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**THE OTTOMAN RESPONSE TO MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES OF IRANIAN
SHIITE ULEMA: THE CASE OF IRAQ IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**
*İranlı Şii Ulemanın Misyonerlik Faaliyetlerine Osmanlı Tepkisi: On
Dokuzuncu Yüzyılda Irak Örneđi*

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THE OTTOMAN RESPONSE TO MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES OF IRANIAN SHIITE ULEMA: THE CASE OF IRAQ IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

İranlı Şii Ulemanın Misyonerlik Faaliyetlerine Osmanlı Tepkisi: On Dokuzuncu Yüzyılda Irak Örneđi

Erhan BEKTAŞ

Abstract: Iranian Shiite ulema played a key role in the prevalence of Shiite population in Iraqi provinces of Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century. The Iranian ulema's first missionary activities began in cities which were accepted as sacred by Shiite believers and it was gradually expanded to all lands of Iraq. As a counter-policy to the Iranian ulema's missionary activities, the Ottoman government took some measures to restrict the activities of Iranian ulema and the number of Shiite populations in Iraq. However, Ottoman government could not prevent the change of demographic map of Shiite population from the minority to the majority in Iraq. In this respect, this article will examine the Ottoman governmental policies towards Shiite groups in Iraq by rethinking the subject of sectarianism within a broader historical context, specifically within a late imperial framework. In other words, the main purpose of this study is to show the policies of the Ottoman administration to cope with the spread of Shiite belief among Iraqi people. This study will also explain the reasons for the growth of the Shiite supremacy in Iraq by basing on a number of documents from the Ottoman archives which reflect the ideology of government's officials in the late- nineteenth century.

Keywords: Iranian Shiite ulema, Iraq, Ottoman Empire, Sunni ulema, the spread of Shiism

Öz: İranlı Şii ulema, on dokuzuncu yüzyılda Osmanlı Irak vilayetinde Şii nüfusunun artışında önemli bir rol oynamıştır. İranlı ulemanın ilk misyonerlik faaliyetleri Şii inananlar tarafından kutsal kabul edilen şehirlerde başlamış ve yavaş yavaş tüm Irak coğrafyasına yayılmıştır. İranlı ulemanın misyonerlik faaliyetlerine karşı bir politika olarak, Osmanlı hükümeti, Şii ulemanın Irak'taki faaliyetlerini sınırlandırmak ve Şii nüfus artışını engellemek için bazı tedbirler almıştır. Ancak Osmanlı hükümeti, Irak'taki Şii nüfusunun demografik haritasının azınlıktan çoğunluğa doğru değişmesini engellemedi. Bu bağlamda, bu makale, mezhepçilik konusunu daha geniş bir tarihsel perspektifte, özellikle geç emperyal bir çerçevede yeniden düşünerek, Irak'taki Şii gruplarına yönelik Osmanlı hükümet politikalarını inceleyecektir. Diğer bir deyişle bu çalışmanın temel amacı, Osmanlı yönetiminin Irak halkı arasında Şii inancının yayılmasını engellemek için uyguladığı politikaları göstermek olacaktır. Bu makale, Irak'taki Şii üstünlüğünün büyümesinin nedenlerini, on dokuzuncu yüzyıl sonlarında devlet yetkililerinin ideolojisini yansıtan Osmanlı arşivlerinden birtakım belgelere dayanarak açıklayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İranlı Şii elema, Irak vilayeti, Osmanlı Devleti, Sünni ulema, Şiiliğın yayılması

Introduction

There was a strong connection between Iraqi region¹ and Iran due to Shiite (Iranian) religious institutions in Iraq. The four crucial shrine cities in Iraq were accepted as sacred by Shiite Iranian believers: Najaf, Karbala, Samarra, and Kazimayn which was known as the Atabat-ı Aliyyat.² Particularly in the aftermath of the Afghan invasions and the fall of the

¹ Throughout this article, the term 'Iraqi province or Iraqi region' refers to the area that three territories- Mosul, Baghdad and Basra; each one was administered independently. In the archival documents, the term "Ottoman Iraqi province" was named as "Hitta-i Irakıyye".

² For the Atabat, see Hamid Algar, "Atabat," in The Encyclopædia Iranica, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/atabat>, (accessed 28 August 2019) *Atabat: "thresholds," more fully, 'atabāt-e*

Safavids, a large number of Iranians had moved to sacred cities in Atabat-ı Aliyyat. In this way, it was established crucial networks between Iran and Iraq and the Shiite³ faith of the Iranians began to spread enormously in Atabat-ı Aliyyat. However, this expansion of Iran into Iraq was not confining only to the sacred Shiite cities of Najaf, Karbala, Samarra and Kazımayn. The expansion spread in all lands of Iraq throughout the century.

Before the nineteenth century, the settlement of the Shiite population in Iraq had been limited in the lands of Shiite cities of Najaf, Karbala, Samarra and Kazımayn. However, major changes in the number of Shiite populations and their settlement distribution in Iraq had taken place in the first and second half of the nineteenth century. According to the statistics, 53 to 56 percent of the all population had converted to Shiism in Iraq. The number of Shiite believers was 1,500,000 out of total population of 2,850,000; that was, about 53 percent of the population in Iraq.⁴ This number was almost parallel to the Ottoman military commander Hüseyin Pasha's report in 1899 about the increasing Shiite population in Iraq. He stated that the Shiite population of Baghdad province and its surroundings had been only composed of five percent, 25 years earlier in 1875. However, afterwards, the Shiite population made up eighty five percent in the cities of Baghdad province. While this ratio in central Baghdad was sixty percent, in the surroundings of Baghdad, it was eighty percent in 1900.⁵ This rapid change of population's ratio from Sunnism to Shiism was an indication of the necessity to control the Iraqi province and strengthen the Sunni identity of society. The Ottoman central authority was of great importance in two aspects: First, the Ottomans were not only the representative of the Sunni identity, but also the protectors of the Sunni sect in the Islamic geography. The increasing Shiite population signified a serious threat for the Sunni image of the Ottoman authority. Second, with the expansion of Shiite population, Iran could extend their religious and political hegemony on the Iraqi region and this may have resulted in separation of Iraq from the Ottoman authority.

Many of the academic works provide a considerable literature on the history of Shiites in the Ottoman Iraqi province in the nineteenth century.⁶ However, there many questions remain unanswered and unknown aspects from the perspective of Ottoman state in the question of how the Shiism spread quickly in Iraq in the nineteenth century. Current Ottoman historiography about Shiite population in the Ottoman Iraqi province mostly emphasis on the question of how Shiism occurred in Iraq only by citing Arabian and British archival documents. They also do not

³ 'alīyāt or 'atabāt-e (or a 'tāb-e) moqaddasa "the lofty or sacred thresholds," the Shi'ite shrine cities of Iraq—Najaf, Karbalā, Kāzēmayn, and Samarra—containing the tombs of six of the imams as well as secondary sites of pilgrimage."

³ For the description of Shiites, see Jane Hathaway, *The Arab Land Under Ottoman Rule, 1516-1800* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), p. 307. Shiites: "adherents of the minority sect of Islam who believe that Muhammad designated Ali ibn Abi Talib to succeed him as leader of the Muslim community on his death and that subsequent caliphs, or imams, should be descendants of Ali and Muhammad's daughter Fatima. Major subjects are the Imamis, or Twelvers; Ismailis, or Seveners; and Zaydis."

⁴ Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shiis of Iraq* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 25.

⁵ BOA. Y.PRK.MYD. 23/18, 23 Zilhicce 1317/ 24 April 1900.

⁶ For details see Selim Deringil, "The Struggle against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq: A Study in Ottoman Counter-Propaganda," *Die Welt des Islams New Series* 30, no. 4 (1990), p. 45-62; Hala Fattah, *A Brief History of Iraq*, New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009; Gökhan Çetinsaya, *Ottoman Administration of Iraq: 1890-1908* (London: Soas/Routledge Studies on the Middle East, 2006); Sabri Ateş, "Bones of Contention: Corpse Traffic and Ottoman-Iranian Rivalry in Nineteenth Century Iraq," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 3 (2010), p. 512-532; Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shiis of Iraq* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003); Juan R. I. Cole and Moojan Momen, "Mafia, Mob and Shiism in Iraq: The Rebellion of Ottoman Karbala 1824-1843," *Past & Present*, no. 112 (August 1986), p. 112- 43; Juan R. I. Cole, "Indian Money and the Shii Shrine Cities of Iraq, 1786-1850," *Middle Eastern Studies* 22. no. 4 (December 2006), p. 461-80; Karen M. Kern, *Imperial Citizen: Marriage and Citizenship in the Ottoman Frontier Provinces of Iraq* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011); Nikki Keddie, "Religion and Politics in Iran: Shiism from quietism to revolution," (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1983); Faruk Yaslıçimen, "Saving the Minds and Loyalties of Subjects: Ottoman Education Policy Against the Spread of Shiism in Iraq During the Time of Abdülhamid II," *Divan: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 21, no. 4 (2016), p. 63-108.

pay much attention the history of spreading Shiism in Iraq from the perspective of Ottoman official documents. In this regard, this article offers a more comprehensive study on the historiographical analysis of the Ottoman officials' perspective and uses a methodical approach to explain the effects of modern governmental practices of the Ottoman Empire. My contribution to the literature will also be to show the reasons for the expansion of the Shiite population in Iraq and the measures taken by the Ottoman Empire against this expansion by referring to some original Ottoman archival documents that have not been studied before. My argument in this study is that although the Ottoman Empire enforced the Sunni ulema's authority and increased the efficiency of Sunni educational institutions as Ottoman counter reactions towards the spread of Shiism in Iraq in the nineteenth century, the growth of Shiism was not restrained because of the incapability of educational Sunni centers and the powerful influences of Iranian ulema on the Bedouins in Iraq.

In this article, my main question is to examine how the expansion of Shiism was tried to prevent by the Ottoman government in Iraq. In other words, how the central government improved its governmental mechanisms, such as modern education and propagation of Sunni ideals in the context of a challenge to the spread of Shiism. I also ask further questions; such as what caused these people to adopt the Shiite identity in Iraq, which factors encouraged the spread of Shiism in Iraqi region, what was the counter propaganda of the Ottoman Empire for these conversion activities, how Iran was involved in the missionary activities in Iraqi region in the nineteenth century, what were the motivations of Ottoman central and local officials to prevent the expansion of Shiite population in Iraqi province, and lastly, what were the consequences of the conversion of Sunni Iraqis to Shiite. In the light of these questions, I particularly focus on the new governmental practices and socio-political realities of the region to draw a broader picture of the problem.

The Role of the Iranian Ulema in the Spread of Shiism

In the most sacred places (*Atabat-ı Aliyyat*) for Shiite sect located at Najaf, Karbala, Kazımiyye, and Samara, there are tombs of Hz Ali and his sons and some sacred *imams*.⁷ Every year, thousands of Shiite persons come to visit the shrine cities of Iraq for the pilgrimage. The number of people making the pilgrimage annually reached as average 100,000 together with the development of the mass transportation and modern communication in the nineteenth century.⁸ These Shiite groups coming from Iran and India by using of Persian Gulf route and Khanaqin-Baghdad routes stayed in Samara, and then proceeded in Karbala and Najaf.⁹ The pilgrims visited the tombs of Shiite holy *imams* (*meşahid-i mükerreme or seyyid-i karbala*) Ali, Hüseyin (*descendant of Prophet Muhammed*), Musa Kazım and Abbas.¹⁰

Another reason why Iraq was important to Iranians was education opportunities in Iraq. The *Atabat-ı Aliyyat* were the most important region of Shiite educations in the nineteenth century. There were at least nineteen Shiite religious schools in *Atabat-ı Aliyyat* and the Iranian Shiite students completed their training in these schools.¹¹ The *Atabat-ı Aliyyat* were fully under the control of Iranian ulema and these cities had a privileged status as derived from their protection by the Iranian government. The proportion of the Iranian Shiite ulema (religious scholar) and students in all of the Iraqi provinces is 5 percent; but this rate reached 75 percent especially in Karbala and Najaf regions in the 1918.¹² The Ottoman official Mümtaz Seyyid

⁷ Cole, "Indian Money and the Shii Shrine Cities of Iraq, 1786-1850," 26.

⁸ Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of the Middle East, 1800-1914* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 129.

⁹ Nakash, *The Shiis of Iraq*, p. 164.

¹⁰ Takvim-i Vekayi, 6 Safer 1263/ 24 January 1847, 1.

¹¹ Nakash, *The Shiis of Iraq*, p. 18.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 241. He states that "the total numbers of Persian ulema and students had grown to an average 6000 in 1918."

stated in his report that more than a thousand Iranian Shiite students were trained in the Najaf and Karbala madrasas in 1885 by Iran's leading ulema.¹³ These students who grew up in these madrasas played a major role in conversion activities to Shiism in Iraqi regions because these madrasas were not only the Shiite centers of learning but also centers for the dissemination of the Shiite ideas and political action.

Another factor that caused the spread of Shiism in Iraq was the influence of Shiite ulema. Although the Ottoman official correspondences do not refer one specific reason for a big sectarian change from Sunnism to Shiism in Iraq in the nineteenth century, the common opinion in the Ottoman correspondences about the expansion of Shiite population in Iraq and the conversion to Shiism from Sunnism was missionary activities of Iranian ulema.¹⁴ The report of Hüseyin Pasha, an Ottoman military commander in Baghdad in 1899, alleged that the number of Iranian ulema had continued to increase day by day in southern Iraqi cities like Kazimiye, Najaf, and Karbala. As a result of the Iranian ulema's missionary activities, many groups living in southern Iraq had been converted to Shiism. The main reason that Shiite ulema influence the Sunni people was the lack of strong faith in Sunnism and the lack of Sunni ulema. According to the Hüseyin Pasha's report, the Ottoman Shiite groups in Iraq felt as if they were Iranian subjects due to lack of Ottoman central state's control.¹⁵ Another report which was prepared by headmasters Abdizade İbrahim Efendi and Alusizade Şakir Efendi indicated that Iranian ulema were constantly organizing missionary activities under the pretext of visiting shrine cities (*Atabat-ı Aliyat*). Abdizade İbrahim and Alusizade Şakir Efendi reported that the Iranian ulema reduced the Iraqi Shiite population's loyalty to the Ottoman Empire and they accepted the Shiite rules in Iraq and they were morally damaging to the Iraqi people.¹⁶ In addition, in a telegraph sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on April 26, 1894 about the riot movement of Iranian ulema in Iraq, it was reported that the people of Najaf and Samarra was encouraged to rebel against the Ottoman central authority by the Iranian ulema Mirza Celil and Sheikh Abbas Han, instead of performing the ritual prayers of Islam with religious community.¹⁷ Due to the effects of the Iranian ulema over the Shiite subjects, Ottoman administration began to perceive the Shiite persons as distrusted and undesirable subjects. Because of this suspicious circumstance towards the Shiite subjects, the Ottoman Empire decided to take action against the Shiite ulema's conversion activities in Iraq.

The Ottoman Response to Shiite Conversion Activities

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the demographic map of Shiite population in Iraq changed from the minority to the majority through the Iranian ulema. This rapid growth of Shiism was a serious political problem because central administration was afraid of Shiite rebellion or the separation movement of Shiites in Iraq against the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the imperial center interfered in the Iranian ulema wishing for the expansion of Shiite population in the Iraqi villages and districts in the frontier territories.¹⁸ First, Ottoman Empire forbade the opening of new Shiite madrasas by Iranian and Indian Shiite believers, and no license was granted to those who wanted to establish Shiite madrasas to prevent the missionary activities of Shiite ulema.¹⁹ Second way to stop the Shiite activities was to confiscate the Persian and Indian lands that Persian citizens owned in the holy cities in Iraq. The estates which passed into the hands of Iranians and Indian Shiite believers in Iraq had to be confiscated by the imperial center

¹³ BOA. ŞD. 2488/28. 11 Ramazan 1302/ 24 June 1885.

¹⁴ Ibid., "işte (ahund) tabir olunan ulema yı iraniyenin iğfalat ve tesvilatına kapılarak ahali yi tarik-i hidayet ve müstekimden udul ile tarik-i sekime sapmaktadırlar..."

¹⁵ BOA. Y.PRK.MYD. 23/18. 23 Zilhicce 1317/ 24 April 1900.

¹⁶ BOA. MF.MKT. 1050/7. 24 Rabiyyülahir 1326/ 26 May 1908.

¹⁷ BOA. BEO. 401/30073. 04 Zilkade 1311/ 9 May 1894.

¹⁸ BOA. A.MKT.UM. 549/27. 22 Ramazan 1278/ 23 March 1862.

¹⁹ BOA. İ. HR. 78/3847. 12 Şevval 1237/ 2 July 1822.

to prevent the expanding Shiism. Therefore, the rich Indian and Iranian Shiites who wanted to buy lands in the holy cities Najaf and Karbala were not also allowed.²⁰

Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire introduced restrictions for Shiite ceremonies which seemed much more political than religious like the remembrance of Muharram (memorial services of the Karbala events) and the mourning of Husain's death. These ceremonies in Iraq was seen as the vehicles of propagation of Iranian Shiite groups and one of the unifying factors of large number Shiites in the Karbala region.²¹ These ceremonies which offered motivations to the Shiites was also under the control of Iranian ulema in the Shrine cities. Therefore, the Ottoman administration had aimed to prevent the participation of local Sunni families, soldiers and officials as audience at these ceremonies to eliminate the efficiency of these ceremonies. A telegraph from the Baghdad education council to the imperial center about the Shiite ceremonies in Karbala gave in the following expressions;

In the religious ceremonies of Shiite communities (mourning of Muharram) in Iraq, the medals were given to the converted people from Sunnism to Shiism. The Sunnis constantly complained about these organizations which were campaigned by Iranian Shiite citizens. If the conversion activities of Iranian Shiites continued, it would be very difficult to maintain the Sunni state authority in Iraq. For this reason, the Ottoman Shiite groups had to be kept away from such 'bad' religious activities of Shiite sect. Also, these Shiite ceremonies should be controlled by Ottoman gendarmes and the Shiite women and men must separately be kept away each other during the Shiite ceremonies.²²

Another way to terminate Shiite activity in Iraq was to ban the marriages between Iranians and Ottomans living in Ottoman areas. A regulation (*nizamnâme*) was published to ban the marriages of Shiite- Sunni groups. According to the regulation, the marriage of Iranian and Ottoman people was forbidden, the Ottoman subjects who married Iranian people would be punished. If an Iranian woman married an Ottoman man, both the woman and her child would be the citizen of the Ottoman Empire and their son would be responsible for the military service and every kind of the rules of the Ottoman Empire. If an Ottoman woman married to an Iranian man, she would be deprived of Ottoman citizenship.²³

The central administration officials had also reached an agreement that the Iranian ulema must not be allowed to circulate among the nomadic tribes in Iraq. The Iraqi society must clearly be informed about the rules of the Sunni understanding by expert religious teachers (*müderris*) and they should be warned about the mistakes and sins of the Shiite sect. Also, if the Shiite ulema disseminated the Shiite Islam within Iraq, the Sunni ulema must help the Iraqi people to find true path with respect to Sunni perceptivity (*akaid-i ehli sünneti telkin ve talim ve halka vaz u nasihat için*).²⁴

Moreover, the Ottoman administration did not allow the Iranians living in Najaf to build new places within the context of stopping Shiite expansion in Iraq. In this regard, the Sunni Mufti of Najaf Mehmed Lütfü Efendi warned the central authority that the expansion of Najaf areas would just lead to an increase in Iranian houses and institutions. Additionally, the demand of Iranians who lived in Najaf for making new buildings and expanding lands and destroying the city walls in Najaf in 1896 to set up new settlements was rejected by the imperial center. The Ottoman central administration did not certainly permit the expansion of Najaf city because of the increasing number of Persians in Najaf and increasing Shiite threat.²⁵

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Nakash, *The Shiis of Iraq*, p. 142.

²² BOA. Y.PRK.MYD. 23/18 23 Zilhicce 1317/ 24 April 1900.

²³ BOA. HR.HMŞ. İŞO. 136/12. 07 Şevval 1338/ 3 August 1919. "Tebea-yı Devlet-i Aliyye ile Tebea-yı İraniyenin İzdıvacı Haklarında Olan Memnu'iyetin Muhafazasına Dair Nizamname."

²⁴ BOA. Y. EE. 9/14. 06 Rabiyyülahir 1327/ 27 April 1909.

²⁵ BOA. DH.MKT. 2394/21. 31 Cemaziyelevvel 1316/ 13 August 1900.

The Sunni Ulema versus the Shiite Ulema

In the understanding of the Ottoman Sunni ulema, Shiism is one of the superstitious beliefs and Shiites are not seen as eligible for Islamic belief (*taklid-i iman*). The Shiites was criticized by the Sunni ulema for reducing the Islamic rules to minor traditions, such as a visit to the divine tombs like Hz. Ali or Big Divine Imams in Atabat-ı Aliyyat.²⁶ The Sunni Ottoman Empire examined that the Shiite ulema deface the rules and the verses of the Quran, and the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad were also changed by the Shiite ulema. The Iranian ulema also deceived the Iraqi people by using their ignorance and lack of knowledge of religion for the Sunni sect.²⁷

The reports coming from the Iraqi region to the Ottoman center stated that the reason for the increase in the Shiite population in Iraq was due to the lack of Sunni ulema in the region and because of this lack was the ignorance of the Sunni people. For example, Alusi, who was one of the respected Sunni ulema in Baghdad, pointed out that the increasing number of converts to Shiism was a result of Shiite ulema. Also, he warned the central authority that the converts' loyalties to the Ottoman Sultan had been decreasing from day to day in Iraq. He expressed the need for strong Sunni centers instead of Shiite centers in Iraq. Alusi also stated that the Shiites in Iraq can only reach the true path of Islam through Sunni ulema.²⁸ Therefore, a crucial mission was given to the Sunni ulema for the purposes of protecting the Sunni sect's rules and preventing the growth of Shiism in Iraq.

In this regard, highly trained Sunni ulema began to be appointed to Iraq in the nineteenth century. For instance, forty state-salaried ulema were sent to Baghdad and neighboring districts in order to consolidate the Sunni Islam by the Ottoman government.²⁹ These Sunni ulema who sent to Iraqi province were ordered to complete following tasks; to stay continuously among the tribes and to teach the basic Sunni rules like reciting the Quran (*Elifba*), the recitation rules of the Quran (*Tecvid*), a concise manual of Islamic faith, worship and ethics of Islam (*ilmihal*), to the tribe members, as well as to encourage the members of the tribes to perform prayer with congregation. The appointed ulema were also tasked with informing the Sunni subjects in Iraq sufficiently about the evil of Shiite Islam. It was ordered that the ulema should treat the Shiite believers well and avoid religious debates that could result in conflict. Lastly, when the tribesmen asked why they went there, they had to answer like follows: "I am just visiting here as a traveler", to prevent the tribe members from knowing that they were officials appointed by the Ottoman Empire.³⁰ In another example, ten Sunni ulema were sent to the Sunni madrasas in Basra and its surroundings to spread the Sunni faith and to stop the spread of Shiism.³¹

Apart from the lack of Sunni ulema, another factor that caused the spread of Shiism in Iraq was the inadequacy of Sunni educational centers in region. The Iraqi society could not be informed about this sect and remained ignorant because the educational institutions were insufficient in Iraq.³² For example, the number of Sunni education centers in Baghdad in 1909

²⁶ BOA. BEO. 413/30919. 28 Zilkade 1311/ 2 June 1894.

²⁷ BOA. Y.PRK.MYD. 23/18 23 Zilhicce 1317/ 24 April 1900. "Hitta-i irakiyyece mezheb-i ehl-i sünnet ve şî'adan ibaret olmak üzere iki kısımdır. Bunlardan Sünnileri cehaletleri hasebiyle yevmen fe yevmen mezhebine meyyal olarak tedennileri ve şî'iliğin terakkisi başlıca bir kuvveyi esbaba müsteniddir ki Sünnilerin diyanete adem-i temessükleriyle şî'iliğe meyillerinden ve kıta-i mezkurece de ulemanın nedret ve fikdaniyetinden ileri gelir."

²⁸ BOA. İ. HR. 78/3847. 12 Şevval 1237/ 2 July 1822.

²⁹ BOA. Y. EE. 9/14. 06 Rabiyyülahir 1327/ 27 April 1909; BOA. İ.ML. 10/61. 26 Zilkade 1311/ 31 May 1894.

The Ottoman government provided financial assistance and salary to the prominent ulema who were sent to Iraqi province. This state-salaried ulema served to spread the Sunni Islam within Shiite peoples living in the Iraqi region.

³⁰ BOA. Y. EE. 9/14. 06 Rabiyyülahir 1327/ 27 April 1909

³¹ BOA. MF.MKT. 561/28. 21 Rabiyyülahir 1317/ 9 June 1901. "These Sunni preachers and müderris were chosen by the Süleymaniye Madrasa which was the highest education center in the Ottoman Empire and their salaries were 500 piasters that were paid by the Ottoman treasury."

³² BOA. Y.PRK.MYD. 23/18 23 Zilhicce 1317/ 24 April 1900.

was limited with two civil and military, two elementary school and one school of Fine Arts.³³ Therefore, sending of Sunni ulema and offering Sunni education were constantly among the recommended opinions by the Ottoman local governments in Iraq. For instance, Mümtaz Seyyit Efendi, the Ottoman officer in Baghdad, warned the central government that missionary activities of Iranian ulema in Iraq have become an urgent and serious problem. He stated that the Ottoman Empire should prevent the growth of Shiite sect and that this could be achieved with the institutional Sunni education centers and the Sunni ulema's preaching.³⁴

In line with the target of preventing the Shiite missionary activities, Ottoman government decided to renew and increase in the number of the Sunni schools. All children in the cities were trained by the way teaching Sunni ideas against Shiism in these Sunni schools. In addition to these, the Sunni education was not only taught in cities but also in rural areas with mobile (*seyyar*) schools for tribes in Iraq. Sunni ulema traveled among the tribes to train the children of tribes according to the understanding of Sunni Islam. A travel expense (*harc-ı rah*) of these ulema during the visitations of tribes were given by the government.³⁵ For instance, ten *seyyar* madrasas were established among the tribes in 1908 and their expenses were met by the taxes of sepulture (*Defniye Rüsümü*)³⁶ which was received by Iran and Indian Shiite believers for funeral expense in Iraq.³⁷ Furthermore, the new religious scholars (*müderris*) was appointed to many Ottoman madrasas such as the madrasas of Imam-ı Azam, Hazret-i Gavs, Seyyid Sultan Ali and Münevver Hatun in Iraq.³⁸

Although the Ottoman Empire established new madrasas and Sunni tekkes in Iraq and appointed Sunni ulema and preachers for these Sunni institutions, the inactiveness and inefficiency of Sunni ulema's training methods were some of the most frequent complaint issues by the local governors in Iraq.³⁹ They had two very important tasks in the Sunni institutions in the Iraqi region: to prevent the expansion of Shiite population and to strengthen the Sunni subjects' belief. However, many of the Sunni ulema sent from Süleymaniye Madrasa in Istanbul which were the highest education center in the Ottoman Empire, were overreacting to Shiism and were radical advocates of Sunni Islam. Also, their education method against the growth of Shiism was only based on giving information to the classic Islamic rules of Sunnism. Their understanding of religion was based on strict interpretations about Islamic rules. Thus, they failed to solve the expansion of Shiite population in Iraq and they led to further increase of the Shiite population.⁴⁰ In this regard, one of the major reasons for the failure of Sunni education was the employment of wrong method against the Shiite subjects by ultraconservative Sunni ulema. Another report coming from the Vilayet of Baghdad in 13 August 1907, the governor Nazım Pasha reported that:

“Even though eight ulema had been sent to the places where Shiite Islam was widespread, there were no benefits of these Sunni ulema who had come from Süleymaniye madrasas because they were excessive religionist (*mutaassıp*). They lacked the consciousness of their crucial duties for Sunni Islam. These Sunni ulema could alienate the Iraqi people from Sunni understanding rather than strengthening the Sunni belief. When the Sunni ulema compared to the Shiite ulema, the Shiites could know the rules of their own sects very well and were very intelligent persons who could easily affect Sunni believers in Iraq. Also, they

³³ BOA. Y. EE. 9/14. 06 Rabiyyülahir 1327/ 27 April 1909.

³⁴ BOA. ŞD. 2488/28. 11 Ramazan 1302/ 24 June 1885.

³⁵ BOA. MF.MKT. 1050/7. 24 Rabiyyülahir 1326/ 26 May 1908.

³⁶ For the definition of ‘Defniye Rüsümü’, see Nakash, *The Shiis of Iraq*, 187: Defniye Rüsümü: “taxes which were collected from foreign Shiite subjects of Iran and Indian during the transportation of corpses. Ottoman Empire acquired annually income average 9,243 pounds and the number of buried the Shiites approximately 15,000 in one year.”

³⁷ BOA. MF.MKT. 1050/7. 24 Rabiyyülahir 1326/ 26 May 1908.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ BOA. Y. EE. 9/14. 6 Rabiyyülahir 1327/ 27 April 1909.

⁴⁰ BOA. Y.PRK.MYD. 23/18 23 Zilhicce 1317/ 24 April 1900.

could valorously take the risks against all challenges for the sake of the improvement and spread of Shiite sect. By doing so, the Iranian ulema tried to deceive Iraqi people by resorting to their love ahl-i beyt (the household of the Prophet Muhammad)."⁴¹

Abdizade İbrahim Efendi and Alusizade Şakir Efendi from the respectable ulema also shared same opinions with the Baghdad governor Nazım Pasha in their comprehensive report. For them, there had not been the benefits to employ the preachers and müderrises in the Iraq region. Although the number of the Sunni primary schools in Iraq were increased by the central Ottoman administration, the education of these schools could not be appropriate for Sunni training and the manners of the Sunni sect.⁴²

Moreover, it was constructed the Sunni religious madrasas in Iraq under the influence of the ideas of Naqshbandi sect. The Bektashi and Naqshbandi Dervishes which came from Sufi order had been appointed to these madrasas to prevent the spread of Shiism in Iraq and they immediately began the Sunni teachings.⁴³ For instance, Ottoman commander reported about the growing Shiite activity and influence of Sheikh Said Efendi in Iraq. Sheikh Said Efendi, a respectable Naqshbandi Dervish who was sent to Iraq, was highly educated knowledge in Sufism and Sunnism and he had been successful in elimination and breaking religious influences of Persian ulema over the Iraqi subjects in Samarra. Due to his effort to inform Iraqi people about Sunni belief, the spread of Shiite believers in the city of Samarra was stopped within two years.⁴⁴ And, Shiite subjects were led to conversion to Sunnism from Shiism in the city of Samarra, which was inhabited by majority of Shiites.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Ottoman officers regarded the increasing conversion to Shiism from Sunnism as a potential threat for the near future in Iraq as a result of the constantly increasing reports on the growth of the Shiite population in Iraq. The propagation of Shiism by way of Iranian ulema with the efforts of Iranian state to extend their religious and political hegemony on the Iraqi region may result in separation of Iraq from the Ottoman authority. Therefore, the central administrators had reached an agreement about the intervention to Iraq to extent their influence over Shiite subjects by using different ways. The efforts of Ottoman Empire to stop the increasing Shiism in Ottoman Iraq in the nineteenth century were as follows, the sending Sunni Imams and Sunni preachers to Iraqi mosques, the establishment of Sunni institutions and the appointment of Sunni scholars for these madrasas. It was also brought some prohibitions to the Shiite activities such as the forbidding of the Muharram commemoration, the prohibition of Shiite-Sunni marriages, and preventing Iranians from acquiring property on Ottoman lands to eliminate the religious influences of Persian citizens over the Ottoman subjects in Iraq. Furthermore, the imperial center interfered in Iranian missionary activities to prevent the expansion of Shiite population because the missionary activities was a crucial security risk which required urgent intervention against Iran for the Ottoman authorities.

The expansion of Shiite population in Iraq in the nineteenth century cannot be explained by any single cause like Iranian missionary activities. However, as understood from the perspective of Ottoman officers, the main reasons for the growth of Shiism were the incapability of Sunni education and the effects of Iranian ulema living in Iraq over the Sunni society. As a solution towards the spread of Shiism in Iraqi provinces, the Ottoman Empire tried to enforce the Sunni ulema's authority and increase the efficiency of Sunni educational institutions in the

⁴¹ BOA. MF.MKT. 1050/7. 24 Rabiyyülahir 1326/ 26 May 1908.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ BOA. Y.PRK.MYD. 23/18 23 Zilhicce 1317/ 24 April 1900. "Nitekim Samarra cihetinde iki sene zarfında mumaileyhin [Said Efendi] yüzünden şii mezhebinde o kadar tedenni görülmüştür ki adeta o havalide Şiilik yok hükmüne girdiği mevsuk olarak tahakkuk edilmiştir."

⁴⁵ Ibid.

nineteenth century. However, the problem of spreading Shiites remained an unresolved issue because of the insufficient Sunni educational institutions and the effect of Iranian ulema on the Iraqi people. Despite all the efforts of the Ottoman Empire, the Ottoman Shiites were brought under the control of Iranian state. While the rate of Shiite groups in Iraq were fifteen percent in 1888, the Shiite Islam had spread all Iraqi region in 1908.⁴⁶ Throughout the nineteenth century, the population of Shiites in Iraq has continued to increase enormously and the majority of Iraqi society had undergone a big sectarian change from Sunnism to Shiism.

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⁴⁶ BOA. MF.MKT. 1050/7. 24 Rabiyyülahir 1326/ 26 May 1908.

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