European East India Companies residing in Basra, and especially the various court chronicles emanating from neighbouring Safavid Iran. But it seeks to do more than present a fuller narrative on the basis of material left unexamined by Longrigg and others. This material adds much detail to our understanding of events in Basra but above all helps to free the city from an exclusively Ottoman context.

With its surrounding area, Basra needs to be examined in its own right and its peculiar regional and trans-regional setting rather than as a mere imperial outpost over which the metropole was unable to impose effective control. It is true that the sultan in Istanbul, or rather his proxy, the *bāshā* of Baghdad, found it impossible to establish lasting authority over Basra and environs. There were several reasons for this. One was the difficulty of dispatching adequate military forces to the area and of maintaining a garrison in the city following a successful military campaign. This was a function of distance—Basra fell outside the radius of one year's fighting season attainable by an Ottoman army sent from Istanbul—and a forbidding physical geography marked by harsh sun-baked desert land and inaccessible marshes, but it also had to do with the type of people inhabiting the estuary of lower Iraq.[8] The Arab tribes living in the marshlands north of Basra and throughout lower Mesopotamia were notorious for their unwillingness to submit to central authority and feared for their tendency to exact protection money from passing caravans. As the Englishman Ralph Fitch, visiting Basra in 1584, said: 'The Turks cannot subdue some of the Arab tribes, because they hold certain islands in the river Euphrates, which the Turk cannot win off them, and have

[6] Thabit A. J. Abdullah, *Merchants, Mamluks, and Murder: The Political Economy of Trade in Eighteenth-Century Basra* (Albany, 2001).

[7] Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Oxford, 1925; repr. Reading, 2002).

[8] Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 1149. Pietro della Valle in 1625 noted that it was difficult for an Ottoman army sent from Istanbul to reach the confines of the Safavid Empire in one season and that it typically had to winter around Aleppo or in Mesopotamia. See Pietro della Valle, *The Travels of Sig. Pietro della Valle, a Noble Roman, into East India and Arabia Deserta* (London, 1665), 253. Rhoads Murphey speaks of the 'desert margins' of the south as the outer limit of the Ottoman ability to project military power. See Rhoads Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare 1500–1700* (New Brunswick, 1999), 24.

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no settled dwelling but move from place to place, with their camels, goats and horses, wives and children and all'.[9] Faced with these fiercely autonomous, highly mobile Bedouins who were prone to take up arms against any outside force encroaching upon their territory and who could always retreat to their marshes, the Ottomans never achieved more than negotiated, inherently unstable arrangements in the area.

Almost as important as the Ottoman connection is the role Safavid Iran played in Basra's affairs. Iran's influence and control extended to an area almost as far—and at time as far—as the city perimeters, and all through the seventeenth century Basra existed as much in the orbit of the Ottomans as that of the Safavids, who managed to bring the town under their control twice, first in the 1510s and later at the turn of the eighteenth century. In the Safavid relationship with Basra, too, Arab tribal forces played a pivotal role. The Musha'sha', a radical Shii tribal confederation founded in the fifteenth century and concentrated on the edge of the marshes alongside Safavid 'Arabistān (modern Khūzistān), were nominally subjected to the Safavids but in reality enjoyed a large measure of autonomy, their territory serving as a buffer between the Ottomans and the Iranians.[10] The Safavids could not always count on the Musha'sha', and they had to be careful not to alienate them for fear that they might defect to the Ottomans. But inasmuch as the arrangement that tied them to Iran was clearly delineated, the Musha'sha' were much more useful to the Safavids than the Āl 'Ilayān, the main tribe of the al-Jazā'ir region, were to the Ottomans. The Ottoman sultan depended on the governor of Baghdad to gather troops and equip expeditions. The shah of Iran relied on the governor of Shiraz for the same purpose, but unlike the Ottomans, who could rarely count on the tribes of lower Iraq for military assistance, was often in a position to use the Musha'sha' as proxies as well, benefiting from their assistance in the form of troops and logistical means.

The pull exerted on Basra by Safavid Iran was not simply a matter of proximity but also had an important economic dimension. Safavid 5-shāhī pieces and 'abbāsīs were the coins most often encountered in the city in the mid to late seventeenth century.[11] This speaks to the circumstance that at that time, Basra functioned as a busy conduit for Iran's export bullion trade. Faced with a Safavid state that chose to combat a shortfall in its external supply of precious metal, and a prolonged economic crisis with restrictions on the export of silver and a ban on the export of gold ducats, merchants in Iran, as of the 1660s, began to take much of their bullion and specie to Basra, where there were no such restrictions.[12]

Just as important from a long-term point of view, Basra served as a gathering place for pilgrims coming from Iran and heading for Mecca and Medina. From Basra the pilgrims would first go south to al-Ḥasā, and then cross the central Arabian desert, reaching the Hijāz in about three weeks. The hajj

[9] Ralph Fitch, 'The Voyage of Master Ralph Fitch Merchant of London to Ormus…', in Samuel Purchas (ed.), *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 20 vols (Glasgow, 1905–07), III, 167.

[10] The term 'Arabistān emerged under Shāh 'Abbās I to denote the southern part of Khūzistān. Under Nādir Shāh 'Arabistān was extended to comprise the northern part of Shustar and Dizfūl as well. Only in 1923 did the name revert to that of Khūzistān. See W. Caskel, 'Die Wālī's von Huwezeh', *Islamica* 6, 1934, 416, n.1; and, for a general overview of the history of Khūzistān, Svat Soucek, 'Arabistan or Khuzistan', *Iranian Studies* 17, 1984, 195–214.

[11] Jean de Thevenot, *Suite de voyage de Mr. de Thevenot au Levant*, vol. 4 of *Voyages de Mr. de Thevenot en Europe, Asie et Afrique*, third edition, 5 vols. (Amsterdam, 1727), 561–2.

[12] For this, see Rudi Matthee, 'Mint consolidation and the worsening of the late Safavid coinage: the mint of Huwayza', *Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient* 44, 2001, 505–39.

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through Basra was frequently interrupted, especially during the reign of Shāh Ṭahmāsb (1524–76), a period of intermittent Ottoman–Safavid warfare when Iranian pilgrims were at times forced to go all the way to Damascus to join a hajj caravan.[13] In fact, the passage seems to have been closed for most of the period between 1546, the year of the Ottoman conquest of Basra, and 1591, the year when the Ottomans and the Safavids concluded the Treaty of Istanbul.[14] In the seventeenth century, and especially after the two countries concluded the more definitive Peace of Zuhāb in 1639, the road was generally open and accessible to pilgrims arriving from Iran.

The sheer number of men and animals involved suggests the economic significance of the hajj caravan traffic for Basra. Chardin claims that in some years 10,000 pilgrims from Iran went to the Arabian shrine cities. The Dutch in 1646 insisted that each year some 5,000 to 6,000 pilgrims from Iran and elsewhere would converge on Basra, bringing 10,000 to 11,000 camels with them.[15] Other sources are more specific. The caravan that left in early October 1645 comprised 2,500 camels.[16] In October 1651 it was said that pilgrims, many from Iran, were streaming into the city. The caravan that set out later that month reportedly numbered 3,000 pilgrims, included 8,000 camels, and was accompanied by a convoy of 200 soldiers.[17] In 1659, the return caravan from Mecca brought more than 6,000 people en route to Iran and almost 5,000 camels to Basra.[18]

The hajj caravan trade was very lucrative for the authorities of Basra. According to Jean de Thevenot, the city's bāshā sold the pilgrims from Iran the camels they needed 'at what price he pleases'. The pilgrims resold these camels on the way back at greatly reduced prices, only to pay the same bāshā dearly for the horses to be used for their return journey. Given the number of animals involved, the resulting profits are easy to imagine. In return for the payment of 30–35 gold dinars per person, the bāshā would also send an armed escort of 300 troops with caravans coming from Iran. Again, the reported number of Iranian pilgrims suggests the amount of money involved, so that it is hardly surprising that the governors of Basra and those of Baghdad were engaged in fierce competition over which town would serve as the point of departure for the Iranian pilgrims. In 1664, de Thevenot claims, the bāshā of Baghdad wrote letters to Iran in which he offered safe conduct for pilgrims for a mere 20 ducats, and many pilgrims had flocked to Baghdad to avail themselves of the 15-ducat discount.[19]

[13] Suraiya Faroqhi, *Pilgrims and Sultans: The Hajj under the Ottomans* (London, 1994), 135.

[14] John E. Mandaville, 'The Ottoman province of al-Hasa in the sixteenth and seventeenth century', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, 1970, 498. See also R. D. McChesney, 'The Central Asian Hajj-pilgrimage in the time of the early modern Empires', in Michel Mazzaoui (ed.), *Safavid Iran and Her Neighbors* (Salt Lake City, 2003), 129–56, who argues that the fact that the passage between Safavid and Ottoman territory may have been closed to hajjis for periods of time in the sixteenth century does not mean that it was closed permanently and that pilgrims from Central Asia chose to circumvent Iran for the duration of Safavid rule. For Ottoman suspicions of Iranian pilgrims and efforts to minimize contact between them and the sultan's subjects, see Suraiya Faroqhi, The *Ottoman Empire and the World Around It* (London and New York, 2004), 162–64.

[15] Jean Chardin, *Voyages du chevalier Chardin en Perse et en autres lieux de l'Orient*, ed L. Langlès, 10 vols and atlas (Paris, 1810–11), III, 135; and Dutch National Archives, The Hague (NA), Coll. Geleynssen de Jongh 280e, Mathys van Riethoorn, Basra Daghregister (Diary), 8 Oct. 1646, unfol.

[16] NA, VOC 1152, Van Riethoorn, Basra Daghregister, 2 Oct. 1645, fol. 299.

[17] NA, VOC 1188, Elias Boudaen, Basra Daghregister, 14 and 28 Oct. 1651, fols 461v. and 463.

[18] Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 1150.

[19] Vincenzo Maria di S. Caterina da Siena, *Il viaggio all'Indie orientali* (Venice, 1672), 104; de Thevenot, *Suite du voyage*, III: 321–2; and Rasūl Ja'fariyān, *Safaviyah dar 'arsah-i dīn, farhang va siyāsat*, 3 vols paginated as one (Qum, 1379/2000), 831.

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The people of Basra existed in an uneasy relationship with the various tribal formations that surrounded them, and suffered from frequent outbreaks of violence in and around the city, but also knew how to use the presence and power of the Safavids and their proxies to maximize their autonomy within the Ottoman context. As the following discussion will show, too much pressure from Istanbul might drive the population of Basra into the hands of the Safavids, who needed little excuse to intervene in the city's affairs.

I. *Basra in the sixteenth century*

From the beginning of the fifteenth century, Basra was ruled by the dynasty of the Āl Mughāmis, a branch of the Banu'l-Munṭafiq tribe inhabiting the area of lower Iraq between Kūfa and Basra. Their control did not remain undisputed, for soon after the rise of the Āl Mughāmis, Basra fell under the influence of the two short-lived dynasties that followed in the wake of the disintegration of the Timurid state, the Qārā-Qūyūnlū (Black Sheep) and the Āq-Qūyūnlū (White Sheep), successively. Between 840 and 914/1436–1514, real control over Basra was in the hands of the Musha'sha'. In the latter year the newly emerging Safavid ruler, Shāh Ismā'īl (r. 1501–24), made Basra tributary following a campaign that brought the Musha'sha' under Safavid control as well. Although nominal Safavid rule remained in place for some time longer, Muḥammad b. Mughāmis seems to have resumed effective control over Basra in 1524. At an unspecified date he was succeeded by his brother, Rashīd.[20]

Soon thereafter, the Ottomans made a first attempt to incorporate Basra into their realm. An Ottoman army took Baghdad in 1534, and during Sulṭān Süleymān's stay in the city in the same year, he received envoys representing rulers from various regions ranging from al-Jazā'ir, Huwayza, al-Qaṭīf and Bahrain, who came to offer their allegiance to him. Rashīd b. Mughāmis sent a mission, too, offering loyalty, although not submission. An offer to that effect came four years later, when Rashīd sent a delegation, led by his son, Māni', his vizier, Muḥammad, and his *qāżī 'askar* (army judge), Abu'l Faḍl, to Edirne, to accept Ottoman control for the city. The Porte accepted Basra's vassal status, and the authorities of Basra agreed to pronounce the Friday prayer and mint coins in the name of the Ottoman sultan, pay an annual tribute, and defend the town against external enemies.[21]

The Ottoman subjection of Basra to vassalage was part of a larger southward thrust, a shift of interest and energy towards the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, and into the Indian Ocean that in 1538 brought Yemen under their control and that in 1550–51 led to an attempt to incorporate the region of al-Ḥasā on the Arabian shore of the Persian Gulf. Its purpose has been variously assessed by modern scholars but securing open access to the commercial routes to India appears to have been its principal rationale, and on balance the intervention was more defensive than offensive. Much of it was in reaction to a Portuguese challenge to pilgrim and merchant traffic around the Arabian Peninsula and efforts to infiltrate the Red Sea.

For the first twelve years after 1534 the Ottoman hold over Basra remained tenuous; it was only in 1546 that Istanbul managed to consolidate its control

[20] 'Abbās 'Azzawī, *Irāq bayn al-iḥtilālayn*, 7 vols (Baghdad, 1372/1953), IV, 49 f.; and Tarik Nafi Hamid, 'The political, administrative and economic history of Basra Province 1534–1638' (PhD Dissertation, University of Manchester, 1980), 13.

[21] 'Alī Shākir 'Alī, *Ta'rīkh al-'Irāq fī 'ahd al-'Uthmānī 1638–1750 m. Dirāsa fī aḥwālihi al-siyāsiya* (Baghdad, 1980), 123; Hamid, 'The political, administrative and economic history of Basra province', 20–21; and Bacqué-Grammont et al., 'Textes ottomans et safavides', 12.

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over the city and its environs. Made possible by the conclusion of an armistice with the Habsburgs a year earlier, this move may have been triggered by Shāh Ṭahmāsb's success in establishing Iranian control over neighbouring Dizfūl a short while before,[22] but was more directly prompted by the decision of the ruler of the nearby fortress of Zikīya, Sayyid Amīr, to turn away from the Musha'sha' and submit to the Ottomans. When this resulted in the dispatch of an Ottoman army led by Khurrem Beg of Baghdad, Sayyid Amīr got cold feet. He resumed contacts with the Musha'sha', requesting military assistance from them. He also teamed up with Shaykh Yaḥyā, the Mughāmis ruler of Basra—who by this time had succeeded Māni'. Shaykh Yaḥyā was thereupon accused of disloyalty and summoned to Istanbul. When he refused to do so and drove out the Ottomans with the help of the Musha'sha', Ayās Bāshā, the governor of Mosul, was sent to subdue him with a large army. The campaign got underway in the early summer of 1546 and took more than six months to achieve its goal. In December 1546 Basra fell to the Ottomans, who left a sizeable Janissary garrison in the city. Basra and its surroundings were turned into an Ottoman administrative district, *eyelet*, and Bilāl Meḥmet Beg became its next governor, acquiring the right to set up a mint to strike Ottoman coins.[23]

The Ottomans established a naval base in Basra (which, however, proved to be ineffective for lack of local timber and the area's mouldering climate), and used it twice, in 1552 and 1554, to launch naval expeditions into the Persian Gulf. In an effort to stimulate trade they sent goodwill messages to the Portuguese and deposed Bilāl Meḥmet Beg for oppressing merchants, replacing him with Ramażān-oglī Kubāb in 1549.[24] They also set out to make changes in the administration of the town, abolishing taxes deemed not in conformity with the *Sharī'a*. They did not install a prebend-like *iqṭā'* regime whereby the holder had a great deal of autonomy, but rather an administrative structure resembling the more invasive *iltiẓām* (tax-farm) system.[25] Their authority, however, continued to sit ever so lightly on Basra. As they did not have the troop strength to maintain total control over the city and its surrounding area, they were unable to put an end to the endemic tribal unrest of the region. In 1549, less than two years after Basra's incorporation, the regional tribes staged a revolt that blocked passage and made caravan trade between Baghdad and Basra impossible. The leader of the uprising was Ibn 'Ilayān, shaykh of the Āl 'Ilayān, the main tribe of al-Jazā'ir, who in the same year laid siege to Basra. This attack forced the town's governor, Darwīsh Bāshā, to seek the assistance of the *vālī* of Baghdad, 'Alī Bāshā. It took years and a number of campaigns to subdue the Āl 'Ilayān, or at least to forge a working arrangement with them, and only in 1553 was Ramażān-oglī Kubāb called the grand ruler of Basra, al-Jazā'ir and (the fortress of) Mudayna.[26] The tribute the city paid to the Ottomans is listed as 15,000 gold pieces per annum.[27]

In 1566 new unrest broke out, triggered in part by the heavy taxes the Ottomans had imposed on the Āl 'Ilayān. 'Alī b. 'Ilayān again commanded the rebels. The Ottomans, having constructed a large fleet at Birecek on the upper Euphrates, sent 450 ships and an army of two-thousand Janissaries, hundreds of gunners and six-thousand Arab and Kurdish troops to the marshes of lower

[22] Walter Posch, *Der Fall Alkâs Mîrzâ und der Persienfeldzug von 1548–1549. Ein gescheitertes osmanisches Projekt zur Niederwerfung des safavidisches Persiens* (Marburg, 2000), 27.
[23] Ibid., 80–87; 'Alī, *Ta'rīkh al-'Irāq*, 124.
[24] Posch, *Der Fall Alkâs Mîrzâ*, 350.
[25] 'Alī Shākir 'Alī, 'al-Tanẓīmāt al-idāriya al-'uthmāniya fi niṣf al-thānī min al-qarn as-sādis 'ashar', *Majallat Dirāsāt al-Khalīj wa al-Jazīra al-'Arabiya* (Kuwait) 25, 1983, 125–40.
[26] Posch, *Der Fall Alkâs Mîrzâ*, 352.
[27] Ibid., 351.

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Iraq. This show of force and the drastic measures that accompanied it, such as the cutting of palm trees and the destruction of many villages, proved enough to defeat the rebels in the summer of 1567.[28] This was not to lead to a drastic and definitive change in the balance of power, though. Never more than a limited intervention, the Ottoman military foray into the Persian Gulf had stalled with the failed attempt to take Bahrain 1558. With Sulṭān Süleymān's death in 1566 a turning point was reached in Ottoman foreign policy. Faced with growing challenges in Europe, Istanbul's strategic focus now shifted back to Central Europe and the Mediterranean. The Ottomans never managed to establish full control over southern Iraq, and periodic uprisings in the area continued to occur.

Basra's commercial success in the subsequent period was not enough to offset the financial effect of the city's loss of authority over its immediate hinterland, the fiscal imposition it suffered, and the general monetary problems experienced by the Ottomans in the late sixteenth century. The Ottoman currency became severely debased as of 1575, and measures to stem the outflow of specie to India via Basra by prohibiting the minting of the local silver lārī and banning exports in 1579 and 1595 met with little success.[29] Faced with a shortfall in the city's revenue and an inability to cover the upkeep of local forces, in 1005/1596 governor 'Alī Bāshā sold the government of Basra to Afrāsiyāb, the leader of an eponymous family, descendants of the Seljūqs whose home base was Dayr, on the Shaṭṭ al-'Arab, some 45 km north of Basra. Afrāsiyāb is said to have paid eight purses of 3,000 muḥammadis each, 24,000 muḥammadis in all, for the right to control Basra, with the understanding that the *khuṭba* in town would continue to be read in the name of the Ottoman sultan.[30] Many years later, the French traveller Tavernier put the story of the changeover in Basra in the context of an ongoing conflict between the Turkish garrison and the town's Arab population, with the Arab tribal forces coming to the aid of the inhabitants. Tired of the troubles, he claimed, the bāshā sold the government for 40,000 piasters to 'a rich lord of the country, who presently raised a sufficient number of soldiers to keep the people in awe'. Afrāsiyāb called himself the prince of Basra and 'Alī Bāshā was strangled upon his return to Istanbul.[31] As Longrigg puts it, there is nothing improbable about this account. Indeed, the two versions of the story are not mutually exclusive, and the existence of tensions between the Turkish military and the local Arab population in particular is a theme that echoes over time. Between 1596 and 1668 Basra had the status of a hereditary *eyelet* under the descendants of Afrāsiyāb.[32]

II. *Seventeenth-century developments: the reign of the Afrāsiyāb*

Afrāsiyāb established peace in Basra and is said to have reigned with justice, maintaining a working relationship with the Ottomans, to whom he remained nominally beholden but who left him to his own devices, content as they were

[28] Colin Imber, 'The navy of Sülayman the Magnificent', in Colin Imber, *Studies in Ottoman History and Law* (Istanbul, 1996), 60–61; Hamid, 'The political, administrative and economic history of Basra province', 45–51, 53–6.

[29] H. Inalcik, 'The Ottoman economic mind and aspects of the Ottoman economy', in M. A. Cook (ed.), *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East* (London, 1970), 213; Şevket Pamuk, *A Monetary History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge, 1999), 105.

[30] Al-Shaykh Fatḥ Allāh b. 'Alwān al-Ka'bī, *Zād al-musāfir wa laḥnat al-muqīm wa al-ḥāḍir*, ed. 'Alā' al-Dīn Fu'ād, second edition (Baghdad, 1377/1958), 17. Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 100, and Hamid, 'The political, administrative and economic history of Basra province' mistakenly cite 800 purses.

[31] Tavernier, *Les six voyages*, English trans. quoted in Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 100.

[32] Andreas Birken, *Die Provinzen des osmanischen Reiches* (Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Reihe B, Nr. 13.) (Wiesbaden, 1976), 226.

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with his success in keeping regional powers in check. They periodically sent envoys to Basra with gifts and robes of honour, confirming Afrāsiyāb's status as bāshā. In 1623 the Carmelite fathers called him 'absolute lord of this town and of many other places under it'.[33]

Afrāsiyāb's main regional contenders were the Musha'sha', who at that time were headed by a local chieftain named Sayyid Mubārak. In 1003/1594, Sayyid Mubārak had taken Dawraq, Dizfūl and Shushtar, all nominally under Safavid rule. A year later, he had further expanded his realm by invading and occupying al-Jazā'ir where, in the name of Shāh 'Abbās I, he took control of a number of the fortresses that were located a short distance from Basra itself. This enabled him to impose a toll on the city. In 1597 he is said to have plundered the outskirts of Basra as well as al-Ḥasā.[34] So extensive was Sayyid Mubārak's power that on old maps his territory is mentioned as 'the country of Baradachan'.[35]

In line with his continued designs on Basra, Sayyid Mubārak is said to have maintained secret contact with Basra's Arab population, playing on anti-Turkish or at least anti-Ottoman sentiments among them. He also solicited Portuguese military support, even dispatching envoys to Goa in 1608. In exchange for fifteen to twenty warships he pledged 30,000 serafins and half of Basra's customs revenues in case he captured the city. In addition, he promised to build a fortress at Khidhr, at the entrance of the Euphrates. But he never succeeded in taking Basra.[36] In fact, Afrāsiyāb managed to retake the territory that Sayyid Mubārak had occupied, or at least al-Jazā'ir, and also to end the toll the Musha'sha' had imposed on the city. He similarly extended his control over Dawraq, whose governor he dismissed. After Sayyid Mubārak's death in 1025/1616–17, relations between Basra and the Musha'sha' remained strained. Thus in 1619–20 Afrāsiyāb fought against Sayyid Rashīd, a nephew of Sayyid Mubārak who had become the head of the Musha'sha', as part of a controversy concerning tribesmen from the Fuḍūl tribe who had gone over to Basra. In the battle that ensued, the Musha'sha' were defeated and Rashīd himself was killed.[37]

When Afrāsiyāb died in the summer of 1624, his son, 'Alī, succeeded him.[38] 'Alī Bāshā was to rule until 1055/1645.[39] During his reign he managed to extend the territory under his control by capturing the al-Jazā'ir region and by wresting Kut al-'Amāra from the jurisdiction of Baghdad.[40] Nominally, Basra remained under Ottoman jurisdiction, and 'Alī Bāshā maintained reciprocal relations by periodically dispatching missions to Istanbul.[41] Yet Basra continued to be all but independent from Istanbul, even if the fiction of its

[33] Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 274n.

[34] Mullā Jalāl al-Dīn Munajjim, *Tārīkh-i 'Abbbāsī ya rūznāmah-i Mullā Jalāl* (Tehran, 1366/1987), 286; Sayyid Aḥmad Kasravī Tabrīzī, *Tārīkh-i pānsadsālah-i Khūzistān* (Tehran, 1362/1983), 58; 'Alī Shākir, *Ta'rīkh al-'Irāq*, 127.

[35] Slot, *The Arabs of the Gulf*, 119.

[36] Antonio de Gouvea, *Relation des grandes guerres et victoires obtenues par le roy de Perse*, trans. A. de Meneses (Rouen, 1646), 509–13; and Roberto Gulbenkian, 'Relações político-religiosas entre os Portugueses e os mandeus baixa Mesopotámia e do Cuzistâo ne primeira metade do século XVII', in idem, *Estudios Históricos*, II, *Relações entre Portugal, Irâo e Médio Oriente* (Lisbon, 1995), 325–420 (361–71).

[37] Iskandar Beg Munshī Turkaman, *Tārīkh-i 'ālam-ārā-yi 'Abbāsī*, ed. Īraj Afshār, 2 vols paginated as one, second edition (Tehran, 1350/1971), 952.

[38] Della Valle, *Travels*, 249, claims that the son 'intruded into the government by force before the father expired'.

[39] Gulbenkian, 'Relações político-religiosas', 382; 'Abd 'Alī b. Nāsir al-Huwayzī, *Ta'rīkh al-imāra al-Afrāsibiya aw ḥalqat mafqūda fi ta'rīkh al-Baṣra* (Baghdad, 1380/1961), 47. Some claim that 'Alī was Afrāsiyāb's brother, not his son. See Slot, *The Arabs of the Gulf*, 153. Slot argues that 'Alī's age in 1645 suggests that he was a brother rather than a son.

[40] Ka'bī, *Zād al-musāfir*, 19.

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subordination to the Porte was maintained. Tolls, for instance, were collected in the name of the sultan, although other than a yearly gift, mostly in the form of horses, cloth and curiosities, Istanbul never saw any of the proceeds.[42] De Thevenot in 1665 claimed that the bāshā of Basra each year sent tribute to the Porte in the sum of 1,000 piasters. In addition, De Thevenot insisted, he paid a great deal in gifts to the sultan, the palace eunuchs and other high court officials with whom he was in close contact, 'because it is only by means of presents that he sits sure'.[43]

At about the time that 'Alī Bāshā succeeded his father, Basra once again became the target of direct Safavid aggression. Following his seizure of Baghdad and Iraq's other Shii shrine cities in late 1623, Shāh 'Abbās I made preparations to attack Basra as well. His intent to add southern Iraq to his possessions clearly derived from the realization that Basra had siphoned off trade from Bandar 'Abbās. As Della Valle plausibly argued, the shah was also motivated by a desire to weaken the Portuguese, who had established friendly relations with Basra's authorities and gained commercial privileges in town, and to force them to use his ports instead for their commercial operations in the Gulf.[44] He thus demanded that Afrāsiyāb give up his loyalty to the Ottomans and settle for Safavid vassalage—an agreement to strike coins and have Friday prayer said in the shah's name, but which did not include the payment of any tribute—in exchange for which he would be guaranteed continued autonomy. When Afrāsiyāb rebuffed the mission sent by the Safavid ruler, an Iranian army led by the powerful governor of Fārs, Imām Qulī Khān, moved to the area. Before taking on Basra, Imām Qulī Khān headed to Huwayza, the Musha'sha' capital, with the intention of punishing and expelling its ruler, Manṣūr b. Muṭallib, whose ambition to become independent from Isfahan had caused him to draw closer to Basra. The immediate reason for the disciplinary action was Manṣūr's refusal to assist the Safavids in their siege of Baghdad and to heed the shah's subsequent summons to come to Isfahan. Manṣūr reacted by fleeing Huwayza with about 500 men. He went to Nahrawān, where he was welcomed with honours by 'Alī Bāshā who allowed him to stay in the vicinity of Basra. Manṣūr's nephew, Muḥammad Khān b. Mubārak, who had spent a long time at the Safavid court, was next appointed vālī, semi-autonomous governor, of Huwayza. Having accomplished its task in Huwayza, the Safavid army came within a day's distance from Basra and set out to capture the fort of Qubbān.[45]

A marriage alliance between the house of Afrāsiyāb and the Munṭafiq tribe made the latter side with Basra in this conflict. However, what really may have saved the city from the Safavids at this point was the close relationship that had meanwhile developed between Basra and the Portuguese.[46] This relationship went back to the time in the early sixteenth century when the

[41] Iskandar Beg Turkamān, *Dhayl-i tārīkh-i 'ālam-ārā-yi 'Abbāsī*, ed. Khvānsarī Suhaylī (Tehran 1317/1938), 228; Hamid, 'The political, administrative and economic history of Basra province', 62–5.

[42] NA, VOC 1188, Boudaen, Report on Basra, 29 Nov. 1651, fol. 538.

[43] De Thevenot, *Suite du voyage*, 4:566. The English translation appears in *The Travels of Monsieur de Thevenot into the Levant* (London, 1686), 158.

[44] Della Valle, *Travels*, 254. For a discussion of Safavid motives and objectives in their dealings with Iraq, see Rudi Matthee, 'The Safavid–Ottoman frontier: Iraq-i Arabs as seen by the Safavids', *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 9, 2003, 157–74.

[45] Della Valle, *Travels*, 248–9; al-Huwayzī, *Ta'rīkh al-imāra al-Afrāsibiya*, 5, 10; Muḥammad 'Alī Ranjbar, *Musha'sha'iyān. Māhiyat-i fikrī-ijtimā'ī va farāyand-i taḥavullāt-i tārīkhī* (Tehran, 1382/2003), 322.

[46] For the alliance between the house of Afrāsiyāb and the Munṭafiq, see Max Freiherr von Oppenheim, *Die Beduinen*, vol. 3, Werner Caskel, *Die Beduinenstämme im Nord- und Mittelarabien und im 'Irāk* (Wiesbaden, 1952), 417.

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Portuguese had first entered the Persian Gulf. At that time it was directed against the Ottomans. In the later half of the sixteenth century Luso-Ottoman relations had gradually improved, however, in a process that was accelerated as Shāh ʿAbbās I expanded Iran's influence over the Persian Gulf. Following their loss of Hurmuz to the Iranians in 1622, the Portuguese had drawn closer to Afrāsiyāb in the hope of finding in Basra an alternative to Hurmuz. They found a warm welcome in Basra and in subsequent years co-operated with the Basrenes and the authorities of al-Ḥasā in a plundering raid against Qatar and a plan to recapture Bahrain.[47] The establishment in 1624–25 of a Carmelite convent, the first official representation of the Christian faith in Basra, is also a part of this close co-operation.[48] This was to be a long-term relationship; forty years later, the Portuguese agent in town still received a daily stipend from the bāshā.[49]

To withstand the Iranian aggression, Afrāsiyāb asked the Portuguese for a force of six galliots, offering to defray the cost of the operation for as long as it would last.[50] In response the Portuguese sent five ships under the command of Don Gonçalo da Silveira. Bombarding the Safavid camp from the Kārūn River, these prevented Qubbān from falling into the hands of the Iranians, and thus helped save Basra in 1624.[51] In the spring of the following year, presumably after ʿAlī Bāshā had rejected new overtures for vassalage by Shāh ʿAbbās, the Iranians sent a new force, numbering 30,000 men, against Basra. In response, the Portuguese dispatched 3,000 men to assist the city. These moved to al-Qūrna, a fortress located some 75 km north of Basra, at the confluence of the Tigris and the Euphrates, and of such strategic importance that 'Basra, Baghdad, all the districts on the Tigris and the Euphrates were said to depend on it for their safety'.[52]

Local leaders, too, rallied around ʿAlī Bāshā, mobilizing Muslim as well as Sabean inhabitants. Before it came to a battle, however, the Safavid soldiers hastily retreated, apparently because they had been recalled to attend to more pressing tasks, such as the defence of Qandahar, which the shah had just taken from the Mughals.[53]

In 1628 the Iranians marched on Basra again. This time their expedition may have been triggered by the collapse of the rebellion the Āl ʿIlayān had been fighting against ʿAlī Bāshā, which prompted Ibn ʿIlayān to request assistance from Imām Qulī Khān.[54] According to Safavid chronicler Iskandar Beg Munshī, the Iranian army consisted of troops from Fars and also included a detachment of musketeers and contingents of Lurs and Kurds. The same source claims that the Arab tribes along the route submitted to the *beglerbeg*, governor, of Fārs and rendered a variety of services to him, and explains this co-operation by noting that the Safavid commander 'handed out cash grants,

[47] H. Dunlop (ed.), *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis der Oostindische Compagnie in Perzië, 1630–38* (The Hague, 1930), 148.

[48] Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 274–5; and William Foster (ed.), *The English Factories in India, 1624–29* (Oxford, 1909), 354.

[49] De Thevenot, *Suite du voyage*, 354.

[50] C. R. Boxer, *Commentaries of Ruy Freyre de Andrada* (New York, 1930), 192.

[51] As the Carmelites put it: 'If there had not been 20 Portuguese ships in local pay, which went to the rescue, it might have been taken, it is said'. See Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 281 and 1127.

[52] Abbé Carré, *The Travels of the Abbé Carré in India and the Near East 1672 to 1674*, 3 vols paginated as one (London, 1948), 86.

[53] Della Valle, *Travels*, 250–52; Luciano Cordeiro, *Dois capitaes da India. Documentos ineditos entre os quaes diversas centidoes autographas de Diogo de Conte* (Lisbon, 1898), 77–8, 81–3.

[54] Hamid, 'The political, administrative and economic history of Basra province', 74, 82.

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robes of honour, and other gifts in profusion'.[55] Seizing a number of fortresses in the vicinity of Basra, the Iranians were in a good position to take the city itself. In defence, the Arabs resorted to a proven technique by flooding the area around Basra. What really halted the campaign, however, was Shāh 'Abbās's death in January of 1629. Upon hearing the news, Imām Qulī Khān gave up the siege and returned to Isfahan.[56]

Ibn 'Ilayān's final defeat and the failure of the Iranian rescue mission made it possible for 'Alī Bāshā to gain control over al-Jazā'ir and thus over the trade routes connecting Basra to Baghdad. Following an exchange of messages of good will and robes of honour, peace with Imām Qulī Khān was established in 1041/1631. Six years later 'Alī Bāshā sent a mission to Shāh Ṣafī (r. 1629–42) accompanied by Arabian stallions and many other gifts.[57] Stability was further enhanced when in 1639, following the definitive Ottoman seizure of Baghdad, the Safavids entered into a peace agreement with their neighbours. The resulting Treaty of Zuhāb (Qasr-i Shīrīn) established boundaries and also guaranteed unhindered travel for Iranian pilgrims to Iraq and Arabia and for merchants from either state in each other's territory.[58] Marking the end of Safavid–Ottoman hostilities, it remained in place until the end of the Safavid dynasty.

Basra now entered a period of efflorescence, growing in commercial significance and activity, to the point where Fatḥ Allāh al-Ka'bī—who found refuge at the ruler's court—likened 'Alī's reign to that of Hārūn al-Rashīd in terms of its prosperity, its inhabitants' search for knowledge, its literature and poetry, and its safety.[59] In 1635, a resident missionary observer spoke with similar hyperbole when he claimed that, 'this town has grown so greatly in riches, merchandise and for the numbers of people resorting to it, that it can be compared to Constantinople'.[60] By the mid-seventeenth century, Basra had, in Dina Rizk Khoury's more sobre terms, evolved from a tribal port to a city with a court culture and a modest literary tradition'.[61] The increase in the number of inhabitants seems to confirm this. On the basis of surveys carried out between 1570 and 1590, the number of inhabitants at that time may be estimated as approximately 20,000.[62] By 1650 the number of people had more than doubled to 50,000.

Peace and stability lasted into the early years of the reign of Ḥusayn Bāshā, 'Alī Bāshā's son and successor, who was entrusted with Basra's administration in 1055/1645.[63] But thereafter matters soon took a turn for the worse. In 1651 Basra narrowly escaped another Safavid campaign as Shāh 'Abbās II (r. 1642–66) moved troops to the south west, threatening to take the city. The

[55] Eskandar Beg Monshi, *History of Shah 'Abbas the Great*, ed. and trans. Roger M. Savory, 2 vols paginated as one (Boulder, Co., 1978), 1299.

[56] Muḥammad Ma'ṣūm b. Khvājigī Iṣfahānī, *Khulāṣat al-siyar. Tārīkh-i rūzgār-i Shāh Ṣafī Ṣafavī*, ed. Īraj Afshār (Tehran, 1368/1989), 48; al-Ka'bī, *Zād al-musāfir*, 19; Mullā Kamāl, *Tārīkh-i Mullā Kamāl*, in Ibrāhīm Dihgān (ed.), *Tārīkh-i Ṣafaviyān* (Arak, 1326/1950), 78; Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 284, 1134.

[57] al-Huwayzī, *Ta'rīkh al-imāra al-Afrāsibiya*, 31, 36–7.

[58] For more information on this, see Rudi Matthee, 'Iran's Ottoman diplomacy during the Reign of Shāh Sulaymān I (1077–1105/1666–94)', in Kambiz Eslami (ed.), *Iran and Iranian Studies: Papers in Honor of Iraj Afshar* (Princeton, 1998), 97–126.

[59] al-Ka'bī, *Zād al-musāfir*, 18–19.

[60] Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 1135.

[61] Dina Rizk Khoury, 'Merchants and trade in Early Modern Iraq', *New Perspectives on Turkey* 5–6, 1991, 60.

[62] Ömer L. Barkan, 'Research of the Ottoman fiscal surveys', in M. A. Cook (ed.), *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East* (London, 1970), 171.

[63] al-Huwayzī, *Ta'rīkh al-imāra al-Afrāsibiya*, 7. Al-Huwayzī writes that at the time of writing of his chronicle, 1058/1647, peace still reigned in Basra.

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shah's attention was diverted by a new threat from the Mughals to Qandahar, however, so that he had to move his troops back to Isfahan.[64] Instead, internal conflict erupted in the following years. Different narratives of the sequence of events exist. One version, with slight variations, is recorded by Vālah Qazvīnī Iṣfahānī and Vaḥīd Qazvīnī, the authors of two contemporary Safavid chronicles, and al-Ka'bī, a man of letters from the region whose *Zād al-musāfir* was written a generation or so after the events. According to these three sources, Ḥusayn Pasha's abuse of power prompted his uncles, Aḥmad Āqā and Fatḥī Beg, to go to Istanbul to complain about him and to solicit a decree from the sultan dismissing Ḥusayn Bāshā and granting Aḥmad Āqā control over Basra and Fatḥī Beg over al-Qaṭīf and al-Ḥāsa.[65] The sultan handed them such a decree, written in the name of the bāshā of Baghdad, Murtaḍā Bāshā. Armed with this document, Aḥmad Āqā and Fatḥī Beg returned to Basra with a large army. Despite conciliatory messages from Ḥusayn Bāshā, who offered them a share in the town's administration if they were willing to make concessions, they pressed on. On arrival in Basra, Ḥusayn Bāshā imprisoned them. Killing them proved unfeasible, so the governor decided to load his cousins on a ship and send them off to India. They managed to escape, however, reaching Baghdad via al-Ḥasā.[66]

Dutch reports, written in Basra as events unfolded, supplemented by the account of De Thevenot who visited Basra some years later, confirm the outline of the above version while providing more detail about the outbreak of an internecine war between Ḥusayn Bāshā and his uncles. They recount how Ḥusayn Bāshā's tyranny prompted his uncles to go to Istanbul with a request to be appointed as rulers over Basra and al-Qaṭīf and al-Ḥasā, respectively, and how the sultan reacted by ordering Murtaḍā Bāshā of Baghdad to march on Basra in order to depose Ḥusayn Bāshā. They also talk about popular support for his uncles upon their arrival, and concur that Ḥusayn Bāshā agreed to all their demands and ceded authority to Aḥmad Āqā, being the eldest of the two, but then went on to imprison them, after which he sent them off on a ship sailing for India. According to this version, they managed to land on the Arabian coast and only then went to Istanbul to complain about their relative. The sultan next mandated Aḥmad Beg, his brother and the bāshā of Baghdad, to demand the fortresses of al-Jazā'ir, Manṣūriya, and al-Qūrna, and to take these strongholds forcibly should Ḥusayn Bāshā refuse to obey the order.[67] Vālah Qazvīnī Iṣfahānī and Vaḥīd Qazvīnī also mention the part played by the governor of Baghdad, claiming that Murtaḍā Bāshā saw this as an opportunity to make good his long-cherished ambition of establishing control over Basra and in 1654 sent an army to subdue the town.

III. *The events of 1654*

From the moment Murtaḍā Bāshā's army approached Basra in the fall of 1654, we have the diary of the Dutch Basra resident, Elias Boudaen, to inform

[64] See Willem Floor and Mohammad H. Faghfoory, *The First Dutch–Persian Commercial Conflict: The Attack on Qeshm Island, 1645* (Costa Mesa, 2004), 183–4.

[65] Only Thevenot mentions that Fatḥi Bik had his eyes on the governorship of al-Qaṭīf and al-Hasā. See De Thevenot, *Travels*, 159.

[66] Muḥammad Yūsuf Vālah Qazvīnī Iṣfahānī, *Khuld-i barīn. Īrān dar zamān-i Shāh Ṣafī va Shāh 'Abbās-i divvum (1038–1071 h.q.)*, ed. Muḥammad Riżā Naṣīrī (Tehran, 1380/2001), 530–31; Muḥammad Ṭāhir Vaḥīd Qazvīnī, *'Abbāsnāmah ya sharḥ-i zindigānī-yi 22 sālah Shāh 'Abbās-i thānī (1052–1073)*, ed. Ibrāhīm Dihqān (Arak, 1329/1950), 177–8, al-Ka'bī, *Zād al-musāfir*, 19–20.

[67] NA, VOC 1208, Barra, Basra to Heren XVII, 15 Oct. 1654, fol. 291r–v.; De Thevenot, *Travels*, 159.

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us of the events that followed. Reports of the advancing Turkish army reached Basra on 12 September. Ḥusayn Bāshā, Boudaen claimed, acted confused and, appearing irresolute, began to mistrust everyone around him. In the week that followed he ordered new gates to be built. He also mustered new troops and distributed horses, clothing and arms among them. Arab forces meanwhile plundered the countryside around the city. Rumours circulated that the commander in chief of Ḥusayn Bāshā's forces had made common cause with the advancing troops.[68] This fits with an observation made by De Thevenot who claims that the governor had little trust in his own troops since 'they were all either Turks or fugitives from Aleppo and Baghdad, who only look for an opportunity of returning again to their country, or they are Arabs, who are of all men the soonest corrupted by money'.[69]

On 23 September, with the enemy drawing closer, the town became inundated with refugees, and all those who could move their womenfolk and assets to the Iranian side of the river. Ḥusayn Bāshā was among them. A courtier brought letters from his cousins, in which it was alleged that they had initially come down with an army consisting of Ottoman soldiers to establish command over the fortresses of Manṣūriya, al-Jazā'ir, al-Qūrna, and Ṣuwayb, located south of al-Qūrna. But his lack of respect for these soldiers had caused them to take up arms to gain what they were refused. He demanded an advance sum of 20,000 reals for the satisfaction of the troops. The courier was decapitated for his efforts.[70]

On 26 September Ḥusayn Bāshā summoned all Janissaries who had arrived in Basra that year with the intention of engaging in commerce, and complained to them how his own commander-in-chief had betrayed him by surrendering the fortress without any resistance. He pleaded with them to allow him to leave in order to save his life, informing them that he was willing to hand them a certificate stating that he had left voluntarily. Only with great insistence did they acquiesce, on condition that his departure would take place without any commotion. Following this the Janissaries took up their weapons to prevent the outbreak of disorder. That same day, Ḥusayn Bāshā fled to Iran, accompanied only by his wives, two of his sons, his *shahbandar*, tollmaster, 'Abd al-Raḥmān, and ten to twelve servants. The Dutch report how he was denied entrance into the fortress of Manāwī, and how he was almost killed on the way by the people of the stronghold who saw an opportunity to get rid of a tyrant, after which he sailed down the river past various other forts, to end up in a Safavid port, most probably Bandar Rīg.[71] Vaḥīd Qazvīnī, by contrast, insists that Ḥusayn Bāshā first fled to Huwayza and Dawraq in Safavid 'Arabistān, and only later went to Bihbahān, located in the Iranian province of Kūh-i Gilūya, more than 200 km east of Basra, in order to seek an audience with Shāh 'Abbās II. The same source also claims that he sent his relative 'Abd al-Raḥīm Beg with gifts to Isfahan with the task of soliciting assistance from the Safavid court. In return he apparently offered to put Basra under Safavid vassalage.[72] Yet Shāh 'Abbās II decided to honour the pact that his father had made with Sulṭān Murād IV in 1639, and chose not to lend him any assistance.

Notified of Ḥusayn Bāshā's flight, Aḥmad Āqā and Fatḥī Beg closed in on the city, fortifying the villages with troops and fighting Arab marauders who

[68] NA, VOC 1208, Boudaen, Basra Daghregister, 12–18 Sept. 1654, fol. 254v–256.
[69] De Thevenot, *Suite du voyage*, IV, 567; trans. in idem, *Travels*, 158.
[70] NA, VOC 1208, Boudaen, Basra Daghregister, 23 Sept. 1654, fol. 258v.
[71] NA, VOC 1208, Boudaen, Basra Daghregister, 26–27 Sept. 1654, fols. 258v–60; VOC 1208, Barra, Basra to Heren XVII, 15 Oct. 1654, fol. 292.
[72] Al-Ka'bī, *Zād al-musāfir*, 20, Vaḥīd Qazvīnī, *'Abbāsnāmah*, 178–9.

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were exploiting the turmoil. On 28 September Basra's commander in chief, with his 6,000 to 7,000 troops, surrendered, and Aḥmad Āqā and Fatḥī Beg, accompanied by Murtaḍā Bāshā, entered a city that had descended into chaos and whose inhabitants had been calling for Aḥmad Āqā to take over. The soldiers who seized Basra are said to have broken in to houses and engaged in many acts of evil, including the rape of women and boys. Although no-one was apparently killed, the new rulers also subjected the population to torture in order to extract the wealth left behind by the old ruler and his entourage. They further seized the estates of the town's richest inhabitants. On 30 September the new rulers convened all the town's dignitaries, and Aḥmad Āqā was elected the new bāshā of Basra.[73]

This was not the end of the turmoil, for Murtaḍā Bāshā next persuaded Aḥmad Āqā and Fatḥī Beg to go to Qubbān, an island located between Basra and the mouth of the Euphrates, in order to capture Ḥusayn Bāshā. The argument was that they were the only ones who could be trusted to undertake the journey and that the family treasures that were surely to be found there would pay for the tribute demanded by the sultan and make them rich to boot. Yet, while sailing on the Euphrates, both uncles were strangled with a silken cord by the people who accompanied them. Al-Ka'bī and Vaḥīd Qazvīnī both confirm that this was done at the instigation of Murtaḍā Bāshā who, they claim, coveted sole rule in Basra.[74] The Dutch comment on this development was that the entire operation was really designed to end the rule of the Afrāsiyāb, extirpate the family, and establish Ottoman rule over Basra once and for all. As they saw it, the uncles had only been a means towards that end. Once the Ottomans were in control of the town, the two brothers had outlived their usefulness. The following day their naked bodies were thrown in the square facing the bāshā's palace. The occupying Turkish soldiers, meanwhile, swarmed out across the bazaar to make sure that no-one suffered any mistreatment, and in various parts of town Janissaries who had misbehaved vis-à-vis the inhabitants were executed.[75] On 6 October the following persons were also hacked to death: Muṣṭafā Beg, the seventy-year old governor of al-Jazā'ir, 'Abd Allāh Kāshī, uncle of Ḥusayn Bāshā, seventy-five years old, Ḥamid, the son of 'Abd Allāh Ṣawr, a young man of twenty-five, Ibrāhīm b. 'Uthmān, thirty years of age, and Qādir Beg, erstwhile governor of Qubbān. Their disfigured corpses were deposited in various places around the city.[76]

When the news of these killings spread, the fortresses that had initially surrendered, al-Jazā'ir, Fallūja and al-Qūrna, erupted in revolt, strengthening their defences. In an attempt to lure the rulers of these towns to Basra, Murtaḍā Bāshā sent forty-five men to al-Jazā'ir, but these were cut down as soon as they had entered the compound. Everyone with arms in Basra thereupon headed for al-Jazā'ir as well as al-Qūrna. Yet a few days later, 1,200 Arab tribesmen were spotted across the Euphrates, presumably moving to assist the rebels of al-Qūrna. Ḥusayn Bāshā did manage to win Qubbān over to his side by sending its ruler money and gun powder, and Murtaḍā Bāshā dispatched 400 Janissaries to secure Qubbān. These were all killed in their sleep, however, so that another 400 had to be sent.[77] The people of Basra,

[73] NA, VOC 1208, Boudaen, Basra Daghregister, 27–30 Sept. 1654, fols. 260–64; VOC 1208, Barra, Basra to Heren XVII, 15 Oct. 1645, fol. 292v–293; Vahīd Qazvīnī, *'Abbāsnāmah*, 178; De Thevenot, *Suite de voyage*, IV, 567.

[74] al-Ka'bī, *Zād al-musāfir*, 20; and Vahīd Qazvīnī, *'Abbāsnāmah*, 178–79.

[75] NA, VOC 1208, Boudaen, Basra Daghregister, 1–2 Oct. 1654, fols. 267–9.

[76] Ibid., 7–8 Oct., fol. 271.

[77] Ibid., 9–11 Oct., fols 271–2.

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meanwhile, weary of the treatment they had received from their new masters, sent secret messages to Ḥusayn Bāshā, notifying him that they would side with him should he return to fight the bāshā of Baghdad. In response, Ḥusayn Bāshā sent secret letters telling them that their liberation was in the offing and that, in case the assault took place at night, they would not have to fear plunder and violence. Ḥusayn Bāshā, sensing his opportunity to reclaim Basra, quickly returned home at the head of an assortment of hastily recruited Arab warriors and an undefined few thousand Iranians, who are likely to have been supported, perhaps even provided, by the Safavid government in Isfahan.[78] There were also Bedouin Arabs led by Muḥammad Rashīd on the march. The Ottoman Janissaries, carrying a large cannon, charged, but the rebels' stiff resistance inflicted heavy losses on them. Murtaḍā Bāshā, meanwhile, sat holed up in Basra, fearing the future. Having no choice but to flee, he is said to have made his way to Iran. He came as far as Kurdistan, where he was recognized and killed. Ḥusayn Bāshā next returned to Basra and resumed his post as bāshā. He sent gifts to the Porte and, in al-Ka'bī's words, bought the crown of the vizierate from the sultan.[79]

In the aftermath of the conflict, the Ottoman and Safavid states exchanged ambassadors to confirm that no damage had been done to their good relations. Kalb 'Alī Khān (Sulṭān) went to Istanbul in 1655, and returned with an Ottoman envoy by the name of Ismā'īl Āqā Mutafarriqeh Āqāsi, who, the Safavid chroniclers insist, was received with the highest honours and respect in Isfahan. When he fell ill, he was cured by the shah's own physician.[80]

IV. *The Ottomans return*

As the way in which Ḥusayn Bāshā began his second term as bāshā indicates—'buying' the position of bāshā from the Ottomans whom he had just defeated—the status quo ante seems to have been restored at this point. This is confirmed by the remarks of several travellers over the next few years. In 1661, the Frenchman Bourges, passing through Basra, found the town to be firmly in the hands of the local rulers. According to him, the bāshā did not obey the Ottoman sultan, although each year he sent him tribute in the form of presents. He also made sure he maintained good relations with the Arabs surrounding the city so as to be able to use them should the need arise.[81] De Thevenot's remark to the effect that the ruler of Basra often resisted the demands of the Ottomans by buying them off underscores his de facto autonomy.[82]

The year 1665 saw the beginning of a new and lengthy round of great hardship and suffering for Basra and its inhabitants. The Carmelites claimed that this new outbreak of turmoil started with Ḥusayn Bāshā's refusal to recognize the suzerainty of the sultan, as a result of which the Ottomans sent a large army to subdue Basra.[83] More detailed information comes from al-Ka'bī, who reports that in 1073/1663, Ḥusayn Bāshā conquered al-Ḥasā. This apparently aroused the anger of the sultan, especially since the conquest seems to have

[78] See Abu'l Ḥasan b. Ibrāhīm Qazvīnī, *Favā'id al-ṣafaviyah*, ed. Maryam Mīr Aḥmadī (Tehran, 1367/1988), 68–9, who says that Ḥusayn Bāshā retook Basra with the assistance of Shāh 'Abbās II.

[79] Vaḥīd Qazvīnī, *'Abbāsnāmah*, 179–80; Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 1142; Thevenot, *Suite de voyage*, IV, 567.

[80] Vālah Qazvīnī Iṣfahānī, *Khuld-i barīn*, 585–7; Vaḥīd Qazvīnī, *'Abbāsnāmah*, 222–3.

[81] M. de Bourges, *Relation du voyage de monsigneur l'évêque de Beryte… par la Turquie, la Perse, les Indes etc*. (Paris, 1666), 52.

[82] De Thevenot, *Suite de voyage*, IV, 566.

[83] Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 1151.

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been accompanied by great loss of life. The ruler of al-Ḥasā, Muhammad Bāshā b. ʻAlī Bāshā, went to Istanbul to complain about Ḥusayn Bāshā's behaviour, and this prompted the Ottomans first to send a letter ordering Ḥusayn Bāshā to submit to the Porte, and then, when he rejected the order, to dispatch an army.[84]

In the fall of 1665, rumours indeed began to circulate in the city that a large Turkish army headed by Ibrāhīm Bāshā, the governor of Baghdad, was approaching to oust Ḥusayn Bāshā.[85] In response, Ḥusayn Bāshā moved to the fortress of al-Qūrna, followed by his commander-in-chief, Ḥājjī Āqā, with some 3,000 cavalry and infantry. This meant that he was in command of some 20,000, some claimed 30,000, men, who were used to block the entrance to the town from the land side and to withstand the troops of Ibrāhīm Bāshā, which numbered about 12,000. Ḥusayn Bāshā forced merchants sailing past al-Qūrna to pay money, which was then distributed among his troops. He also sent his son to Iran to acquire weaponry. It is not clear if the latter succeeded in his mission. After his return in early December, the son joined his father, accompanied by the latter's brother-in-law, with 1,000 to 1,200 troops. The assistance of the Munṭafiq aided Basra's cause as well. After the Ottoman advance had stalled before al-Qūrna, a 900-strong Bedouin force was sent as reinforcement from Baghdad, but they were prevented from reaching al-Qūrna by the Munṭafiq, who pushed them back near Kut al-ʻAmāra.[86]

Basra itself, meanwhile, had been entrusted to Ḥusayn Bāshā's nephew, Ibrāhīm Āqā, who had the town fortified and the moats deepened.[87] His heavy-handed treatment of the populace, which included the expulsion of everyone he considered useless for the city's defence, weakened the people's loyalty to the house of Afrāsiyāb. Another cause of alienation was that Ḥusayn Bāshā forced all passing merchandise destined for Basra to be transported to al-Qūrna, and subsequently confiscated it, leaving the owners with empty vessels. All this sparked a popular revolt, with some Basrenes reaching out to the approaching Ottomans for assistance and the dispatch of a new governor. A confusing series of events ensued. Ḥusayn Pasha sent troops from al-Qūrna to subdue the rebels. But before a confrontation could take place, Ibrāhīm Āqā and the shahbandar fled the city on New Year's Eve, together with many of its inhabitants, following the rumour that Ḥusayn Bāshā had abandoned al-Qūrna. The ʻulamā of Basra who, the Dutch claimed, were among those who were favourably inclined to the Ottomans, took advantage of this situation to call up the rabble, and in the demonstrations that followed the town was proclaimed the property of the Turkish sultan. These chaotic conditions lasted until 12 January 1666. On that date the ʻulamā offered the government of the city to a Turkish merchant by the name of Ḥājjī Musellem. Some saw the hand of the bāshā of Baghdad in this move, but the Dutch expressed their doubt about this scenario and implied local initiative by arguing that the connection between Basra and the Ottoman army was effectively non-existent because of the blockade at al-Qūrna.[88]

[84] al-Kaʻbī, *Zād al-musāfir*, 2. See also Naẓmī-zāda Murtaḍā Afandī *Gulshan-i khulafā*, trans. Mūṣā Kāẓim Nūrsū (n.p., n.d.), 265.

[85] NA, VOC 1251, Resolution merchants of Basra, 14 Oct. 1665, fol. 1552v; and ibid., De Vogel and Smit, Gamron to Heren XVII, 8 March 1666, fols. 1528–29.

[86] Caskel, *Die Beduinenstämme*, 417–18.

[87] NA, VOC 1251, Brouwer, Basra to Van Wyck, Gamron, 27 Jan. 1666, fol. 1561; Afandī, *Gulshan-i khulafā*, 266.

[88] NA, VOC 1251, Brouwer, Basra to Van Wyck, Gamron, 27 Jan. 1666, fols 1559–61; Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, reports 31 Aug. 1669 and 23 March 1671, 1151–52.

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The resulting stalemate continued for several months, with Ḥusayn Bāshā, marooned in al-Qūrna, able to withstand the troops of the governor of Baghdad even while the latter's artillery did great damage to the fortress. The arrival of Ramadan and the attendant lull in the fighting provided an opportunity for Ibrāhīm Bāshā and Ḥusayn Bāshā to open negotiations, so that on 7 March an armistice was declared. The house of Afrāsiyāb was to retain control over Basra. Ḥusayn Bāshā was to pass the government to his son Afrāsiyāb, however, and he was also forced to give up al-Ḥasā.[89] Ottoman troops agreed to withdraw but only if Ḥusayn Bāshā promised to pay the sultan a sum of 700,000 Spanish reals of eight, and on condition that his brother-in-law could be taken as a hostage. The pressing need for money this caused, the Dutch resident insisted, had led to an extortionate rule, as a result of which merchants and commoners suffered greatly and were reduced to poverty, while those who had money did not dare show their assets.[90] The Carmelite fathers in town indirectly refer to this search for revenue by noting that in 1666 and 1667 Ḥusayn Bāshā took money from all inhabitants, including foreign residents, for the upkeep of the 18,000-strong troop detachment stationed in Basra.[91] The Carmelites themselves were forced to pay 70 piasters in 1667.[92]

Calm seems to have returned to Basra at this point, albeit only temporarily. Taking advantage of the death of Shāh 'Abbās II in the fall of 1666, the Ottomans in 1667 again made an attempt to gain undisputed mastery over Basra, ordering the governors of Baghdad, Diarbakr, Aleppo and Mardin, among others, to organize a campaign against the city. This seems to have followed a mission to Edirne by a brother-in-law of Ḥusayn Bāshā by the name of Yaḥyā Āqā, as the bāshā's representative. While in Edirne, Yaḥyā Āqā betrayed his master and made himself available as candidate for ruler of Basra. Qārā Muṣṭafā, the new bāshā of Baghdad, took the lead in the subsequent assault on Basra, which was designed to install Yaḥya Āqā. This time the Ottomans seem to have secured the assistance of the Munṭafiq, who in exchange for switching sides were to receive control over part of al-Jazā'ir.[93] Ḥusayn Bāshā, furious at the betrayal, is said to have vented his anger on Basra's population, to have sent his women to Iran, and to have destroyed his own palace.[94] The Abbé Carré claims that he offered Basra to the Iranians but that they declined it.[95] On 18 November, when Ḥusayn Bāshā no longer had any hope of defending the city, he gave orders for its evacuation. In keeping with the scorched-earth warfare typical of the region and the times, all inhabitants were told to leave for Iran within three days and with all their possessions, after which the town would be torched. This is indeed what happened: Basra, being depopulated, was first sacked by Ḥusayn Bāshā's soldiers and subsequently laid in ashes.

Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'iri, a Shii scholar from al-Jazā'ir who was an eyewitness to some of these events, provides some more detail. He describes how Basra's inhabitants were transported to a place called Sahāb, near Huwayza. Ḥusayn Bāshā himself moved there, too, but stationed his army at the fortress of al-Qūrna. The Ottoman army, closing in on al-Qūrna, began a siege that lasted four months. On 10 Ramadan 1078/23 February 1668, Ḥusayn Bāshā,

[89] This part of the conditions appears in Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 115, but not in the Dutch sources.
[90] NA, VOC 1251, Brouwer, Basra to Van Wyck, Gamron 27 May 1666, fols 1562–3.
[91] Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 1153, report 31 August 1669.
[92] Carmelite Archive, OCD 241d, Ange de Joseph, 24 May 1667.
[93] Chardin, *Voyages*, X, 80; Caskel, *Die Beduinenstämme*, 418.
[94] Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 116.
[95] In ibid., 116, n. 4.

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fearing that his army would betray him, escaped from the city and fled to Dawraq in Iran. Upon hearing the news, the people of al-Jazā'ir who were staying in Sahāb moved to Huwayza, making a trip through the desert that took three days and cost many lives.[96] From other sources it becomes clear that from Dawraq, Ḥusayn Bāshā went on to Shiraz with a retinue of 2,000 to request assistance from Shāh Sulaymān (r. 1666–94). He stayed in Shiraz for a while at the shah's expense, in the hope either of being restored to the governorship of Basra by the Iranians or of being appointed as governor elsewhere in the Safavid realm. Shāh Sulaymān was not about to endanger the peace agreement with the Ottomans, however, especially not since the Ottoman sultan, Meḥmet IV, requested extradition by way of a mission organized and dispatched by the new bāshā of Basra.[97] This mission generated controversy among the authorities in Iran. Raphaël du Mans, writing from Isfahan, reports that Zamān Khān, the governor of Kūh-i Gilūya, chided the bāshā for sending a mission to the Safavid court instead of to him, his equal. The same author claims that there were two camps at the Safavid court, those who leaned toward extradition and those who favoured standing up to the Ottomans. In the end neither option was chosen. While the Iranians did send troops to 'Arabistān, just in case there might be trouble, the Shah seems to have forced Ḥusayn Bāshā to leave Safavid territory. Disappointed, Ḥusayn Bāshā returned to Bandar Rīg on the coast and from there embarked for Sind, having made promises to the Portuguese in case they would help him to recover Basra. Arriving at the Mughal court in 1669, he received the title Islām Khān Rūmī. He never returned to Basra, but died in India in 1676.[98]

The Turks next laid siege to Basra and after a month took the city unopposed in early 1668. They then 'made themselves masters of the whole country and without bloodshed began to restore it'. Their efforts to repopulate Basra and its surroundings, extending a welcome to anyone who wished to return, were aided by the presence of Yaḥyā Āqā, the new governor. Thanks to him, all Arabs quickly returned after an absence of four months.[99] As Chardin (who insisted that it took the Basrenes six months to return) put it, the inhabitants came back and placed themselves under Ottoman protection in the same way as they had earlier lived under the Afrāsiyāb.[100] Du Mans, however, who tended to be well informed, claimed that the Turks killed 20,000 (Shii) inhabitants of al-Jazā'ir.[101] Harassment of Shii pilgrims with the encouragement of the Ottoman government did not cease, either,[102] and the Iranian authorities themselves, frustrated at the high cost, the lack of security and the extortion their subjects suffered in this period banned the passage of pilgrims on a number of occasions. This tended to harm the Arab chiefs along the road more than the Safavids, however, so that the bāshā of Basra and other local

[96] See Devin Stewart, 'The humor of the scholars: the autobiography of Ni'mat Allāh al-Jazā'irī (d. 1112/1701)', *Iranian Studies* 22, 1989, 75.

[97] India Office Records, London (IOR), G/36/105, Flower, Isfahan to Surat, 14 Aug. 1668, fol. 68; NA, VOC 1268, Goske, Gamron to Batavia, 26 May 1668, fol. 1369v; VOC 1270, Goske, Gamron to Batavia, 18 June 1669, fol. 967.

[98] NA, VOC 1270, Goske, Gamron to Batavia, 18 June 1669, fol. 968; Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 1153, letter 31 Aug. 1669; Francis Richard, *Raphaël du Mans, missionnaire en Perse au XVIIe s.*, 2 vols (Paris, 1995), I, 218, letter Du Mans, Isfahan 3 April 1668; ibid., 224, letter 23 April 1668. Zamān Khān is identified as the governor of Kūh-i Gilūya in Muḥammad Ṭāhir Naṣrabādī, *Tadhkirah-i Naṣrabādī*, ed. Vaḥīd Dastgirdī (Tehran, 1317/1938), 361.

[99] P. Fr. Ambrosio A S. Teresia, O.C.D., 'Relatione della missione di Bassora', *Analecta Ordinis Carmelitarum Discalceatorum*, 13, 1938, 85; NA, VOC 1255, Roothals, Gamron to Heren XVII, 26 Jan. 1668, fol. 740r.; Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 1153.

[100] Chardin, *Voyages*, V, 319–20.

[101] Richard, *Raphaël du Mans*, II, 218, letter du Mans, 3 April 1668.

[102] Mandaville, 'The Ottoman province of al-Hasa', 498.

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magistrates often sent missions to Isfahan to plead for reinstatement. Chardin claims that he had seen four of these in the twelve years he had been in Iran, and gives the specific example of a 'Mir Hagez', who in 1675 came to Isfahan to ask Shāh Sulaymān to lift a ban he had imposed, carrying letters stating that those who had molested Iranian pilgrims had been punished.[103]

Yaḥyā Āqā appears to have been left in power for almost a year after the Turks had retaken the town. Trade quickly resumed, with the Dutch reporting that indigenous merchants had begun to ply their trade in Basra again and that some fifteen to sixteen ships had already arrived from Surat.[104] But soon Yaḥyā Āqā's desire for autonomy ran afoul of the Ottoman policy of establishing tighter control over Basra. Istanbul did not just send a contingency of Janissaries, but a qāżī as well as a shahbandar and an accountant, *daftardār*, all in an effort to restrict his freedom of action. When Yaḥyā Āqā told the daftardār not to meddle in his affairs and withheld pay from the Janissaries, they rose in revolt. The Ottomans next accused him of maintaining relations with Iran, and sent an army against him. In March 1669, deprived of the port's customs receipts by the Turkish shahbandar and feeling beleaguered by the Janissaries, he fled to Iran, accompanied only by a single relative. There he set out to assemble an Arab fighting force, to return and appear in sight of Basra on 18 April 1669, accompanied by an army of between 15,000 and 20,000 men. These assailed the city for ten days and, despite resistance by the Turks, who had fortified the town, on 29 April managed to breach the walls. In the onslaught that followed most of the Turks and many of Basra's Arab inhabitants were put to the sword and not a single house was spared. The invading troops are said to have killed some 5,000 people while committing unspeakable acts of savagery during their three-day rampage.[105]

Following this victory, Yaḥyā Āqā besieged al-Qūrna, where the fleeing Janissaries had taken refuge. The intervention of the bāshā of Baghdad, however, forced him to retreat. The tables turned, Yaḥyā Āqā was forced to give up the town and on 6 September 1669 left the area for Bandar Rīg in Iran. The Turks once again entered the badly mauled city and on 17 October established peace, allowing those who had fled to return.[106] Just how devastating the events had been for Basra is suggested by an Ottoman census conducted in 1669, which listed 5,557 households, a number that translates into a total population of some 35,000—a loss of at least 15,000 and perhaps 25,000 from its mid-century peak.[107] As one missionary later put it 'already at the time of Ḥusayn Bāshā, but especially from the years 1664 and 1665, after many revolts and wars from this and that side, the town and the region of Basra finally fell under Ottoman domination and our fathers of this residence were exposed to avariciousness and maltreatment'.[108] The Abbé Carré, visiting Basra in 1672 after an absence of three years, claimed that in the intervening period the town had much changed. There was less trade than formerly, the town having been abandoned by the majority of its inhabitants, on account of the extortions and pillaging by the Turks. According to him, this had also been a factor in the Arab revolts of the period.[109]

[103] Chardin, *Voyages*, III, 134–6, VII, 183–5.
[104] NA, VOC 1270, Goske, Gamron to Batavia, 18 June 1669, fol. 967v.
[105] Ambrosio a S. Teresia, 'Relatione', 87; Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 1154; Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 118–19.
[106] Sir Hermann Gollancz (ed.), *Chronicle of Events between the Years 1623 and 1733 Relating to the Settlement of the Order of Carmelites in Mesopotamia* (London, 1927), 332; Alfred Martineau (ed.), *Mémoires de Francois Martin, fondateur de Pondichery (1665–1696)*, 3 vols (Paris, 1931–34), II, 210–11.
[107] Abdullah, *Merchants*, 25, based on Rizk Khoury, 'Merchants and trade'.
[108] Carmelite Archive, OCD 241d, F. Angelo di San Giuseppe, Venice, 16 Sept. 1679.
[109] Abbé Carré, *Travels*, I, 90.

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Other sources confirm this picture. They insist that Istanbul took measures to increase security and to revive trade, but they also suggest that, on balance, this latest imposition of Ottoman authority had a negative effect on the taxation system, mostly because stimulating the local economy took a backseat to the Porte's need for immediate revenue. To be sure, once they were in control in Basra, the Ottomans tackled the lawlessness that had begun to prevail along the trade routes in Mesopotamia. In 1672 the new bāshā of Basra, Ḥasan Chalabī Bāshā, dispatched a contingent of 2,000 soldiers to the countryside for this purpose. These ended up killing 2,000 to 3,000 robbers, while taking back some fifteen of their leaders to Basra, where they were executed. The road to Baghdad opened up and merchants returned to the city.[110] A Janissary garrison of 2,000 to 3,000 apparently stayed on in the city to guarantee future order.[111] The results were seen in the next trading season. In early 1673 it was reported that during the previous season fifteen large ships had docked at Basra, quite aside from some Dutch and English vessels and a number of small barques belonging to indigenous merchants.[112] But the Ottomans also appointed as tax farmer the individual who had tendered the highest bid for the position, promising the largest amount of revenue for the sultan's coffers.[113] In January 1673 a representative of the Porte arrived with robes of honour and a confirmation of office for the bāshā—and the message that the sultan needed money. Soon thereafter the Ottomans collected the possessions of the deceased bāshā in order to transport them to Istanbul, and various functionaries, among them the city treasurer, were summoned to the capital as well.[114] The Dutch, writing from Iran, confirm that cash money became scarce as a result of the war in Europe.[115] The Abbé Carré, who passed through Mesopotamia in this period, provides further details. He reports how in 1674 he was prevented from travelling overland between Basra and Baghdad because of widespread Arab unrest, on account of which all roads had been closed to prevent the Turks from coming and going. He explains that this was related to the recent Polish defeat of the Ottomans—a likely reference to the battle at Khoczin (Chotin) on 11 November 1673. Following this defeat, he notes, the Ottomans 'made great levies of soldiers and money on all sides, which they sent to Constantinople and to the camp of the Grand Seigneur. In so doing they succeeded in ruining all trade and the lands under them by their disgraceful extortions all over the country'.[116]

V. *Later developments*

The relative stability of the next two decades—called 'twenty years of normal government' by Longrigg—was interrupted several times by new outbreaks of tribal unrest in the area between Basra and Baghdad.[117] Thus in 1089/1678 the Banū Lām, a tribe located in the border area with Iran, engaged in brigandage,

[110] NA, VOC 1279, De Haeze, Gamron to Heren XVII, 14 Oct. 1672, fol. 1034. The name Ḥasan Chalabī Bāshā appears in Afandī, *Gulshan-i khulafā*, 277.

[111] François Petis de la Croix, *Extrait du journal du sieur Petis, Fils, Professeur en Arabe, et secrétaire interprète entretenu en la marine renfermant tout ce qu'il a vu en fait en Orient*, in Ahmad Dourry Efendy, *Relation de Dourry Efendy, ambassadeur de la Porte Othomane auprès du Roi de Perse*, ed. L. Langlès (Paris, 1810), 110. Since they were part of the militia stationed at al-Qūrna, they were forced to get their wages from there as well, which meant a journey of some eight to ten hours.

[112] NA, VOC 1285, De Haeze, Gamron to Batavia, 14 Jan. 1673, fol. 5.

[113] NA, VOC 1279, Report Willemsen, Basra, 19 Nov. 1671, fol. 916v.

[114] NA, VOC 1285, Wallis, Basra to Heren XVII, 9 March 1673, fol. 25v.

[115] NA, VOC 1304, De Haeze, Gamron to Batavia, 24 May 1674, fol. 439.

[116] Abbé Carré, *Travels*, III, 840.

[117] Longrigg, *Four Centuries*, 119.

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despoiling travellers. This prompted the governor of Baghdad, 'Umar Bāshā, to send an army of between 4,000 and 5,000 soldiers to the area, where they defeated the tribesmen near Huwayza before returning to Baghdad.[118] In 1683 we hear of disturbances in the vicinity of Baghdad preventing merchants from undertaking the journey to Basra.[119] Much of this period seems to have been rather tranquil, though, with the authorities of Basra engaged in efforts to revitalize the town. To attract merchants to the port, in 1681 the bāshā offered the Dutch East India Company reduced toll rates and also decided not to farm out the post of shahbandar but to appoint an Ottoman official instead, making sure that merchants would not have to pay more than the official dues.[120] But conditions soon began to deteriorate again. Monetary problems in Iran spilled across the border, causing a shortage of silver and leading to the circulation of an abundance of debased coins in the city.[121] Istanbul's need for revenue grew more urgent as well. In late 1686 a new governor, Ḥusayn Bāshā, was appointed. When he died after barely four months in the job, the old bāshā was brought back. Initially hailed by the populace, he soon made himself very unpopular by announcing that the sultan needed vast amounts of money for his wars in Europe and by demanding that the local merchants fulfil this need by coming up with the considerable sum of 5,000 tūmāns within four months.[122]

Far worse, and a new nadir for the city, was the repeated visitation of the plague in the last decade of the seventeenth century. In 1690 sixteen or seventeen ships still arrived in Basra from India alone.[123] Before the year was out the plague struck, having arrived from Baghdad.[124] The resident Carmelites complained that in March of the same year, they had no way of buying anything in town because all shops and bazaars were closed. All Europeans, the English, the French, the Dutch and the Portuguese, had left, as had anyone of the inhabitants who could afford it.[125] The Dutch envoy to the Safavid court, Johan van Leene, reports that, while in Isfahan in 1690, he had heard that there was only one European left in Basra and that the entire city population had been decimated.[126] According to Hamilton, who was no eyewitness and whose numbers must be exaggerated unless they cover an area far beyond Basra proper:

> The pestilence raged so violently, that above 80,000 People were carried off by it, and those that remained fled from it, so that for three Years following it was a Desert, inhabited only by wild Beasts, who were at last driven out of the Town by the circumjacent wild Arabs, who possest it about 12 Months, and were in their turn driven out by the Turk, who keeps it till this day.[127]

The epidemic was followed by a new outbreak of unrest among the Arab tribes, with the Munṭafiq, led by the formidable Shaykh Māni' b. Mughāmis,

[118] Afandī, *Gulshan-i khulafā*, 283.
[119] NA, VOC 1373, Van den Heuvel, Gamron to Batavia, 19 April 1683, fol. 882v.
[120] NA, VOC 1355, Verdonck, Basra to Heren XVII, 26 Sept. 1681, fols 438–9; VOC 1379, Casembroot, Gamron to Batavia, 2 Oct. 1681, fol. 2635v.
[121] NA, VOC 1333, Verdonck, Gamron to Batavia, 21 March 1679, fol. 695v.; VOC 1355, Verdonck, Basra to Heren XVII, 31 Sept. 1681, fol. 439; VOC 1398, Haen, Basra to Heren XVII, 10 Dec. 1685, fol. 600v.
[122] NA, VOC 1425, Van Bullestraten, Basra to Heren XVII, 26 Sept. 1687, fol. 460v.
[123] Abdullah, *Merchants*, 61–2.
[124] Afandī, *Gulshan-i khulafā*, 298.
[125] Carmelite Archive, OCD 184a, Annales de la mission de Bassorah, fols 54–5.
[126] François Valentijn, *Oud and nieuw Oost-Indiën*, 8 vols in 5 tomes (Dordrecht, 1727), V, 255.
[127] Hamilton, *A New Account*, I, 55.

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posing the greatest challenge to Ottoman control of Basra. Fiscal issues appear to have been at the root of this unrest. Although they had been unable to cultivate the land for three years since the outbreak of the plague and the famine that followed it, the Arabs surrounding Basra were still forced to pay the full taxes.[128] The revolt this caused prompted Istanbul to send troops to Baghdad, and in response the Arabs blocked all routes between Baghdad and Basra. The populace was left in the dark about this, the official version being that relief was on the way in the form of Turkish soldiers intent on decimating the Arab marauders. Refugees from Basra arriving in Kung, however, reported how, by now, Basra had become a desolate town, ruined as a result of the calamities that had befallen it, its inhabitants anxious to flee but prevented from doing so by a Turkish garrison which itself was threatened by the Bedouin troops that controlled the countryside. To provide relief, Istanbul dispatched a new bāshā who came down accompanied by the governors of Baghdad, Diarbakr, Mosul and Kirkuk and in possession of an order to move to Basra with 14,000 soldiers in order to oversee the revival of the town. Basra's new governor received a *farmān* granting him jurisdiction over the city for the next three years and commissioning him to use the militia to curb the rebellious Arab tribes.[129]

Despite these measures, conditions remained precarious, with tribal forces continuing to block the road to Baghdad. Reports in the summer of 1695 to the effect that the authorities of Baghdad and Basra had managed to restore order in the area and that trade was picking up proved premature, as the subsequent period saw the rise to prominence of the Munṭafiq in the area.[130] The pending arrival of Ottoman troops in 1693 had caused Shaykh Māni' to retreat with his troops. In late 1695 the tables had turned, in part because the Ottomans were tied up on the European front. While besieging the city, Shaykh Māni' was apparently invited to enter by its inhabitants, and thus managed to take Basra without a struggle, expelling the Ottoman bāshā and his troops.[131] Shaykh Māni' is said to have ruled Basra wisely for the next two years, so that peace reigned and the inhabitants were content.[132]

Iran's rulers were less pleased with this turn of events and the plundering of a number of hajj caravans in the vicinity of Basra that was part of it, for it alerted them to the danger posed by Shaykh Māni''s expansionist ambitions. Faraj Allāh, the Iranian-appointed vālī of Huwayza, had his own reasons to be concerned, since some 5,000 disgruntled members of the Musha'sha', followers of Faraj Allāh's nephew, Sayyid Maḥmūd, had joined forces with Shaykh Māni', assisting him in the seizure of Basra. What ensued was a struggle between Shaykh Māni' and his Musha'sha' sympathizers and the forces loyal to Faraj Allāh, which resulted in the latter taking Basra, forcing Māni' to flee.[133]

[128] Martin Gaudereau, 'Relation de la mort de Schah Abbas roi de Perse et du couronnement de Sultan Ussain, son fils', letter 12 Aug. 1694, in Anne Kroell (ed.), *Nouvelles d'Ispahan 1665–1695* (Paris, 1979), 62.

[129] NA, VOC 1507, Verdonck, Gamron to Heren XVII, 16 Aug. 1692, fol. 443v.; and ibid., Bout, Basra to Verdonck, Gamron, 24 Feb. 1693, fol. 344; VOC 1507, Bout, Basra to Verdonck, Gamron, 24 Feb. 1693, fol. 344; idem to idem, 8 March 1693, fol. 344.

[130] NA, VOC 1571, Verdonck, Gamron to Batavia, 26 June 1695, fol. 167–8.

[131] NA, VOC 1582, Verdonck, Gamron to Batavia, 1 Nov. 1695, fol. 16. The Ottoman governor, fearing for his life if he returned to Istanbul, fled to Iran, apparently intent on asking the Shah to make a case for him with the sultan during an imminent mission to Istanbul designed to congratulate Sulṭān Muṣṭafā on his accession to the throne. See Gaudereau, 'Relation de la mort de Schah Abbas', in Kroell (ed.), *Nouvelles d'Ispahan*, 77.

[132] Gollancz (ed.), *Chronicle of Events*, 412–13.

[133] Gaudereau, Isfahan 12 Aug. 1694, in Kroell (ed.), *Nouvelles d'Ispahan*, 62; Ranjbar, *Musha'sha'iyān*, 330–31.

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Māni‘’s flight and the seizure of Basra by the governor of Huwayza did not end the turmoil in the region. Shaykh Māni‘ managed to regroup with the support of Arab tribes such as the Banū Khālid, the Fuḍūl, and the Rabī‘a, and turned around to attack Basra and even Huwayza itself. These developments prompted the Safavid court to issue a farmān ordering an army from Luristan, led by ‘Alī Mardān Khān, the governor of Kūh-i Gilūya, to move to Basra. On 26 March 1697 Iranian troops occupied Basra and ‘Alī Mardān Khān was appointed its governor. Later that year, ‘Alī Mārdān Khān was replaced by the governor of Dawraq, Ibrāhīm Khān.[134]

It is not clear how Basra fared under the Iranians. Contemporary sources voice no consensus about the issue. Several eyewitnesses insist that under Iranian control Basra was well governed, and hail both ‘Alī Mardān Khān and Ibrāhīm Khān as just rulers who showed concern for the people. According to the resident Carmelites, the town prospered under their benevolent rule.[135] Hamilton, too, praised what he called the Iranian encouragement of trade and contrasted their rule to that of the Turks which, according to him, was ‘insolent to strange merchants’.[136] The Dutch, on the other hand, in 1700 complained that Basra had lost its former lustre under the Safavids, claiming that many merchants had left the port and that trade was on the decline.[137]

The Iranians took possession of Basra but refrained from laying full and definitive claim to the town. Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn’s concern not to disrupt the peace with the Ottomans that his forebears had so scrupulously maintained since 1639 clearly played a role in this reluctance. His concern was reinforced by the challenge the Kurdish rebel Sulaymān Bābā posed to Safavid authority in the border area with the Ottomans by seizing the town of Ardalān and the fortress of Urūmiya in 1697.[138] But an awareness of Iran’s inherent military weakness and a realization that it would be difficult to hold on to a city located in an extremely volatile region must also have been a factor. Shāh Sulṭān Ḥusayn thus had keys made of pure gold and sent Rustam Khān Zanganah as ambassador to Istanbul to hand these over to the sultan in a symbolic gesture of offering the city to Ottoman control. And indeed, in late 1697 Shaykh Māni‘, seemingly recovered and having made common cause with his erstwhile enemy, Faraj Allāh, who had meanwhile been dismissed from his post as vālī of Huwayza, defeated a large Iranian force near the fortress of Khurma, killing most of the Safavid troops and capturing their general.[139] In the summer of 1698 it was reported in Iran that a 400-person Ottoman embassy was on its way to Basra in order to take the town in the name of the Ottoman sultan.[140] The Iranians entertained the members of the mission between December 1698 and April 1699, and continued to express their willingness to surrender Basra, even though in his letter to the shah the sultan apparently had not responded to the question of whether or not he wished to recover Basra. Instead, he was said to have ordered the governor of Baghdad to go reclaim the city, and rumour had it that Sulaymān Bābā was

[134] Muḥammad Ibrāhīm b. Zayn al-‘Ābidīn Nāṣirī, *Dastūr-i shahriyārān*, ed. Muḥammad Nādir Nāṣirī Muqaddam (Tehran, 1373/1994), 249; NA, VOC 1598, Bergaigne, Gamron to Batavia, 8 June 1697, fol. 80; Gollancz, *Chronicle of Events*, 415; Ranjbar, *Musha‘sha‘iyān*, 331.

[135] Anon. (ed.), *A Chronicle of the Carmelites*, 1170 ff.; Gollancz, *Chronicle of Events*, 415–16.

[136] Hamilton, *A New Account*, I, 82–4.

[137] NA, VOC 1614, Hoogcamer, Gamron to Batavia, 31 May 1700, fol. 1131v.

[138] NA, VOC 1611, 2nd fasc., Hoogcamer, Gamron to Batavia, 31 March 1698, fol. 7.

[139] Afandī, *Gulshan-i khulafā*, 307; NA, VOC 1611, 2nd fasc., Hoogcamer, Gamron to Batavia, 11 Jan. 1698, fol. 19; idem to Heren XVII, 6 May 1698, fol. 37; idem to Batavia, 20 Aug. 1698, fol. 6.

[140] Afandī, *Gulshan-i khulafā*, 307; NA, VOC 1611, 2nd fasc., Hoogcamer, Gamron to Heren XVII, 6 May 1698, fol. 37; idem to Batavia, 20 Aug. 1698, fol. 6.

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enlisted in the efforts as well.[141] All in all, it would take a few more years for Basra to revert to Ottoman control. In early 1700, Shaykh Māni' again appeared before the city, demanding 500 tūmāns from Ibrāhīm Khān. The latter, short on troops, bought his opponent off with a payment of 300 tūmāns and next recruited 6,000 soldiers from Kūh-i Gilūya. But the Arab forces kept up the pressure on the city, causing the shah to recall Ibrāhīm Khān for lack of performance later that year, and to replace him with Dāvūd Khān, the former governor of al-Qūrna, a man the Carmelites called a 'dog'. The Arabs next blockaded Basra, causing famine to erupt.[142]

This situation continued into the following year. By February, the 6,000 Iranian soldiers quartered in the city, demoralized by a lack of pay and the news that a huge Ottoman army was approaching, revolted and sacked a large number of homes.[143] The Ottomans had indeed organized a massive expedition to meet an outbreak of tribal violence in central Iraq. Their main target was the town of Hilla, which was threatened by the Khazā'il tribe. While a fleet of rafts, assembled at Birecek, sailed down the Euphrates and proceeded to protect Hilla, an army set out from Baghdad in the direction of Basra.[144] On 9 March 1701, Daltabān Muṣṭafā Bāshā, the *mutesellim* of Baghdad, appeared before Basra, demanding the keys to the city. Dāvūd Khān surrendered and the Iranian troops next boarded the ships that had been kept ready. A day later, a newly appointed Ottoman governor, 'Alī Bāshā, made his entry into Basra, accompanied by the governors of Baghdad, Sivas and Kirkuk, as well as 30,000 Ottoman soldiers.[145]

Conclusion

This study, while confirming the reliability of Longrigg's narration of events, has added many important details to the tumultuous political history of seventeenth-century Basra. Taken together, these bear witness to the degree to which Basra and environs remained contested territory long after the city was supposedly incorporated into the Ottoman framework in 1546. To be sure, historians, beginning with Longrigg himself, have recognized that, even after it was formally implanted, Ottoman control over Basra was tenuous at best. As Bruce Masters writes, 'The Pax Ottomanica did not reach very far and certainly did not prevent turmoil and unrest from erupting periodically in the road to the Levant'.[146] As was true in much of North Africa, where local rulers nominally recognized Ottoman suzerainty but in effect ruled autonomously, the Āl Mughāmis and the Afrāsiyāb ruling dynasties acted largely independently of Istanbul, even if they upheld the fiction of full subordination. But this study has widened the scope of the sources and dynamics of this perennial instability, suggesting that these went beyond the disruptive effect of indomitable tribal forces within the Ottoman realm and occasional Iranian interference. In particular Iran's interest and involvement in the affairs of Basra in this period (as later) appears much more intense and sustained than is often

[141] NA, VOC 1603, Hoogcamer, Gamron to Batavia, 6 Feb. 1699, fol. 1851v; VOC 1626, Casteleyn, Isfahan to Hoogcamer, Gamron, 22 Feb. 1699, fol. 98.
[142] Naṣīrī, *Dastūr-i shahriyārān*, 257; Gollancz, *Chronicle of Events*, 418–20.
[143] Gollancz, *Chronicle of Events*, 427–8.
[144] Caskel, *Die Beduinenstämme*, 419.
[145] NA, VOC 1626, Casteleyn, Isfahan to Hoogcamer, Gamron, 22 Feb. 1699, fol. 98; VOC 1603, Hoogcamer, Gamron to Batavia, 6 Feb. 1699, fol. 1851v; ibid., Hoogcamer, Gamron to Batavia, 1 July 1699, fol. 1654v.; IOR E/3/64/7982, Goodshaw, Basra to Comp., 27 Oct. 1702; Gollancz, *Chronicle of Events*, 428.
[146] Bruce Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance in the Middle East: Mercantilism and the Islamic Economy in Aleppo, 1600–1750* (New York, 1988), 13.

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recognized. Southern Iraq was much closer to Isfahan than to Istanbul and a natural extension of the lowlands of 'Arabistan subordinated to them, so that it must have been tempting for the Safavids to try and bring Basra, commercially interesting and mostly populated by Shiis, into their orbit.

By examining Basra in a wider regional context, this study has shown that the real dynamics involved the interplay between multiple actors engaged in a complex struggle for power which played itself out in the context of permeable and shifting territorial borders. The struggle over Basra was fought between and among four sets of groups. The local populace and its representatives, the Āl Mughāmis and, later, the Afrāsiyāb, formed the first of these. Their allegiance to the city was real but could not prevent the existence of strong tribal bonds with forces outside the walls, the second groups of actors. Of these, the Āl 'Ilayān, the Munṭafiq, and the Musha'sha', were the most important and powerful. Nominally beholden to the Ottomans and the Safavids, respectively, these were in reality largely autonomous from the ambient imperial powers, although in the case of the Musha'sha' this autonomy was circumscribed by a formal tributary relationship with Iran that gave their ruler the status of vālī, governor of a border province. Local tribal forces were pivotal in the strategy of the imperial powers, the third group, who used them as proxies and auxiliaries, depended on them for logistical activities, for intelligence, and for actual military support, in a relationship that was mutually instrumental. The weak military capacity of the powers put the regional forces in a strong position, which they used to maximize their own autonomy. As Rhoads Murphy has argued, the (Kurdish) tribes in the borderlands between the Safavids and the Ottomans, rather than losing power by being drawn into the war effort of Istanbul and Isfahan, the border tribes actually gained in power as the empires depended on their services.[147] Finally, the fourth group consisted of Europeans, people who had entered the area as complete outsiders. In the role the Portuguese played as military protectors of Basra we see an early example of what, over time, would become a major theme in the area's political dynamic: local and regional forces seeking protection from Western nations with their superior firepower, either against rival powers in the region or against the central government.

The stakes in this struggle were power and income, the alliances mostly instrumental, although occasionally one gets a glimpse of ethnic animosity—Turks versus Arabs—and the role of Basra's local rulers in all this was mostly one of seeking to balance the outsider powers. The Afrāsiyāb thus were careful to play the Ottomans off against the Safavids as much as they could. 'Alī Bāshā's decision to appear neutral by not taking part in the Safavid–Ottoman war over Baghdad which led to the capture of the city by the Ottomans in 1638 seems to have been typical of the approach taken by the authorities of Basra, a deliberate policy designed to remain on good terms with both powerful neighbours. Similarly, the bāshā of Basra was in the habit of paying an annual tribute of ten to twelve horses to *both* the sultan in Istanbul and the shah in Isfahan.[148]

The two imperial powers played their part in this strategy. Perpetually alert to the ambitions of the other, neither wished to see Basra and its surroundings

[147] See Rhoads Murphey, 'The resumption of Ottoman–Safavid border conflict, 1603–1638: effects of border destabilization on the evolution of state–tribe relations', *Orientwissenschaftliche Hefte*. Mitteilungen des SFB 'Differenz und Integration', 5: Militär und Integration, Halle, 2003, 151–70.

[148] Le Gouz de la Boullaye, *Les voyages et observations du Sieur Boullaye-de-la-Gouz* (Paris, 1657; repr. 1994), 163–4; and NA, VOC 1188, Boudaen, Report on Basra, 29 Nov. 1651, fols 544v–45.

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fall definitively into the hands of the other.[149] After the Iranians made peace with the Ottomans in 1639, the latter gained the upper hand in their quest for domination over southern Iraq, although the authorities of Basra continued to seek support from Isfahan as a counterweight to pressure from Istanbul for decades afterward. Until the end of Shāh ʿAbbās II's reign this policy worked remarkably well in that it may have guaranteed the autonomy of Basra.

Even when the Ottomans finally re-established control over Basra in 1669, the struggle over Basra did not cease. The Ottomans set out to bring the town back to life and to revitalize its trade. Their efforts were undermined by a fiscal regime designed around a desperate need for revenue, however, so that the real needs of the town were not met, local inhabitants chafed under the new administration, and the surrounding tribal folk were not pacified either. The terrible plague of 1690 put a further nail in the coffin of the hapless city, and when it was over, the various contenders for power once again began to vie for supremacy.

[149] See NA, VOC 1188, Boudaen, Basra Daghregister, 14 Jan. 1652. fol. 467; and Chardin, *Voyages*, X, 79.

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