

Spring 2014

# Basra's high hope: An American missionary school in Iraq during the World War Era

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Basra's High Hope: An American Missionary School in Iraq during the  
World War Era

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A thesis project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

May 2014

*To my father who filled our home with history books.*

*To my mother who taught me the power of words.*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My gratitude goes to Dr. T.J Fitzgerald who guided me throughout this process and kept my focus on the main thesis of this study. I am grateful to my respected readers Dr. Owusu-Ansah and Dr. Christian Davis who recognized my contribution, and with their suggestions and criticisms, improved and strengthened my argument. My thanks go to Dr. Michael Galgano for opening a window for me and Dr. Gabriele Lanier for being an awesome teacher and examiner. I would like to thank Mrs. Patricia Hardesty from Carrier Library who helped me in locating some of the key sources for this thesis. Special thanks go to Dr. Giuliana Fazzion, the Department Head for Foreign Languages, Literature, and Cultures for her great support.

I would also like to thank Dr. Latif Jiji who was not just my inspiration for this work, but who also opened his house and his heart and shared his memories of his beloved city, Basra. My gratitude goes to Mrs. Sophie Sulieman whose at age 93, amazes me with her vivid memory.

Lastly, I would like to thank those who suffered the most during this process, my daughter Jenna, who endured my absence from two of her birthdays, and my husband, Karim whose support and encouragement helped me through this journey, especially in times when I was in doubt.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	v
Table 1 Chronology of Political and Other School-Related Events in Basra and Iraq .....	vi
Table 2 Students Enrollment in School of High Hope and School of Women's Hope .....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER ONE.....	30
Basra: "The Asiatic ethnological Museum"	
"First the Missionaries, then the Traders, then the Gunboats", Arab-US Relations in the Pre-War Era	
"There's a land long since neglected, there's a people still rejected"	
CHAPTER TWO.....	56
Education in Basra before the High Hope	
The Students of High Hope	
The High Hope Schools during Occupation	
High Hope under the Mandate	
CHAPTER THREE .....	89
High Hope and the National Education System	
Nationalism	
The End of a Mission	
CONCLUSION.....	122
REFERENCES .....	129

## ABSTRACT

Basra, on the eve of WWI, was an Ottoman *wilaya* with a diverse society. During this period, Basra became a platform for two major British military campaigns. In 1914, Britain occupied the city as a precautionary measure to protect British interests in the region after the declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire. After eleven years of a British mandate, Basra became part of an independent country in 1932. In 1941, upon the success of a German-supported coup in Baghdad against the British-aided monarchy, Britain moved its forces to occupy Basra for a second time. During this period of imperial and national transformation, the American presence in Basra grew, especially in commerce, education and politics. In education, the American manifestation was dominated by the Arabian Mission: an American Protestant organization, structured by the Reformed Church of America. This mission, and the schools it founded, the School of High Hope for boys and the School of Women's Hope for girls, was the site of the American influence in and around Basra. This thesis examines the missionary schools of the Arabian Mission, the missionaries who played a major role in the religious and cultural life of Basra, and the distinctive nature of the American influence under the umbrella of a British imperial project. The thesis is divided into an introduction and three chapters. The first chapter introduces the city, the Arab-American relations, and the founding of the Arabian Mission. The second chapter examines the mission and its schools during the British occupation of 1914 and under the British Mandate. The third chapter treats the transitions of the schools from schools for the elite to social centers for the needy and the underprivileged.

Table 1 Chronology of Political and Other School-Related Events in Basra and Iraq

Year	Event
637	The establishment of Basra as a Muslim encampment
1668	Ottoman Empire controlled Basra
1810	ABCFM (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) was founded
1889	Arabian Mission was established
1896	First American Consulate opened in Basra
1902	John Van Ess arrived in Basra
1906	John Van Ess represented the Arabian Mission in Cairo conference
1912	The establishment of High Hope Schools
1914	British Occupation of Basra
1920	British Mandate on Iraq Iraq first uprising against the British Mandate
1921	King Faisal became the first king of Iraq under the British control
1932	The establishment of the Kingdom Of Iraq
1936	First national reforms in the Iraqi education system
1940	The first national law to ban foreign and private schools
1941	Coup of Rashid Ali against the monarchy in Baghdad The second British occupation of Basra Pogroms erupted against the Iraqi Jews in Baghdad and Basra
1948	Arab-Israeli War
1958	The 14th of July Revolution and the Republic of Iraq is declared
1963	Coup d'état of the Party
1967	The Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab
1968	Second coup d'état of the Ba'ath Party
1969	The expulsion of all foreign organizations and the closing of all private schools
1974	The dismantling of the Arabian Mission

Table 2 Student Enrollment in School of High Hope and School of Women's Hope

All statistics are from the reports of the Arabian Mission (*Arabia Neglected* and *Arabia Calling* after 1949) unless otherwise specified

Year	Number of Boys in Primary and Secondary Schools	Number of Girls in Primary School	Girls' Clubs	Athletic Clubs
1912	80	29	no club	
1914	146	94	20	
1921	200	80-100 Ashar and Basra	40	
1925	200 *	unknown	unknown	
1929	150	80	unknown	
1933	421 (286 regular school), 100 (evening classes) and clubs	117	unknown	unknown
1935	200 (regular school)	unknown	unknown	unknown
1937	200 (regular school)	unknown	unknown	unknown
1941	unknown number	unknown	unknown	unknown
1942	200	80	200	unknown
1946	unknown number	unknown	200	unknown
1949	250 (regular school)	85	250	120 boys
1956	full enrollment	80-110	unknown	
1957	full enrollment	140	140	

\* [http://www.gosselink.us/dear\\_folks/george.html](http://www.gosselink.us/dear_folks/george.html)

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1	American School in Basra, 1929.....	2
Figure 2	Municipality of Basra-From <i>Municipality of Basra: Survey and Plan</i> prepared by Max Lock and Partners in 1956.....	5
Figure 3	Ashar Creek in front of the missionary property 1932.....	37
Figure 4	The areas of old town Basra, Ashar, Margil, Shatt Al-arab, and Zubair.....	38
Figure 5	The Van Esses with the first group of High Hope's students. ....	59
Figure 6	Outside playing in the girl's school yard. ....	60
Figure 7	Male students of High Hope primary school.....	60
Figure 8	A home visit to a mud-hut, Thursday prayer meeting with Mrs. Bilkert and Mrs. Van Ess. ....	64
Figure 9	Different views of the school of High Hope, 1912-1914. ....	66
Figure 10	Students from the mud-hut settlement.....	97
Figure 11	Girls in a sewing club- 1940.....	100
Figure 12	Students of the clubs, Dorothy Van Ess is standing on the left- 1949 .....	102

## INTRODUCTION

In a brownstone house in upper Manhattan today, a black and white photo from 1929 decorated one of the walls of the first floor. The picture is of a group of seventy-five boys and girls ages 4-16; some are standing and some are sitting around two American teachers (Figure 1). They are the students of High Hope, an American missionary school in Basra, established by a Protestant mission named the Arabian Mission. The majority of the posed students were Muslims; however, Christians, Jews, and Hindi students were also High Hope's pupils. Some youngsters were the children of tribal chiefs of the region, and some were from a nearby mud-hut settlement. Among those children, some were the first in their village to attain a diploma, and some became political leaders and social reformers not just in Basra but in all of Iraq. From 1912 to 1968, the Schools of High Hope nourished the Iraqi education system with students from a vast spectrum of social classes, changing the educational demography in the newly established state forever.

The period during which the schools flourished and grew, was a period of imperial and national transformation. It was a period of the formation of the State of Iraq, a period of two world wars, two British occupations of the region, and two Arab-Israeli wars. Even with the British presence in the region as the sole colonial power, the American presence in Basra was tangible in commerce, education and politics. The most concrete manifestation of this presence was the Arabian Mission: an American Protestant organization, structured by the Reformed Church of America. This mission represented by its schools, was the main vehicle of American influence in and around Basra. Though the story of the mission and the schools has been told in fragments by the missionaries, this thesis proposes to study the education efforts of this mission in one of its stations

holistically. It provides an analysis of the interfaces between the missionaries of the Arabian Mission and the community members living in the port city. The study examines the influence of the mission on the local struggles during the incessant changes in politics and social life of the port. Most importantly, this thesis examines how the distinctive nature of American influence in Basra evolved with the mission during this period.



Figure 1 American School in Basra, 1929.  
From the private collection of Dr. Latif Jiji, Manhattan, New York.

The Arabian Mission chose Basra as its first medical and educational station in 1902. Even though the mission was unsuccessful in gaining a solid number of converts among the locals, it continued to operate in the city for more than fifty years until the expulsion of all foreign organizations from Iraq in 1968. Reverend John Van Ess and his



wife Dorothy Van Ess were two American Protestant missionaries and experts in the Arabic language. They founded two schools in Basra: the “High Hope for Boys” and the “American School for Girls” known also as “The School of Women’s Hope” in 1912. The two schools greatly enhanced the sparse educational system at the time and were the first and the only schools in Basra under the Ottomans that used Arabic as the official language of instruction. During the World War period, the Arabian Mission articulated the distinctive position of Americans in Basra and in Iraq in general. As foreign missionaries, they deployed the typical tools of colonial influence, especially in the field of education. Yet with the British as the predominant political and military power in Iraq, the Americans were not the primary target in the local effort to resist foreign intervention. In fact, without the colonial baggage which the British carried, the Americans appeared as intermediaries between the British and the Iraqis--or Basrans in this case. This allowed Americans like John Van Ess to gain influence of a kind and extent not generally available to foreign missionaries. Using the exact words of a local educator in 1924, Van Ess was considered “the spiritual father of all the inhabitants of the *liwa* [district]”<sup>1</sup>. John Van Ess besides the “spiritual father”, was the founder and the principal of the most famous school, if not the only high school in the region. Even after the establishment of the Iraqi state and the withdrawal of foreign intervention, John Van Ess continued to influence the education system and its national laws through his extended relations with the power brokers of the region. American missionaries after the nationalization of the Iraqi education system in the 1930s, ventured into a new quest, and involved a new class of society. They established evening classes, clubs and literacy

<sup>1</sup> Talib Mushtāq, the Director of Education of Basra from 1924 to 1925, wrote about Van Ess in his memoir: *Awrāq ayyāmi* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali`ah lilTiba`ah wa-al-Nashr, 1968), 151.

classes in neglected rural settlements. This new adventure progressed over time to prove its great inspiration not just in the receiving society but also in the missionaries' role and conscience.

This thesis examines the following: what was the nature of the American presence in the city? How did the locals perceive the American missionaries' influence in education? What was the American missionaries' relation with the key players in Basra: the British, the sheiks and the elites of Basra, the rulers of neighboring countries, and most importantly the underprivileged students of the schools and their parents? How did the missionaries operate within the framework of British imperial control? Did they act as intermediaries between the occupier and the occupied or simply as disinterested functionaries in language and culture? Did the sticky web of politics trap the missionaries, by the virtue of their position? Did the missionaries' intervention reflect American policy interests in Basra or was it simply a missionary effort with no attached political strings? And did education in the American schools of Basra become the open door for American political influence in the region? And lastly, this study will examine how the mission influenced the hearts and minds of future Iraqi politicians and educators, by influencing the Iraqi public education system and by reaching out to underprivileged communities through evening schools and clubs.

There are two terms that the author will use throughout the thesis, which require some definition: Arabia and Basra. Arabia according to the American missionaries and their British contemporaries refers to the Arabic-speaking areas of the Ottoman Empire. As Priya Satia defines it, the term in most cases does not include Egypt or Yemen.<sup>2</sup> Basra

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<sup>2</sup> Priya Satia, "The Defense of Inhumanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia", *The American Historical Review* vol. 111 (February 2006), 17.

on the other hand and according to the missionaries' accounts may refer to the city only or to the Basra province. Basra province or *wilaya* during the Ottoman ruling included an area stretching from Nasiriyah and Amarah in the north to Kuwait in the south. However, in the missionaries' reports on the schools of *High Hope*, Basra includes the areas of: al-Fao peninsula, Basra city with its old section and British-built section, Ashar River district, the town of Qurna, Zobeir [Zubair] an emirate south of Basra, and the date farms of Abu alKhasib town (Figure 2). In addition to the discrepancy in the defined area of the term, the spelling of Basra differs from one account to another. American officials called the city "Basourah", "Basrah", "Bassorah", and "Basura". However, most of the missionaries' accounts refer to the city as "Basrah." The author chose the spelling "Basra" as it is the modern spelling of the city.

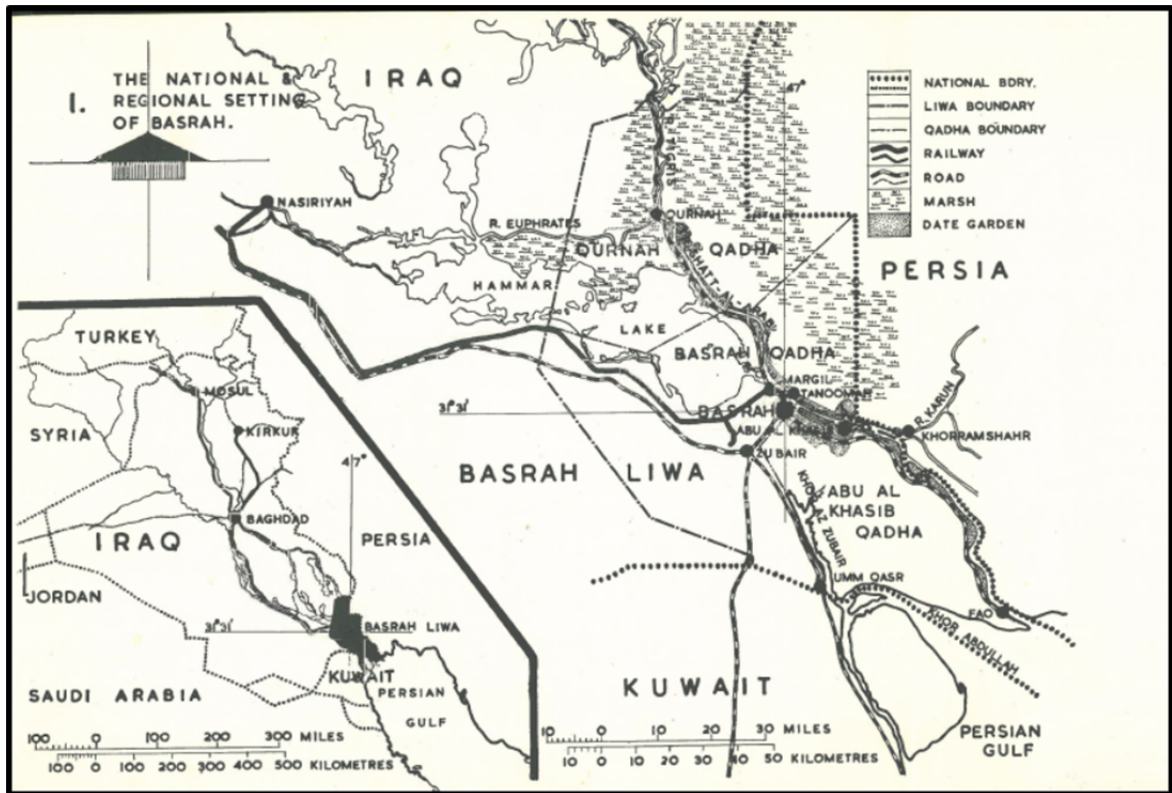


Figure 2 Municipality of Basra-From *Municipality of Basra: Survey and Plan* prepared by Max Lock and Partners in 1956.

## Historiography

Three themes strongly characterize the historiography of the Protestant missions in foreign lands. The first is colonization and imperialism, fathering Christian missions. American Protestant missionaries in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century joined the crusaders efforts of Euroimperialism and shared the “White man’s burden” of “extending civilization to peoples considered incapable of governing themselves”.<sup>3</sup> Mirwa Hirono in *Civilizing Missions: International Religious Agencies in China* highlights this relationship between the civilized and the uncivilized and the responsibility felt by the Western powers to help the uncivilized world.<sup>4</sup> This sense of duty was translated into Christian missions to the non-Christians and to spread the European’s way of life. Ussama Makdisi in, “Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism and Evangelical Modernity” agrees that both Protestant missionaries and European colonial administrators thought of themselves as representative of modernity in the boundary of the civilized and Christian world.<sup>5</sup> In some areas, the missionaries did not just evangelize the locals but facilitated their economic expansions and paved the way to the colonial powers. Stephen Neill in *Colonialism and Christian Missions* expresses how missionaries helped in establishing colonialism in one of the early books on this theme.<sup>6</sup> Harald Fischer- Tine in the introduction of *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*, notes that all European powers claimed to adopt civilizing projects in their colonized

<sup>3</sup> Jim Zwick, *Mark Twain’s Weapons of Satire: Anti Imperialist Writings on the Philippine- American War*. (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992),18, cited in Mirwa Hirono. *Civilizing Missions: International Religious Agencies in China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1.

<sup>4</sup>Mirwa Hirono, *Civilizing Missions: International Religious Agencies in China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Ussama Makdisi, “Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism and Evangelical Modernity” *The American Historical Review* 102, 3(June 1997):680-713.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Neill, *Colonialism and Christian Missions* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1964).

lands,<sup>7</sup> while William Hutchison's *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* highlights the motives to favor an emphasis on civilizing missions.<sup>8</sup> One of these motives is the fact that Protestants addressed their works to people considered primitive or with non-existing civilizations. Second, without the supportive institutions of Catholic monarchs, the European Protestants were forced to operate differently from other missions and were more versatile. In the colonized land, religious civilizing missions became the identified actors of colonialism. As Makdisi notes, missionaries borrowed and built on certain imperial structures without the burdens of colonial attachments. However, in areas under the British colonialism, American missionaries had to choose between being part of the western imperialism project and dissociating themselves from the colonial administration. In most cases and because of their shared language and religion, they were forced to act as mediators and functionaries between the self-appointed civilizing givers and those on the receiving end.

Within colonialism and Christian missions, Orientalism covers some horizons in the historiography. Edward Said's controversial book of 1979, *Orientalism: Western Concept of the Orient* criticizes the orientalist's writings and the images they portray to the western world about Islam, and the Arab.<sup>9</sup> He regarded these self-serving presentations of the Orient as a tool to assist the British and American domination in the Middle East. *Orientalism* generated a debate that is still going on with fewer flames on the subjectivity of the Western scholars. Inspired by this book and the debates it generates, Herb Swanson wrote the essay "Said's Orientalism and the Study of Christian

<sup>7</sup> Harald Fischer-Tine, *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India* (London: Anthem Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> William Hutchison, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Concept of the Orient* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

Missions”.<sup>10</sup> Swanson notes in his introduction notes that Said and his critics are absent from most of the missionary books and studies. Swanson points out that despite this absence, there are many shared characteristics between Orientalism and Christian missions. Swanson draws comparisons between the missionaries’ discourses, especially the missionaries’ accounts and writings and the Orientalists’ discourses, and concludes there is much similarity. The traditional missionary discourse, especially the early missionaries’ method and attitude, was a form of Orientalism. Swanson reminds us that while Said does not focus on religious elements in Orientalism, he associates Protestant missions with European colonialism. Another shared element between missionaries and Orientalists according to Said is the “dualistic”, Us/Them distinction between the superior rational advanced and humane Westerner, and the inferior irrational underdeveloped Oriental. Protestant theology exhibits this dualistic feature in the realm of Christians and non-Christians or the heathen barbaric infidel, and the incomparable faithful. The language of the missionaries employed a lot from the vocabulary of Orientalism. Swanson declares that Said’s Orientalism directs our attentions to several important things that are crucial to the study of Christian missions. First of these things is power. Studying the integrated Orientalism and missions would inspire us to inquire how much power the missionaries demonstrate in their missionary methods whether with converts, native Churches, or local non-Christians. The second quality of Orientalism, which could be traced in Protestant missions, is the preconceived negative stereotype of the Orient. Early generations of missionaries brought with them from home, cognitive “bins” and “encapsulation” (as Said categorizes them) of western bigotry before

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<sup>10</sup>Herb Swanson, “Said’s Orientalism and the Study of Christian Missions” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 28, no 3, (2004):107-112.

encountering any Orient. It molded the quality of interactions between the missionaries and the people of other cultures. The third of Said's accusation of Orientalists is the quality of "textual attitude". If Orientalists encounter an experience or a tradition that they cannot comprehend, they try to explain it not through a previous experience but through books and texts. This last argument raises an important inquiry about the role of the Bible in the missionaries' attitude. Most of the early missionaries depend on the Scripture in understanding heathens and the way to approach and deal with them. Swanson notes that Protestant missionaries had misused Scripture by turning it into an ideological textbook. The last quality of Orientalism, Said accuses of, is the "intimate estrangement" between the Orientalists and the Orient. Though the Westerners and the missionaries alike wanted to understand the Orient, to speak their language, and to savor their food, their superior attitude made them feel as if the others were worth less. Missionaries lived in their own bubble sometimes.

Within colonialism and Christian missions, some historians choose to examine the debates about race among missionaries. Esme Cleall's *Missionary Discourses of Differences: Negotiating Others in the British Empire, 1840-1900*,<sup>11</sup> and *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* by Mary Louise Pratt are examples of the conversion within the superior culture along with the indigenous culture.<sup>12</sup> The latter book actually studies the European travel books, which created the "domestic subject" of Euroimperialism. However, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars*, by Elazar Barkan, examines two approaches: first, the British concept of race as a color differentiation and

<sup>11</sup> Esme Cleall, *Missionary Discourses of Differences: Negotiating Others in the British Empire, 1840-1900* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 2008).



how it relates to British imperialism, and second, the American concept of race as a “primitive mind” that ought to be fathered by a superior culture. For this reason, they associated Native Americans with Arabs and Muslims with pagans.<sup>13</sup>

In general, most of the studies on the work of missions tend to focus on a particular region. The works of Lawrence Kessler’s *The Jiangyin Mission Station: An American Missionary Community in China 1895-1951*<sup>14</sup> and Heather Sharkey’s “Muslim Apostasy, Christian Conversion, and Religious Freedom in Egypt: A Study of American Missionaries, Western Imperialism, and Human Rights Agendas” and *American Evangelical in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire*, are of a specific region evaluation.<sup>15</sup>

The second theme in the historiography is the history of Protestant missions. Needless to say, the literature of the missionary works is problematic. It is either written by the missionaries and their organizations, showcasing the philanthropist work of the church or it is tainted by a political agenda, associating the missionaries with colonial powers. The literature published by The Reformed Church of America is an example of the first kind of literature. This organization initiated the *Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America*, a series which records missionary’ collective memories, and includes Eugene Heideman’s *From Mission to Church: The Reformed Church in American Mission to India*,<sup>16</sup> Morrell F. Swart’s *The Call of Africa: The Reformed*

<sup>13</sup> Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States Between the World Wars* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1992).

<sup>14</sup> Lawrence Kessler, *The Jiangyin Mission Station: An American Missionary Community in China 1895-1951* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> Heather Sharkey, *American Evangelical in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Eugene Heideman, *From Mission to Church: The Reformed Church in American Mission to India* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub Co., 2001).



*Church in America Mission in the Sub-Sahara, 1948-1998*,<sup>17</sup> and Dorothy Van Ess's *Pioneers in the Arab World*.<sup>18</sup> Besides the subjectivity of these sources, the language of the accounts reflects the missionaries' orientalism and western bigotry. They also represent a new generation of missionaries' writings. Though most of the missionaries' experiences were from the late of 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early of 20<sup>th</sup> century, their books were published in the late of the 20<sup>th</sup> century like Dorothy Van Ess's book of 1974. As is well known, many chairs had toppled, and many faces had changed during this period, which influenced the memories and the interpretation of the missionaries' experiences. In some cases, there are discrepancies in the accounts published later in comparison with previous accounts regarding the same person or script. In other cases, selective memories and handpicked paragraphs dominated these writings. Beside missionaries' writings, colonized people wrote their own accounts on the missionary works. This kind of literature is generally concerned with the debate to decide whether or not missionaries were colonial tools. Arab writers and historians considered missionary's efforts in education as cultural imperialism. *al-Tabshīr fī minṭaqat al-Khalīj al-‘Arabī: dirāsah fī al-tārīkh al-ijtimā‘ī wa-al-siyāsī* [*Missionaries in the Region of the Arabian Gulf: A Case Study in the Social and Political History*] by ‘Abd al-Malik Tamīmī<sup>19</sup>, and *al-Tabshīr wa-al-isti‘mār fī al-bilād al-‘Arabīyah* [*Missionaries and Imperialism in the Arab Lands*] by Muṣṭafā Khālīdī, are examples of this second kind of literature.<sup>20</sup> These sources are heavily loaded with anti-imperialism calls to reject any missionary work. Mustafa

<sup>17</sup> Morrell F. Swart, *The Call of Africa: The Reformed Church in America Mission in the Sub-Sahara, 1948-1998* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub Co., 1998).

<sup>18</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Pioneers in the Arab World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub Co., 1974).

<sup>19</sup> Abd al-Malik Tamīmī, *al-Tabshīr fī minṭaqat al-Khalīj al-‘Arabī: dirāsah fī al-tārīkh al-ijtimā‘ī wa-al-siyāsī* (Kuwait: Sharikat Kāzīmāh, 1982).

<sup>20</sup> Muṣṭafā Khālīdī, *al-Tabshīr wa-al-isti‘mār fī al-bilād al-‘Arabīyah* (Beirut: Al Maktaba Al Assrya, 1957).

Khalidi, who examines the position of foreign missionary institutes in Arab countries in general, asserts that the missionaries' motivation was to penetrate into the Islamic and Arab societies to deliberately stir strife and unrest in order to justify foreign intervention. Other Arab writers share this opinion. Khālīd Bassām in his book *Thartharah fawqa Dijla: hikāyāt al-tabshīr al-Masīhī fī al-'Irāq, 1900-1935* [Tattle on Tigris: Stories of the Christian Missionary in Iraq 1900-1935] goes as far as to claim that the American missionaries' intervention in the early decades paved the way for the American invasion of Iraq in 2003.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, there have been few objective studies of the American missionary presence in Arabia in the missionary history. Lewis R. Scudder, the son of a missionary from the Arabian Mission-Kuwait station, published his dissertation on the Arabian Mission's efforts in five stations. He explicates the true intentions of the American missionaries in saving the souls of the Muslims, however he points out that most of the Western Protestant mission efforts were unfortunately tainted by a white superiority attitude in culture, religion, and morals.<sup>22</sup> P. Pekkret in *Protestant Missionaries to The Middle East: Ambassadors of Christ Or Culture?*, joins other historians in explaining the clashes between the Protestant missionaries and the Muslims as a "clash of civilizations",<sup>23</sup> while Ussama Makdisi in *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East*, challenges the notion of a "clash of civilization" in the Protestant missionary activities in Syrian and Lebanon and attributes the failure of the Protestant missions not to cultural clash but to the American

<sup>21</sup> Khālīd Bassām, *Thartharah fawqa Dijla: hikāyāt al-tabshīr al-Masīhī fī al-'Irāq, 1900-1935* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashir, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Lewis R. Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story: In Search of Abraham's Other Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub Co., 1998), 31.

<sup>23</sup> P. Pekkret, *Protestant Missionaries to The Middle East: Ambassadors of Christ Or Culture?* (Hamilton: Independent Publishing Press, 2008).

policy.<sup>24</sup> Makdisi in his later book *Faith Misplaced the Broken Promise of US–Arab Relations: 1820-2001*, examines the missionary stations in the Levant and their influence in the society politically and culturally. He implicates futile American policy as the problem with unsuccessful American missions in the Middle East.<sup>25</sup>

In general, Western historians of theology and religion are more likely to offer positive assessments of missionary activity in the Middle East. Hermas J. Bergman in his article “The Diplomatic Missionary: John Van Ess in Iraq”, states that John Van Ess’s involvement in several important events and dialogues in Basra contributed positively to the formation of an independent Iraqi state.<sup>26</sup> It is worth mentioning that Bergman published this essay in the *Muslim World* journal, which was established by one of the Arabian Mission’s pioneers, Samuel Zwemer. However, for some Iraqi historians like Layla Alamir, John Van Ess did not contribute to the formation of the Iraqi State but rather “opposed the Arabic Islamic spirit and sought to kill the national desire.”<sup>27</sup>

The third topic concerning this study is the history of Iraq and Basra. Many books have examined Basra within the history of Iraq during the World War period. Most of these concentrate on the British occupation of Basra in 1914 and the implementation of the British Mandate. Peter Sluglett’s *Britain In Iraq Contriving King and Country 1914-1932*.<sup>28</sup>, and Mohammad Majd Gholi’s *Iraq in World War I: From Ottoman Rule to*

<sup>24</sup>Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>25</sup>Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced the Broken Promise of US–Arab Relations: 1820-2001* (New York: Public Affairs Press, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Hermas J. Bergman, “The Diplomatic Missionary: John Van Ess in Iraq” *The Muslim World* 72(1982): 180–196.

<sup>27</sup>Layla Yasin Alamir, “alNashatt at talimia lil irrsalia alamrikiya fii albasrah 1912-1958”, *Dirasat Tareekhia*, no. 1 (2005):5-30. <http://www.iasj.net/iasj?func=fulltext&aId=59318>(accessed 01/14/2014).

<sup>28</sup> Peter Sluglett, *Britain In Iraq Contriving King and Country 1914-1932* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

*British Conquest*<sup>29</sup> are the most comprehensive secondary surveys. Other studies like Priya Satia's "The Defense of Inhumanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia", examine how the British practiced their power over Iraq even after their physical departure.<sup>30</sup> Fewer books have concentrated on the nineteenth-and twentieth-century history of Basra and its connection to the Indian Ocean—Robert Blyth's *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East 1858-1947*, examines British plans to install an Indian government in Basra as a proxy arm of the government.<sup>31</sup> The most recent study on Basra by Reidar Visser, *Basra, The Failed Gulf State: Separatism and Nationalism in Southern Iraq*, examines Talib Alnaqib's attempt to separate Basra from the state of Iraq in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>32</sup> In the Arabic literature, very few historians wrote about Basra's modern history. Sa'dūn, Ḥusayn in *al-Baṣrah dhāt al-wishāḥayn: al-tārīkh wa-al-siyāsah wa-al-thaqāfah*, writes on the history, politics and culture of Basra in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup>

All of the above books have emphasized the British authorities and the conflicted relations with the elites and the nobles of Basra, but none has examined the American presence in the city. However, there are some studies that have examined the mounting U.S. interest in Iraqi oil, including Helmut Mejcher's *Imperial Quest for Oil: Iraq 1910-*

<sup>29</sup> Mohammad Gholi Majd, *Iraq in World War I: From Ottoman Rule to British Conquest* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Priya Satia, "The Defense of Inhumanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia" *The American Historical Review* vol. 111 (February 2006):16-51.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East 1858-1947* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Reidar Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State: Separatism and Nationalism in Southern Iraq* (Münster; New Brunswick: Transaction, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> Sa'dūn, Ḥusayn, *al-Baṣrah dhāt al-wishāḥayn : al-tārīkh wa-al-siyāsah wa-al-thaqāfah* (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 2006).

1928<sup>34</sup> and William Stivers's *Supremacy and Oil: Iraq, Turkey, and the Anglo-American World Order, 1918-1930*.<sup>35</sup>

Overall, then, it is clear that limited scholarly attention has been paid to the Arabian Mission, and American missionaries in Basra in particular. This study addresses these gaps while reaching beyond the usual view of imperialism in early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Iraq as only a British affair. A case study of the Schools of High Hope will cover the influence of the American missionaries on the education system and on the lives and minds of Basrans or Iraqis in general during the transitional period between 1912 and 1968.

This thesis is depends heavily on primary sources, among which are the annual field reports of the Arabian Mission from 1918 to 1961. Distorted by Arab historians and understudied by Western historians, these reports highlight the missionaries' reflections on Basran society and shed new light on the hurdles the American missionaries encountered to be accepted culturally and socially. The language of these reports is of special importance. It reflects first, the expectations of the missionaries and their readers at home; second, it reflects the transculturation of the American missionaries with Arabia people in the mission's stations, and the sense of superiority, the missionaries felt in their civility and graciousness; and lastly, it reveals the change in style and language of the missionaries' writings during the time of wars and turmoil. In addition, this thesis consults two books sponsored by the Reformed Church of America about the Arabian Mission and its schools from the perspective of the missionaries who wrote these books. These studies are by the founders of the schools: John and Dorothy Van Ess. *Meet the*

<sup>34</sup> Helmut Mejcher, *Imperial Quest for Oil: Iraq 1910-1928* (London: Ithaca Press, 1976).

<sup>35</sup> William Stivers, *Supremacy and Oil: Iraq, Turkey, and the Anglo-American World Order, 1918-1930* (New York: Ithaca, 1982).

*Arab* by John Van Ess reveals not just Van Ess's intentions, methods, and anticipations but it exposes the missionary's writing transformation from his early writings in the 1900s to his sensitive and selective language to the Muslim world in the 1940s.<sup>36</sup> This book and his wife's book *Pioneers in the Arab Land* include selective paragraphs from John Van Ess's papers in the Cairo conference of 1906.<sup>37</sup> The original paper expresses offensive words and opinions on local Christians and the Muslim community in general. However, the published paragraph, forty years after the fact, expresses a different message of harmony and acceptance. Dorothy Van Ess wrote another book, which grew from a chapter of the same title in *Meet The Arab. Fatima and Her Sisters* is not about the missionary work, but is about the cultural and religious characteristics of the Arab women.<sup>38</sup> Another source, which reveals the private lives of the Van Ess family, is the Van Esses' letters to their daughter Allison during the years 1937-1941, and Dorothy Van Ess's personal papers at Schlesinger Library in Cambridge. This study also scrutinizes the official documents of the American Consulate in Basra from 1896 to 1926 kept now at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. These documents, according to the author's knowledge, had not been previously examined in regards to the missionaries' influential position or in light of the cooperation between the American Consulate in Basra and the Arabian Mission. On the Iraqi students' side, the author consulted the memories of the following individuals: Mrs. Sophie Suleiman a student from Basra's Jewish community who attended the school of High Hope with her four year old sister in 1929, Dr. Latif Jiji, a younger brother of Mrs. Suleiman, who attended a government school in Basra in the 1930s, and Mrs. Souad Alhassani, who attended a Catholic school

<sup>36</sup> John Van Ess, *Meet the Arab* (New York: John Day Co, 1943).

<sup>37</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Pioneers in the Arab Land* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1974).

<sup>38</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Fatima and Her Sisters* (New York: John Day Co, 1961).

and then a government school in Baghdad in the 1930s. From the British side, the study examines the “The Creation of Modern Iraq India Office Political and Secret Files” with their detailed reports on education, population, economy, and tribes’ issues in Basra. In addition, other British documents are consulted, including the diaries and personal letters of Mrs. Bell, the Oriental Secretary of the British High Commissioner Sir Percy Cox, to her parents from 1914-1926. Many historians have examined these letters in relation to the formation of the state of Iraq and the contribution of Mrs. Bell in drawing maps and facilitating the British campaign in Basra in 1914. However, few historians have examined the letters that described Mrs. Bell’s interactions with the Van Ess family and their contributions to the British dialogues with the nobles of Basra. There are other primary sources regarding the city itself that are assessed, like the British newspaper, *Basrah Times*, the memoir of a British Consul in Basra, Sir Albert Charles Wratishaw, and the memoir of an Indian traveler, C. M. Cursetjee, who visited Basra in 1917.

On the education system in Iraq in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the study consults the works related to two Director Generals of Education at the time: Sati‘ Al-husri in his memoirs *Mudhakkirātī, fī al-‘Irāq 1921-1941*<sup>39</sup>, and an authoritative biography of Muhammad Fadhil al-Jamali, *Muḥammad Fāḍil al-Jamālī : wa-dawruh al-siyāsī wa-nahjuh al-tarbawī ḥattā al-‘ām 1958*.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, this thesis consults a book by Mr. Muhammad Abdul Hussain, a teacher and an education inspector for the Euphrates provinces of Iraq in the 1920s.<sup>41</sup> Lastly, the memoir of the Director of Education of Basra

<sup>39</sup> Sati‘ al-Husri, *Mudhakkirātī, fī al-‘Irāq 1921-1941* (Beruit: dar al-Tali’ah, 1967).

<sup>40</sup> Hāshimī, Raḥīm Kāzīm Muḥammad, and Kamāl Muḥzar Aḥmad. *Muḥammad Fāḍil al-Jamālī: wa-dawruh al-siyāsī wa-nahjuh al-tarbawī ḥattā al-‘ām 1958* (Bayrūt: al-Mu’assasah al-‘Arabīyah lil-Dirāsāt wa-al-Nashr, 2012).

<sup>41</sup> Mr. Muhammad Abdul Hussain is the maternal grandfather of the author of these lines. His published notes were kept unnoticed in the family house until 2012. No historian has cited Mr. Hussain’s book *al-Ma’arif fī l-‘Irāq `ala `ahd al-iḥtilāl* (Baghdad: almaktaba alassryia, 1922).

in 1924, Tālib Mushtāq, in *Awrāq Ayyami* sheds a light on the apprehensive atmosphere between the newly established national education office in Basra and the American schools.<sup>42</sup> In addition to Iraqi educators, the study inspects the work of Paul Monroe, an American educator who was commissioned by the Iraqi government to report on the education system in Iraq in 1932. The following work is also considered: *Mudhakkirāt Sulaymān Fayḍī: min ruwwād al-nahḍah al-‘Arabīyah fī al-‘Irāq* [the Memoir of Fayḍī Sulayman: From the Pioneers of the Arab Renaissance].<sup>43</sup> Mr. Faydi lived in Basra at the time and contributed greatly to education, culture and the politics in Basra.

Since, the Schools of High Hope were structured by a Protestant mission, it is imperative to start with the history of this movement in America. From the early of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Americans abroad and at home were inspired to go on missions and to become interpreters for remote cultures and savers for non-Christian people. Like their British contemporaries, American adventurers wanted to initiate civilizing missions and to write exotic travel accounts. Many Protestant missionaries of the time believed that when Jesus said, “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” the command was not to the Apostles as most of churches interpreted it, but to the believers in general. They believed that the duty of a “true church” is to carry on the pure preaching of the gospel.<sup>44</sup> The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was founded in 1810. It became the largest agency for missionaries and sponsored most of the Protestant missions from 1819 until 1961. However, the English missionary movements preceded the Protestant movement in America. As early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, many

<sup>42</sup> Tālib Mushtāq, *Awrāq Ayyami* (Beirut: Dar al-Tali`ah lilTiba`ah wa-al-Nashr, 1968).

<sup>43</sup> Faydi Sulayman, *Mudhakkirāt Sulaymān Fayḍī: min ruwwād al-nahḍah al-‘Arabīyah fī al-‘Irāq* (London: Dar Al Saqi, 1998).

<sup>44</sup> Eugene Heideman, *From Mission to Church: the Reformed Church in America Mission to India* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.), 27.



organizations, like: the Society For Promoting Christian Knowledge of 1698, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts of 1701, the Church Missionary Society in 1799, the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, and the London Society for Promoting Christianity among Jews in 1808, openly joined the European expansion especially in India and the Middle East.<sup>45</sup> The Protestant missions mostly started in colonized lands. American and British missionaries shared language and religion with the colonial power. With WWI and its consequences, many American missionaries became associated with the European imperial powers. However, during the decolonization of the Middle East after WWII, American missionaries detached themselves from colonization and imperialism and even condemned it in some cases. During the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, American missionaries found themselves in a transitional period. The American missionaries were inclined towards weaning gradually from the European supportive system. Because of the great national, social, and religious transformations that swept their parishioners lands, and the changing apathy of their supporters at home, American missionaries had to employ different methods in preaching and in writings to protect their missions and their presence.

P. Pekkret, in *Protestant Missionaries to the Middle East: Ambassadors of Christ Or Culture?*, actually divides the modern history of the Protestant missions in the region of the Middle East into four epochs: 1800-1918 (the end of the WWI), 1918-1946 (The independence of most Arabic countries), the third epoch is through 1979, and the last period starts with the Iranian Revolution and continues until 2005, which is the year of

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<sup>45</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 100.

book's publication.<sup>46</sup> The author of this thesis likes to propose that the first period of the Protestant missions does not end with WWI but rather ends with the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The time of the Cairo conference for the Protestant missionaries in the Muslim World of 1906, was a beginning of a new era. In that year, *The Executive Committee of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions*, had commissioned many missionaries to write textbooks on Islam to be used in the mission studies classes offered at colleges and universities.<sup>47</sup> Although the mentioned organization had started in 1886 to recruit students from colleges and universities to join the missionary work, the organization's fruits started to ripen in the first ten years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Around the same time, calls for well-trained and competent local-language-speaker missionaries to join the growing mission controlled the discussions in Protestant conferences and summits. One of the outcomes of Cairo conference was to recognize the need for a fresh group of missionaries who understood the challenges in the Muslim world and could debate against the Muslim theologians. John Van Ess, the Protestant missionary from the Arabian Mission affirmed in his Cairo conference paper: "I must get a new world-view, perhaps a different God-view if I would be a successful missionary to the Moslems and make a telling breach in the bulwarks of Islam."<sup>48</sup> This period can be marked not just as a pre-war period, or an imperialism expansion era, this period also marks the explosion of missionary works due to advancement in transportation and increasing in Protestant wealth. It was a period of transformation and transition in the number and quality of missionaries and in the method of evangelization. It was a period in which missionaries among themselves expressed

<sup>46</sup> P. Pekkret, *Protestant Missionaries to The Middle East: Ambassadors of Christ Or Culture?* (Hamilton: Independent Publishing Press, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> Samuel Marinus Zwemer, *The Moslem world* (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication, 1907), Xi.

<sup>48</sup> John Van Ess, *Methods of Mission Work Among Moslem*, "Coverts and Backsliders", 128.

their high anticipations and shared their methods and experiences, yet they were vigilant not to publish their writings to their prospected converts.<sup>49</sup> This period in this author's opinion continued until the 1920s when self-determination movements swept the region to mark new systems of ruling and new forms of imperialism and colonialism. American missionaries affected by the changes around them crafted a new image for themselves as philanthropists and social reformers; they altered their writings and their methods of evangelization and abandoned their previous method of direct evangelization and criticisms of the institute of Islam. They also encouraged social and religious reforms of the Arab youth and steered their missionary attention to the underprivileged class. This transformation included not just the above aspects, but also included the writings of the missionaries. Published missionaries' accounts and books after this period reveal a sensitive thoughtful sermon and a transcultural discourse.

In Arabia, in Egypt, and even in India, the missionaries' main methods of penetrating the societies were preaching, teaching and healing. Through touring towns and villages, Protestant missionaries used direct evangelization. Along with preaching, they operated through medical and educational services. There are certain themes that characterized the Protestant missions' methods during the 19<sup>th</sup> century which continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first theme is the concentration of efforts on non-Christians rather than indigenous Christians. Egypt, at that time had a large Coptic Orthodoxy and India had a fair number of Christian converts, the American Protestant missionaries prompted the Coptic Orthodox Church to adopt the Protestant theology and behaved

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<sup>49</sup> The papers of the Cairo Conference of 1906 were privately distributed to the missionaries and the friends of the missionaries. It included the missionaries' recommendation to others, working in the Muslim lands.

likewise towards the converts in India.<sup>50</sup> In the following pages, the reader will observe similar missionary attitudes towards the indigenous Christians of Basra. Nevertheless, the American missionaries of the Arabian Mission did not just neglect the local Christians, but in some cases they did not regard the Oriental Christians as true Christians.<sup>51</sup> The second theme of a Protestant mission's method was to open schools for boys and girls in poor areas, attracting Muslim students rather than Christians or Jews. The Protestant missionaries found themselves inclined to attract Muslims because of the high need for education among such students. In most Arab lands, Catholic schools had preceded the Protestants in education and had absorbed most of the Christians' education needs. Likewise, Jewish schools fulfilled this requisite for Jewish communities. The third theme for the Protestant missions is the medical tours of small and underdeveloped areas while preaching to the needy sick. Some missionaries understood the needs of the locals and exploited them to gain power and prestige in the mission's society. The larger the need for hospitals and schools, the greater became the missionaries' status in the society. Yet some missionaries misunderstood the patients' reactions and perceived them to be open to converting. They anticipated large numbers of converts among patients, which were not reflected in actual statistics. They expressed high hopes to their readers in the mission reports, and encouraged their supporters to contribute financially. However, prejudice and superiority of the missionaries' methods and attitudes in some cases created an opposite reaction from the receiving end. Along with resisting the western presence in colonized lands, missions and their representatives became targets of local repelling

<sup>50</sup>Heather Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

<sup>51</sup>John Van Ess wrote on the characters of Oriental converts in his paper "Coverts and Backslides": "The Semitic cannot think for himself, has no power of initiatives; his is a soldier's obedience, and therefore a soldier's goodness, and we cannot require them to have initiative and to be positively good as we are."

efforts. This resistance was either because of rejecting Euroimperialism or simply because of the locals' devotion to their faith. Locals of Amara, a city north of Basra until today, jest at the American missionaries' naivetés and their failed mission last century. After opening a mission hospital to serve patients of Tuberculosis, Syphilis, Malaria, and Plague in the poor city in the 1920s, American missionaries from the Arabian Mission were hard at work, preaching the gospel and proclaiming the miracles of the Christ at the hospital's wards. One night as the American missionary doctor was evangelizing and mesmerizing his patients with Jesus miracles' stories, a group of patients applauded the stories of Jesus they had just heard by chanting the traditional Muslim chants of praising Muhammad and his family.<sup>52</sup> This anecdote on the patients' reaction to the missionaries' methods reflects two things, first the devoutness of the locals to Islam despite their physical need, and second it represents the social, religious and cultural barrier between the missionaries and the inhabitants. The missionary medical services established respect and acceptance for the American missionaries among the locals and gave the missionaries a rewarding involvement. In education, the experience was fertile and provided more venues of penetration.

It was obvious to the American missionaries, right from the beginning of these mission efforts that education is the main vehicle of influence in the community. Inherited from the old Ottoman system, education in Iraq like in its neighboring countries, suffered from bureaucracy and centralization. After the British occupation, education progressed slowly. As much as the British officers belittled the Ottoman system and attributed its failure to an overly centralized system, they recreated the same

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<sup>52</sup> The author heard the story from her father, who was born in Amara in 1926. He recalls that the patients chanted "Blessing of God on Muhammad and the family of Muhammad". The author heard the same story from another Amara's resident recently.

authoritative system to control education without acknowledging the specificity of each region. Even when the national government took over the responsibility of education, it controlled it in the same manner.<sup>53</sup> The vile system dragged the schools and the curriculum for a long period, during which missionary and religious schools tried to fill the gap and attract not just religious minorities but Muslim students as well. Yet, not all religious and missionary schools provided an adequate education. Mrs. Souad Alhassani, who grew up in Baghdad in 1930s, remembers the challenges her family faced in finding a suitable and accessible school for their six-year-old daughter and five-year old son. The closest government school was two miles away with no dependable transportation for the youngsters. Mrs. Alhassani's father, an educated man thought the Catholic school across the street could be a possible solution. However, after one year of attending the school and to the father's dismay, his two children did not learn much from the experience. Beside hymns, prayers, and working on teasing and picking wool for a charitable cause, Alhassani's young son and daughter did not learn the alphabet nor anything related to reading and writing. Eventually, the young girl was sent to live with her aunt in the district of Kadhymmia to attend a government school close to her aunt's house.<sup>54</sup> The problem of Alhassani children's education reflects the situation of the meager education system in 1930s, which progressed in quality and quantity after 1940s. At last and after the 1958 Revolution, Iraq witnessed fast and aggressive reforms in education and social projects. These reforms included rural areas and underdeveloped population, which for a certain time were controlled by some missionary schools. Missionary schools, unless they could prove their superior services over government schools, did not stand a chance

<sup>53</sup> Khālidī, Muṣṭafā, *al-Tabshīr wa-al-isti'mār fī al-bilād al-'Arabīyah : 'arḍ li-juhūd al-mubashshirīn allatī tarmī ilā ikhḍā' al-Sharq lil-isti'mār al-Gharbī* (Beirut: Al Maktaba Al Assrya, 1957), 85.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Souad Alhassani by the author on 11/27/2013.

against the state-supported institutes. For this reason, many missionary schools retreated after the progress of national education.

As much as most of the missionaries wanted to dissociate themselves from politics, power and colonialism, some believed that their missions were part of a holy war. They used the terms “occupy” and “conquer” in describing new mission stations. American and British missionaries were not the only ones to occupy non-Christian lands; other Europeans joined the evangelization and salvation missions. Mustafa Khalidi describes the missionary efforts in Arabia as a “calm crusader war” that started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and lasted until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He notes that France kept the spirit of the Crusades wars through the works of the Catholic nuns and priests. France even chose its diplomats and representatives among the Catholic missionaries.<sup>55</sup> However, American missionaries, who arrived in protectorates and colonies, administrated by European powers, found themselves abiding by the rules of the game.

Right from the beginning, British colonialism supported English language education and encouraged civilizing missions as an entrance to the teaching of gospel and to the weakening of other non-Christian beliefs. In addition to religion, the British colonial administration wanted to transform colonized people into replicas of Englishmen in order to prepare them to be useful servants for the British Empire. In British protectorates and colonies, the high demand for English speakers opened the doors for English education. Despite the tension between England and America in the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, British authorities in India granted permission to the American missionaries to establish their missions and to move freely between districts. The

<sup>55</sup>Khālīdī, *al-Tabshīr wa-al-isti'mār fī al-bilād al-'Arabīyah* : *'arḍ li-juhūd al-mubashshirīn allatī tarmī ilā ikhdā' al-Sharq lil-isti'mār al-Gharbī* , 127.

ABCFM was encouraged to “conquer India”, an expression used by the missionaries themselves.<sup>56</sup> American missionaries like their English contemporaries favored the British colonization of India. They enjoyed the privileges and the conveniences of having the same language and culture. As a matter of fact, American missionaries, who did not speak the local dialects, accompanied British and Englishmen for support and assistance. In other British controlled lands, the American missionaries regarded the British authorities as partners and advisers. They enjoyed the protection of the British on the ground and the financial support of the church at home. In Egypt, the American missionaries were granted legal and fiscal perquisites after western powers extracted these rights from the Ottoman authorities in treaties. These privileges included buying lands, building schools, and distributing Christian’s books.<sup>57</sup> The tax-exempt status and other privileges for the foreigners and their missionaries in the Ottoman lands, actually go back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Ottoman Sultan, Suleiman the Lawgiver, granted the French king and his subjects some commercial privileges. These favors, which were negotiated with the Ottoman sultan by a French priest, were extended to other western officials and subjects to include not just commercial privileges but also legal protection for all foreigners even for the ones who had no representation in the Ottoman lands. There were other benefits from the British occupation in terms of economy and religion. Like the American Presbyterian missionaries in India, the American missionaries in the Arab lands regarded Britain as an ally of the Protestant grounds.<sup>58</sup> The American missionaries welcomed the advances and the new sanitation and medical arrangement

<sup>56</sup> The missionaries at the Arabian Mission used a similar term “to occupy Arabia” in the Mission Objectives Report.

<sup>57</sup> Heather Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 133,134.



which the British had brought to the colonized lands. Nevertheless; the first concrete relief was the removal of Ottoman restriction on schools, medical service and travel. The second blessing was the economic venues the British facilitated by their occupation. Prominent families were interested in teaching their children, especially after the British occupation, in order to secure jobs with the occupier. However, on the ground among the locals, missionaries were always accused of two charges, as being agents of colonialism and as being destroyers of native cultures.<sup>59</sup> Because their missions were civilizing missions and because they employed the same methods of the British authority, distrust and rejection shadowed their efforts. Yet, in lands where American missionaries preceded the British colonization, the status of the missionaries was disentangled from Euroimperialism. American missionaries were the experts in language and culture, and the new comers, the British authorities, employed the American missionaries as interpreters and facilitators.

John Van Ess and his wife Dorothy Van Ess was a pair of these missionaries who were consultants to the British during the occupation of Basra and during the British Mandate on Iraq. These missionaries by the agency of their manifold connections to the elites and nobles of Basra continued to influence not just education but the social, political and economic outcomes in Iraq. Despite their early associations with the British, American missionaries were able to gain the trust and the respect of their students' parents and pass it on to other American citizens. During the fifty years of the schools' operation, three epochs stand out clearly to define each transformation step of the schools and the mission they represent. The first epoch starts with the early establishment of the

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<sup>59</sup> Eugene, Heideman, *From Mission to Church: the Reformed Church in America Mission to India* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co.), 56.

schools until the British occupation in 1914. The second epoch continues through the occupation and ends with the national education reforms of 1936. The last episode witnessed evolving missionary institutes, clubs, evening schools, and one-day-a-week schools. This institute outshined the schools of High Hope and allowed the American missionaries to become social reformers. This last epoch also revolves around the political changes and outcomes of several confrontations during the midcentury and ends with the sundown of the mission.

Basra's High Hope is a thesis on a transcultural mission. Although it follows the steps of American missionaries in their quest to "occupy Arabia" theologically, it reveals the society's political, social and economic conflicts with foreign powers and in-house controls. Even though this is a case study of one missionary school, it exposes the early American intervention in the area and the nature of such involvement. Moreover, this study reveals layers of Orientalism, colonialism, and racism in the missionaries' interaction with an Arab society. These discourses, and the material interests shaping them, evolved with time, reminding us that while the cultural-imperialist dimension of the Arabian Mission might have ebbed and flowed in salience, it was nearly always there.

#### Map of Chapters

Chapter one gives an overall description of the diverse population of the port city in the subtitle "Basra: The Asiatic ethnological Museum". It examines the role of trade during the Ottoman age and the position of the elites and nobles in the city and other power brokers. Some of these nobles endorsed the schools of High Hope in its early days and boosted the reputation of the school through the enrolment of their children in the

mission school. In the same chapter under the subtitle “First the Missionaries; then the Traders; then the Gunboats”, this essay examines the Arab-US relations in the pre-war era and the American efforts in education, archeology and trade in the region. Lastly, in “There’s A Land Long Since Neglected, There’s a People Still Rejected”, this essay uncovers the forming of the Arabian Mission and the establishment of Basra station. Chapter two highlights three themes: Education in Basra before the High Hope, which examines the lean education system under the Ottomans; the second theme is the students of High Hope in the first ten years; and the third theme is concerning High Hope during the British Occupation. Chapter three examines the School of High Hope and the national education system in the thirties and the missionaries’ measures to preserve the standard and the survival of the schools. The chapter also includes the struggle of the missionaries during the rise of nationalism and the adaptation methods applied to reach out to a different body of students. The chapter concludes with the final days of the American schools in Iraq and the effects of three major events: the 1948 War, the Iraq Revolution of 1958, and the 1967 War with Israel.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Basra: The Asiatic ethnological Museum

Basra's location on Shatt al-Arab, a river formed by the convergence of the Tigris and the Euphrates right at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, gave the city a distinctive stance. Merchants and traders inhabited the city since its establishment in 637 as a Muslim encampment. During the Abbasid era, the city became the outpost of the Islamic Empire and continued to attract businesses from India, Persia, and Central Asia, even after the Ottoman occupation in 1668. The Ottomans patrolled the Persian Gulf and controlled Basra for three centuries with an exception of three years in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Persian army occupied the area in 1775 and lost it in 1778 to the Ottomans with the help of the British Navy.<sup>60</sup> Ottoman governors ruled the province as an Ottoman *wilayah* attached to Baghdad, until 1850. The province gained an independent status from Baghdad during the years 1850 - 1862, and finally maintained the status in 1884 onward until 1914.<sup>61</sup>

However, negligence, multiple waves of malaria, cholera, floods and wars affected the city's development until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>62</sup> The growing Ottoman interest in controlling the commerce in the Persian Gulf, and the customs collected from caravans and ships enticed the Ottomans to attend to the city. Basra regained its harbor position in the second half of the nineteenth century and became the

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<sup>60</sup> Mohammad Gholi Majd, *Iraq in World War I: from Ottoman rule to British conquest* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 3.

<sup>61</sup> Reidar Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State: Separatism and Nationalism in Southern Iraq* (Münste; New Brunswick: Transaction, 2005), 19.

<sup>62</sup> John Van Ess wrote in his articles "Living Issues" that Cholera attacked Basra every four years. Other observers from the University of Michigan noted in *Michigan in Arabia* that malaria visited Basra every year. They added that the region has no asylum.

richest providence in Mesopotamia. Date gardens lined the two banks of the river, and the hot climate encouraged agriculture. Most of the inhabitants were farmers and laborers in the date gardens, however, many merchants and traders chose Basra as their home. As a date trade center for around 70,000 tons of annual production, and as the only port for Mesopotamia, the city welcomed vessels and boats from Bombay, London, and Hamburg.<sup>63</sup> Ships of British India Company arrived daily and a fleet of steamers connected Basra with Baghdad and other cities along the Tigris River.<sup>64</sup> In addition, every September, steamers sailed to New York City directly, carrying loads of dates to the American consumers.<sup>65</sup> Besides the trades, Basra was a station for thousands of pilgrims boarding for Mecca and thousands more of Shite pilgrims on their way to the shrines in Kerbala and Nejf.

However, as much influence as the Ottomans wanted to have in Basra, being 2695 kilometers away from the center of the Empire diminished the government presence in the province. Besides the military garrison of 400-500 men and the headquarters of the Ottoman Navy in the Persian Gulf, Ottomans' only exhibition of power was in the customs station of Ashar--the port section of the city-- controlling the duties on maritime trade. The harsh climate of the province made it an unpopular location for work. Consequently, the Ottoman officials, who were mostly from outside the region, rotated frequently from Basra to other locations, and were passive in the interior affairs of the city. Because of this pale Ottoman presence, other non- governmental parties exercised power in Basra.

<sup>63</sup> *Michigan in Arabia* (Christian Students Association, 1911).

<sup>64</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Fatima and Her Sisters* (New York: John Day Co, 1961), 18.

<sup>65</sup> *Michigan in Arabia* (Christian Students Association, 1911).

The Western powers entered the region in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in trade and religious missions. Because of its location, Basra brought much to the region including French garments, English cloths, German metals and American sugar. At the same time, Basra exported dates, grains, wool, and even licorice roots from the nearby area of Amara.<sup>66</sup> Quickly, foreign merchants gained influence in the port, overshadowing the Ottoman presence. The French Consulate was the first to open in Basra in 1755 followed by agents from the British India Company.<sup>67</sup> Other consuls represented included Russia, Britain, and the United States who maintained agents in Baghdad until late into the 19<sup>th</sup> century when these countries established commercial consulates in Basra.<sup>68</sup> The American Consulate in Mesopotamia represented American interests, specifically, the Standard Oil Company of New York (Socony) which was a major supplier of oil products for the Mesopotamia market. However, the Ottoman authorities did not grant any mineral concessions to American companies.<sup>69</sup>

With all of these external interests, local powers still played a major role in shaping the society of Basra. The estimated population of the city and its environs was between 40,000 and 85,000 Arabs and around 100,000 of total population at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The urban and rural population was governed by domains of control and influence, shifting between Ottoman officers, landlord nobles, paramount sheikhs, and merchants.<sup>70</sup> Most of the nobles of Basra and the tribesmen did not oppose the weak government system of the Ottomans because of the power they were given. The

<sup>66</sup> Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State*, 16.

<sup>67</sup> Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1925), 185, 252, 253. US established its Consulate in June of 1896 by Joe Hamilton

<sup>68</sup> Britain was represented by a consul in Basra in 1898, Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Four Centuries of Modern Iraq* (Oxford: the Clarendon Press, 1925), 305.

<sup>69</sup> William Stivers, *Supremacy and oil: Iraq, Turkey, and the Anglo-American world order, 1918-1930* (New York: Ithaca, 1982), 108.

<sup>70</sup> Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State*, 16.

19<sup>th</sup> century, also known as the age of notables, or *a 'yan* in the Ottoman Empire, witnessed the emerging of this class as intermediaries between the local governor and the population.<sup>71</sup> When the *tanzimat* reforms of 1839 - 1876, which aimed to transfer the Ottoman Empire from a theocratic system to a modern state, encouraged the creation of provincial representative assemblies, these wealthy landlord notables were embodied in the governor's council. In addition, they took over the religious institutions and the security of urban population. For the areas on the edge of the district, like Zubair's tribes and the marsh tribes around Qurna, the population lived without much interference from the Ottoman State. Every paramount sheikh of these tribes was required to pay tributes to the government and to assure the security of his region, while the government on their end welcomed the sheikhs in the local administration. Bribes and promises for the Sultan's titles continued to feed the body of the municipal councils, maintaining a local presence of notables and sheikhs. Even Shia elites were invited to these councils in an all-Sunni system. The Naqib family --descendants from the prophet-- gained substantial influence in Basra in the 19<sup>th</sup> century because of their property wealth. The Naqib's wealth sponsored armed tribal gangs in the city to protect the family's interest sometime, and to demonstrate power other times, causing disruption of security. This military presence entitled the family to have a permanent position in the local administrative council.

The family also enjoyed strong ties with local landlords and dynasties. Among such notables was the ruler of Muhammara, an emirate south of Basra in the region Arabistan, which is modern day Khzistan, Sheikh Khaz'al. Khaz'al ruled the semi-

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<sup>71</sup> Ebubekir Ceylan, *The Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq: Political Reform, Modernization and Development in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East* (New York: I.B.Tauris ,2011), 135.

independent Persian principality since 1897 and was the chief for the tribes on the Ottoman side of Shatt al-Arab. Collaboration between the Naqib family and the Sheikh of Muhammara enabled the disruptive bands to escape to the Persian riverside beyond the Ottoman reach. Another power broker who threatened the Ottoman sovereignty in the region was Sheikh Mubarak, the ruler of Kuwait. Kuwait became a British protectorate in 1899 and the Sheikh enjoyed power over vast agricultural lands along the river and over farmers who cultivated these lands. Sheikh Mubarak befriended the Naqib family and Sheikh Khaz'al, and opened his land for fugitives from the Ottoman land. At the same time, the Naqib family used the Kuwait sovereignty as a trump card to hold out hope for the return of Kuwait to the Ottomans.<sup>72</sup> The three friends and partners controlled not just the water and the land but later influenced the progress of the American schools in Basra by enrolling their children.

The head of the Naqib family, Sayyid Talib maintained good ties with Istanbul and the rulers of the region. Because of Talib's influence, the Ottomans granted him a seat on the council of state in Istanbul. In addition to his influence in Basra, Sayyid Talib took another role in the society during the revolution of the Young Turk reforms of 1908. When the government of the Young Turks forced more centralized reforms on provincial administrations, many Arab nationalists and Muslims, opposed the Young Turks government. Sayyid Talib was among the discontented elites. He convinced several nobles to establish a local branch of the *Moderate Liberal Party*, opposing the official party for the Young Turk government, *Committee of Union and Progress*. The *Moderate Liberal Party* was the first opposition Ottoman party with many local branches in the Ottoman lands. In 1912 the party joined another organization-- *Party of Liberty and*

<sup>72</sup> Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State*, 34.



*Entente*-- under the recommendation of Sayyid Talib.<sup>73</sup> In the same year, and upon a coup that ousted the CUP government, the *Party of Liberty and Entente* and its supporters came to power. Sayyid Talib recovered his position in the city and his supporters regained high positions in the government. However, when the *Union and Progress* recouped the government in Istanbul in 1913, the unrest in Istanbul encouraged Sayyid Talib to start a movement of autonomy for Basra, demanding the taxation revenue of the city. Talib toured the southern region of Mesopotamia and extended his ties with other tribes in the region to recruit them in his pursuit. Soon, other tribes in Diwaniya, a region north of Basra, joined the rebellion against the government.<sup>74</sup> The CUP instructed a tribal chief to attack Basra and occupy the house of Talib, but Sayyid Talib's supporters with arms from Muhammara and Kuwait stopped the assassination attempt and Talib escaped to a nearby region.<sup>75</sup> In 1913, Talib dissolved the *Party of Liberty and Entente* and established the *Reformed Society of Basra*, which was inspired by the decentralization movement of Egypt. The demands of this party echoed the demands in other Arab regions for administrative decentralization. The *Reformed Society of Basra* called for an Islamic autonomous Ottoman province and for Arabic as the official language for the government. The fiasco between Talib and the Ottoman ended in 1914 with reconciliation between the latter, and Talib welcomed the new assigned Ottoman *wali* with a gift, a palace on the bank of Shatt al-Arab.<sup>76</sup>

Though the *Reformed Society's* main dictum was to refuse foreign intervention, Sayyid Talib reached out to the British officials between 1912 and 1914, seeking help in

<sup>73</sup> Sulayman Faydi, *Mudhakkirāt Sulaymān Fayḍī: min ruwwād al-nahḍah al-'Arabīyah fī al-'Irāq : al-ṭab'ah al-kāmilah* (London: Dar Al Saqi, 1998), 119.

<sup>74</sup> Majid, *Iraq in World War I: from Ottoman Rule to British Conquest*, 28.

<sup>75</sup> Faydi, *Mudhakkirāt Sulaymān Fayḍī*, 132.

<sup>76</sup> Majid, *Iraq in World War I: from Ottoman rule to British conquest*, 37.

transforming Basra into a special administrative unit.<sup>77</sup> Not only were the British aware of Sayyid Talib's expectations and status in Basra, American officials were paying attention to his move. The American Vice Consul in Bagdad, C. Richarz noted in a report on Talib's family role: "This family has since many years continually followed a clever mid diplomacy between England and Turkey, being influenced as well by the Turkish as by the British political aims at Bassorah [sic] and in the Persian Gulf."<sup>78</sup> There is no doubt that Sayyid Talib was a key player during the pre-war era of the city and continued to shape Basra's future during the British occupation. However, the city's own diversified population continued to add to the uniqueness of its disposition.

The city became a diverse society during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the migration of several ethnicities. Armenian Christians flocked to Basra from the north, escaping the Ottomans. Jewish and Christian businessmen established charters for foreign companies as well as stores for European goods. European and American companies like Hills Brothers Company and William Hills Jr. and Company traded in the port.<sup>79</sup> In addition, the growing trade movement in the Indian Ocean, and the newly planned project of railroads, made the city a hothouse for Indian commercial activities. An Indian traveler described the charm of Basra with its multicolored life as "a fine Oriental city, rising like Venice out of the circumambient waters and surrounded by groves of crowding date-palms with their waiving feathery branches" (Figure 3).<sup>80</sup> The city in the late of 19<sup>th</sup> century was composed of two sections.

<sup>77</sup>Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State*, 46.

<sup>78</sup>Majd, *Iraq in World War I: from Ottoman rule to British conquest*, 31.

<sup>79</sup> U.S Consulate in Basra. *Miscellaneous Records 1913-1925. C36., 1913 - 1925 ARC Identifier 1313205 / MLR Number UD 137*, (National Archives, College Park, 1913).

<sup>80</sup>C. M Cursetjee, *The Land of the Date: A Recent Voyage from Bombay to Basra and Back, Fully Descriptive of the Ports and Peoples of the Persian Gulf and the Shat'-el-Arab, their Conditions, History, and Customs: 1916-1917* (Reading: Garnet Pub, 1994), 148.

The first section is the old Basra city, which is a three-mile inland. The second quarter is the Ashar port, which grew into two sections after the British occupation, the native section and the British section. The native section of Ashar as described by the traveler, C.M. Cursetjee was “a complete Asiatic ethnological museum” Arabs, Turks, Jews, Armenian, Negros, Persians, Baloochis, Kaboolis, Syrians, Indians, and Kurds inhabited Ashar. When the British army occupied Basra in 1914, a third section grew along the river banks extending from Beyt-Nameh (the British hospital known as the house of Blessing) to Margil- the resort/village reserved for European pleasure. The fourth section is the new town of Basra which consisted of British military quarters along the river front (Figure 4).



Figure 3 Ashar Creek in front of the missionary property 1932.  
From the Private collection of Dorothy Van Ess at Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78-M 124, folder 34.

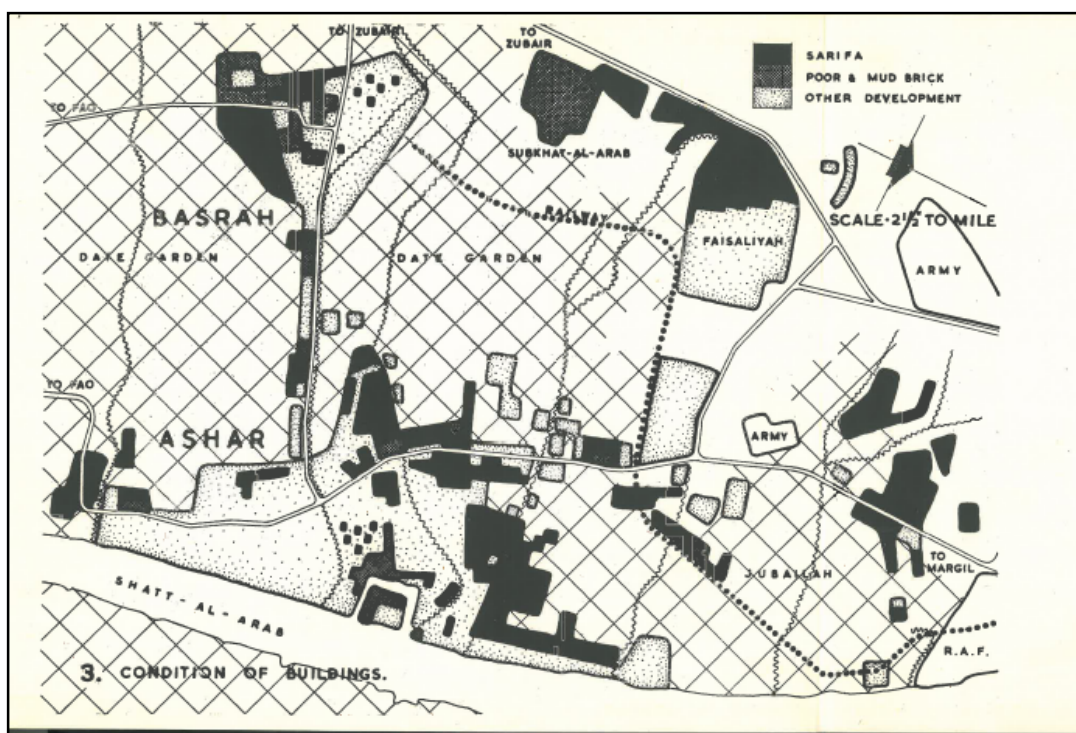


Figure 4 The areas of old town Basra, Ashar, Margil, Shatt Al-arab, and Zubair. Municipality of Basra-From *Municipality of Basra: Survey and plan* prepared by Max Lock and Partners in 1956.

With the British strategic maneuvers in WWI and the growing interest in controlling trade in the Indian Ocean and in securing the oil fields of nearby Abadan, Britain occupied the city in 1914 ending the Turkish subjectivity forever. Britain believed Basra would become a “second Egypt” for the British Empire because of its location on the Gulf, and because of the agricultural potential in Mesopotamia.<sup>81</sup>

The city with its multi-ethnic society and its agricultural and trade potentials, attracted pioneers and missionaries. In addition, the city’s lack of medical and educational services encouraged missionaries to establish their missions in the sleeping town on the river, and its inapprehensible absence of one dominant power made the city susceptible to foreign interference.

<sup>81</sup> Robert J. Blyth, *The Empire of the Raj: India, Eastern Africa and the Middle East, 1858-1947* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

### **“First the Missionaries, then the Traders, then the Gunboats”, Arab-US Relations in the Pre-War Era**

An Indian historian once declared on the association of colonialism and missionary work that in every colonized land, before the arrival of the imperial power, missionaries pave the way to colonialism: “First the Missionaries; then the Traders; then the Gunboats.”<sup>82</sup> In Arabia, American traders preceded the American missionaries. American merchants conducted business in the Ottoman lands in sugar and dates. However, no diplomatic relations were established between the two governments until 1830.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, US –Arab relations go back to the American Independence Day when Morocco was the first state in the world to recognize it, and Tangier hosted the oldest US diplomatic property in the world. Still, prior to the US diplomats, American citizens with different kinds of missions arrived to Arabia in the early of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Protestant American missionaries arrived in the Arab lands in 1819.<sup>84</sup> Their first station was in the holy land because of a scriptural prophecy. The return of the Jews to Palestine is one of the signs for the return of Jesus’s earthly rule. Consequently, the salvation of the Arabs, Turks and Jews seemed to the missionaries as the first step toward fulfilling the prophecy. Although the Protestant missionaries were Americans, they were called Englishmen in most of Arabia.<sup>85</sup> The American missionaries shadowed the British colonists. They shared the same language and religion of the British, and they sought the protection of the British authorities. From the holy land, missionaries moved to Syria and then to Lebanon. Unlike in India or in China, American missions in the Levant were not

<sup>82</sup>Stephen Neill, *Colonialism and Christian Missions* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1964), 13.

<sup>83</sup>Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced: The Broken Promise of U.S.-Arab Relations: 1820-2001* (New York: Public Affairs Press, 2010), 27.

<sup>84</sup>Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 2.

<sup>85</sup>Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 26.



part of a wider colonial project. They operated in Syria without a “colonial apparatus”.<sup>86</sup> The success of the American missionaries in these areas was mostly in education. Missionaries’ homes became the first schools to teach the gospel in Arabic and the missionaries and their wives became teachers for Christian and civilized manners. The first American college or university outside the United State was the Syrian Protestant College, which opened its doors in 1862. This school, which is known today as the American University in Beirut, is still operating as one of the best schools in the Middle East. For girls’ school, the American Board missionaries opened its first school in the Ottoman land in 1834 and its first women college in 1890.<sup>87</sup> However, education was not the only American success. Other accomplishments in Arabia were medical services and establishing an Arabic printing press. The press, which was inaugurated in Beirut in 1830, printed a Bible translated into Arabic for the first time. Arabic press published encyclopedias and books on American people, the American land, and history, educating the young Arab about America and its struggle for independence. Graduates from American missionaries’ schools and universities also became reflections for American ideals in freedom and personal rights.

In Arabia, the wrath of the abolitionists was directed towards the Muslims who were held responsible for the slave trade in the Red Sea. American and British missionaries were the most active agents against slavery, and wrote to their congregations about the horrors of the savage traders. They even established Christian missions in central Africa to offer havens for fugitive slaves. Yet in colonized areas, the plight of slaves became a messy business for the colonizers and the missionaries. Soon,

<sup>86</sup> Ussama Makdisi, “Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity” *American Historical Review* Vol. 102 Issue 3, (June 1997):680-713.

<sup>87</sup> Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 72.

missionaries became associated with freedom. On the other hand, European colonialism ignored slavery and some like the British, adopted a racial segregation policy to separate the working population from its employers. Rev. Duff MacDonald from the Protestant Universities Mission offered his insight on missionary work and colonialism in Africa: “If the colonial work disappeared, the purely missionary work would be more successful”<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, many missions used the dictum of abolition to legitimize their Christian missions and to pave their evangelization path. Arabian Mission, our case study mission, at its foundation had used the slavery plight to ignite the passion for the mission even though slavery was disappearing from Africa at the time.

However, missionaries’ white- man attitude towards the Arabs was prejudiced and superior. They considered the Muslim faith superstitious. They feared the growing Muslim populations and they regarded them as “the most stubborn enemies of civilization, liberty and truth.”<sup>89</sup> On the other spectrum, the Arabs had their own prejudice against the American missionaries. They feared their influence and their methods to eradicate the Muslim faith. A Protestant missionary published these words in Cairo conference of 1906 on the difficulty of reaching Muslims:

“It is commonly accepted dictum that work amongst Moslems is impossible, if controversy be interdicted. But there is controversy and controversy, and it is here if anywhere that constraining love of Christ should make it possible for us to so present the truth in love that we may win men to Christ.”<sup>90</sup>

By the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Arabs had started to taste the bitterness of colonialism. France occupied Tunis in 1881 and Britain occupied Egypt in 1882. When Theodore Roosevelt visited Arabia in 1910 during a hunting trip with his son, Roosevelt spoke to the students of the American University in Cairo, praising the missionary work and the

<sup>88</sup> Paul Lovejoy, *Transformation in Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 259, 260.

<sup>89</sup> *Methods and Mission Work Among Moslems*, 233.

<sup>90</sup> *Methods and Mission Work Among Moslems*, 30.

civilization work of the British Empire. Although the American president encouraged the Egyptians in their pursuit of independence, he admonished that those seeking freedom should be developed and equipped to govern.<sup>91</sup> Many listeners to President Roosevelt were disappointed in the United States' position towards these new forms of Western spheres of imperialism. Western imperialism became a sensitive threat to the Arab of the Ottoman Empire especially to the Muslim Arabs. Muslim religious leaders and Ottoman officials warned against the growing missionaries' influence in education and considered it another tool in the hand of the colonial power. As a result, the Ottomans passed an education regulation in 1869 to control education in all of the Ottoman lands. However, most of the missionary schools ignored the Ottoman law and continued to teach Christian theology in the colonized lands.<sup>92</sup> Subsidized and protected by the British in Egypt, missionary schools ran the education system.

In Mesopotamia, American missionaries toured the area at the same time that their acquaintances were establishing schools and hospitals in the Levant. Two American Jesuits arrived in Baghdad in 1850, invited by the local Chaldean Patriarch. However, their caravan was robbed twice and they left without establishing a mission.<sup>93</sup> Forty years passed before another American mission ventured into Mesopotamia to establish its own Protestant mission.

American archeologists were also attracted to the Arab antiquity. European archeologists from Britain, France, and Germany preceded the Americans as early as 1808. American archeologists arrived at the scene in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first expedition to Mesopotamia was funded privately by J.P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller

<sup>91</sup> Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 82.

<sup>92</sup> Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 86.

<sup>93</sup> Anthony Shadid, "New American Age, Iraq", *GRANTA*,:223-271,228.



Jr. Unlike other European expeditions, the American efforts were by private individuals and had no diplomatic support.<sup>94</sup> American missionaries on the ground toured possible areas for excavation and wrote about these areas to interested readers in the States. Reading about the charm and the wealth of these sites, American academics soon followed like Charles Eliot Norton of Harvard who established the Archaeological Institute of America and William Rainey Harper from the University of Chicago. Like the policy for education, a permit was required from the Ottoman local authorities to pursue archeological excavation in an area. Nevertheless, bribes to the local authorities facilitated the transitions of many antiquities to European and American museums. In 1874, the Ottomans passed their first law to place the archeological excavation under the administration of the Ministry of Education. Hereafter, the Ministry started tightening the screws on missionaries and archeologists. Local authorities started to require permits for travel and for schools and hospitals as measures to control the work of these individuals.

Besides merchants and travelers, American citizens of all classes started to show interest in Arabia. An article published in the New York “Journal of Commerce” around 1911 noted the importance of the region: “We have from time to time endeavored to make it plain to our readers that since the effective arrest of Russian ambitions in Eastern Asia, the international center of Asiatic politics must be sought in the Persian Gulf.”<sup>95</sup> Simultaneously, the Students’ Christian Association from the University of Michigan published in their circular on their mission to Basra in 1911 that “Arabia is the fulcrum of future politics in Asia.” They noted in the same edition on their hope that” Busrah [sic]

<sup>94</sup>Magnus Thorkell Bernhardtsson, *Reclaiming a Plundered Past: Archaeology and Nation Building in Modern Iraq* (Texas: UT Press, 2008), 33, 50.

<sup>95</sup>*Michigan in Arabia.*

will be a standing monument to the skill and efforts of the American engineers who will soon sail for that city.”<sup>96</sup>

However, after the Revolution of the Young Turks of 1908 and its reforms, a growing sense of nationalism along with secularism and westernization revamped the western infiltration into education and public life.

**“There’s a land long since neglected, there’s a people still rejected”<sup>97</sup>**

In the early of 1889, an American Protestant organization, The (Dutch) Reformed Church of America in New Brunswick, New Jersey, launched the Arabian Mission in three Gulf areas: Basra, Bahrain, and Oman. J. G. Lansing a professor in the New Brunswick Theological Seminary and two students of his: Samuel Zwemer and James Cantine believed in the importance of a mission in Arabia. James Cantine, class 1889, was a graduate of Union College as a civil engineer. Samuel Zwemer, class 1890, was an enthused student for foreign missionary work. Rev. Dr. John G. Lansing, professor of the Old Testament Language and Exegesis in the Seminary was born in Syria to a missionary family. The three zealots, in June 8<sup>th</sup> of 1889, sent out an application to the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America, seeking support for their mission. Albeit that the Board welcomed the proposal, it declined the application due to a debt of \$ 35,000.<sup>98</sup> The Reformed Church of America decided to undertake the mission, after several attempt from the three proposers. The three enthusiasts worked to recruit

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> John G. Lansing (1851-1888) Professor of Old Testament Language at the Seminary of the Reformed Church in New Jersey and a missionary who devoted his life to the Arabian Mission project. He composed this hymn in 1889 inspiring others to launch the Arabian Mission from Lewis R. Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story: In Search of Abraham's Other Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub Co., 1998), 137,138.

<sup>98</sup>, Rev. Alfred DeWitt Mason, *History of the Arabian Mission* (New York: The Board Of Foreign Mission, 1926), 60.

missionaries from the church and to secure funds to lead the missionary educational and medical efforts in Arabia. The main dictum of the mission was:

“The object of the Mission, in accordance of its original plan, is the evangelization of Arabia. Our efforts should be exerted directly among and for Moslems [sic], including the slave population; our main methods are preaching, Bible distribution, itinerating, medical work and school work. Our aim is to occupy the interior of Arabia from the coast as a base“.<sup>99</sup>

Lansing was the inspirer behind the Arabian Mission. Like other Protestants of the period, Lansing and Zwemer believed that the Bible includes promises for the redemption of the Arab, and Islam along with Catholicism will collapse as a preface to the millennial.<sup>100</sup> Lansing expressed his beliefs in a hymn that he composed for the mission, which continued to enthuse missionaries even on the eve of the seventy-five year anniversary of the mission:<sup>101</sup>

There's a land long since neglected  
 There's a people still rejected  
 But of truth and grace elected in His love for them  
 Softer than their night wind's fleeting,  
 Richer than their starry tenting  
 Stronger than their sands protecting,  
 Is His love for them  
 To the host of Islam's leading,  
 For the slave in bondage bleeding  
 To the desert dweller pleading,  
 Bring His Love to them

Unlike other Arabian Mission's posts like Oman and Bahrain, Basra had indigenous Christians like the Assyrian Church of the East, the Chaldean Catholic Church, and the Armenian Apostolic Church. Nevertheless, the mission's main aim in

<sup>99</sup> Lewis R. Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story: In Search of Abraham's Other Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Pub Co., 1998), 143.

<sup>100</sup> Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced*, 20.

<sup>101</sup> Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story*, 137, 138.

Arabia was not to support the existing Christian congregations of the city but to convert the local Muslims. However, other missionaries in the region were invited by the local churches to support and grow the Christian congregations such as the Jesuits of New England and the French Catholic Church. Yet their stations were in Baghdad and Mosul.

James Cantine and Samuel Zwemer sailed to Syria in 1889. They visited cities and ports as possible stations for their mission. Muscat and Bahrain were among the possible mission locations but Basra's strategic location and population accessibility was superior to the other cities on the Persian Gulf. The first station of the Arabian Mission was opened in 1891 with the consent of the trustee at home. The two American missionaries joined by a Syrian Jesuit convert opened a Bible shop in 1892 in the middle of the market and rented a small house for the mission. At the beginning, a promising number of locals showed interest in buying from the Bible shop. Many speculators attributed this interest to people's hunger for books and publications. In addition, the bible shop was a hub for curious young people to practice English or to learn about other places. Nevertheless, zealous Muslims upon realizing the Christian message of this shop rejected the shop and the owners. The Arabic preacher Kamil Abd El Messia, the Syrian convert, passed away after a short mysterious illness.<sup>102</sup> Heather Sharkey mentioned El-Messia as an example of a prosecuted convert, while one of the leading American Presbyterian missionaries of Beirut published a biography on El-Messia as a martyr.<sup>103</sup> The two inexperienced missionaries after losing their only Arabic preacher in the group realized that campaigning in the markets of Basra was dangerous and detrimental. They also realized that to evangelize the locals, they would have to gain their trust and

<sup>102</sup> Mason, *The History of the Arabian Mission*, 70.

<sup>103</sup> Sharkey, *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire*, 67.

acceptance through medical and education services. The two missionaries' inexperience and bigotry is pointedly captured in Zwemer's assertion, during his early years in the region that "The strength of Islam lies in its ignorance, the strength of Christianity, in Christian education."<sup>104</sup>

At the time of their arrival, a European physician by the name of Dr. Eustace was serving the society of Basra and performing medical work for the poor. Dr. Eustace's departure to another medical station presented a golden opportunity for the Arabian Mission to establish medical missionary service. After several attempts to recruit permanent medical personnel, medical missionary service was established modestly. Dr. Emma Worrall and her husband Dr. H. R. Lankford Worrall arrived in Basra in 1895. They opened the dispensary, which was closed for a long time due to the absence of qualified medical personnel. The two missionaries performed medical services in Basra for women and children in 1896. The hospital records showed a growth in the number of patients to 760 Muslim patients, 200 Christian patients and 150 eye operations. In 1899, two events caused more growth in the number of patients and the quality of services: the launches of medical operations for the first time in Basra and the spread of cholera assisted the missionaries and expanded their influence.<sup>105</sup>

Women obtained a strong presence in the missionary work in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Single women, and married women to missionaries, opened the door to new social work. They were "Bible women" who entered local homes, opened schools, and established health clinics for women and children. Dr. Emma Worrall managed to run a Sunday school for girls for several years without Ottoman knowledge or interference. However,

<sup>104</sup> Samuel Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ* (London: Seeley, Service and Co. Limited, 1916), 26.

<sup>105</sup> Mason, *History of the Arabian Mission*, 107.

the first encounter between the American missionaries and the local government was through a demand from the *wali* of Basra, Luis Pasha to the American Consular Agent, for a required permit to perform medical service and for a proof of a medical degree for Dr. Emma Worrall<sup>106</sup>. Though Dr. Lankford Worrall had obtained a Turkish medical permit, his assistant, Emma Worrall had not. Despite the local authorities' hampering, the missionaries continued to find other paths for their mission.

Cantine and Zwemer noticed that English teaching could be a good mechanism for conversation and discourse with young Arab. They tried to open an informal school in Basra soon after their arrival but the Ottoman government refused the missionaries' appeal. Actually, there were many attempts to open schools during the early years of Arabian Mission, but Ottoman authorities rejected any Christian school. The Ottoman authorities closed Fred Barney's thirty-five student school in 1906 due to the lack of proper permit.<sup>107</sup> Rev. Barney, who joined the Arabian Mission in 1903, requested in a letter to the American Consular Agent, Robert J. Orr in Basra to obtain Ottoman permits to reopen the school after running it for more than a year without permits. Ottoman authorities refused the appeal and the American Consul was hesitant to press the issue. He even advised Mr. Barney to close the school permanently.<sup>108</sup> The school was the center for many complaint dispatches from the Arabian Mission to the Ottoman authorities during the years 1896- 1907.<sup>109</sup> Besides the closing of the school, the local authorities confiscated eight hundreds books imported by Rev. Cantine for inspection of

<sup>106</sup> U.S Consulate in Basra. Register of Official Letters Received at the American Consular Agency at Bassorah. 1913-1925. C38.4, 1913 - 1925 MLR Number UD 137, (National Archives, College Park, 1913).

<sup>107</sup> Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story*, 245.

<sup>108</sup> U.S Consulate in Basra. Register of Official Letters Received at the American Consular Agency at Bassorah. 1913-1925. C38.4, 1913 - 1925 MLR Number UD 137, (National Archives, College Park, 1913).

<sup>109</sup> Many of these dispatches were composed by the American Consular Agent in Basra to the *wali* of Basra at the time, Hasan Pasha from U.S Consulate in Basra. Correspondence. 1918-1925. C36., 1918 - 1925 ARC Identifier 1313207 / MLR Number UD 137, National Archives, College Park, 1918.

which only nineteen books were found to be prohibited. Despite the hindrance of the Ottoman authorities, Ottoman officials were careful in their transactions with Western diplomats. In a letter from the *wali* of Basra to the United State Consulate in Baghdad, in response to the grumbles of the American missionaries, the *wali* Mahmoud Pasha assured the American Consul, “we try always to find possible means to facilitate their [missionaries] work.”<sup>110</sup>

The American Consulate in Basra was reluctant at the beginning to interfere with the Ottoman authorities on the missionaries’ behalf, yet it acted as a functionary representing the American subjects involved in the matter. In a letter from the US Consul Agent in Basra, J. Hamilton, dated September 15 1896, addressed to the United States Vice Consul Rudolf Huruer in Baghdad, the Consul asked permission to act on the behalf of the missionaries to request customs franchise privileges and approval for requisitions of hospitals and schools. From the first arrival of the Arabian Mission until 1911, the American Consular Agent in Basra had appealed numerous times to secure custom privileges for the missionaries similar to those enjoyed by other foreign institutes. Catholic missionaries and Protestant missionaries in Baghdad had been rendered customs franchise privileges by the Ottoman authorities since 1864, yet the Consul in Basra predicted conflicts with the local government as the American missionaries had not acquired the *farman* permits for monks and missionaries when they first resided in Basra.<sup>111</sup>

Although American diplomats had supported American missionary work in other regions like China, the American Consulate in Basra did not have the US Government’s

<sup>110</sup> letter from Mahmoud, *wali* of Basra to US consulate in Baghdad, Ibid

<sup>111</sup> US Consulate in Basra. Register of Official Letters Received at the American Consular Agency at Bassorah. 1913-1925. C38.4, 1913 - 1925 MLR Number UD 137, (National Archives, College Park, 1913).

assistance nor the support of the *wali* of Basra.<sup>112</sup> As a result, the American Consulate avoided any encounters with the local authorities. Even after the solidification of the Arabian Mission and the growing American interests in trade with the region, the Consulate remained passive and hesitant to help in the missionaries' encounters with the Ottoman government.

Whether obtaining permits for schools and hospitals or acquiring permissions to sell books or attaining permission to visit other districts, the Arabian Mission became a constant headache for the American Consulate. In a letter dated 1906, the American Consul HP. Chalk rebuked Rev. John Van Ess, who arrived in 1902 on his confrontation with the Ottoman authority. John Van Ess, who later became the most celebrated missionary in the Arabian Mission, displayed the American flag on the house of the mission on the eve of Independence Day.<sup>113</sup> In a letter dispatched by the American Consul to Rev. Van Ess, the Consul called the action of John Van Ess "the most injurious motion." He questioned the Reverend's knowledge of the Ottoman policies regarding the display of any flag except theirs. He cautioned Rev. Van Ess that in the future should the Reverend encounter any problem with the Ottoman authorities, he should advise the Consul on the nature of his problems. On another note, Rev. Van Ess traveled to the Fao district and toured other areas in the region without obtaining the required permission for travel. A similar complaint from the authorities was dispatched to the American Consulate along with the flag issue.

<sup>112</sup>Lawrence Kessler, *The Jiangyin Mission Station: An American Missionary Community in China 1895-1951* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 1996), 10, 15.

<sup>113</sup> US Consulate in Basra. Correspondence. 1918-1925. C36., 1918 - 1925 ARC Identifier 1313207 / MLR Number UD 137, (National Archives, College Park, 1918).



After eight years of preaching to and conversing with the Locals, Samuel Zwemer called for a conference to gather all the missionaries in the Muslim lands. The conference was held in Cairo from April 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> 1906. Many missionaries from the U.S., Egypt, Syria, India, and the Arabian Mission attended the conference<sup>114</sup>. The impulses that pushed for the conference were first, to understand the Muslim missionary challenges, and second to draw the attention of the church to millions in Africa and Asia who might convert to Islam. The published section of this conference cautioned in the introduction: “The day seems near at hand when those millions of idolaters will arrange themselves under the opposing standards of Islam and Christianity.” Discussions during the conference produced recommendations to the missionaries to facilitate their work among the illiterate Muslims. One of these recommendations was to use the novelty of the “magic lantern” to preach the gospel to several hundred audiences. Another suggestion was to use songs to attract followers.<sup>115</sup> But the most valuable suggestion was to establish primary schools to reach and to teach illiterate Muslims.<sup>116</sup>

From the early accounts of missionaries in Arabia like the hymn mentioned above and the enthusiasm to evangelize the Muslim, missionaries were determined to convert the locals, to build churches, and to seek opportunities to establish an evangelical center in Mesopotamia. This attitude towards evangelization of the Arab continued with the first group of missionaries like Zwemer and Cantine, but their Orientalist bigotry overshadowed their efforts. In *Mohammed or Christ*, Zwemer noted that: “most Muslims reside in what some called the “heat belt” (30 degree N. Latitude and 30 degree S. Latitude” [which includes Basra], adding the following statement:

<sup>114</sup> *Methods of Mission Work Among Moslems*, 7.

<sup>115</sup> Magic lantern refers to an early slide projector

<sup>116</sup> *Methods of Mission Work Among Moslems*, 32.

“During the past five hundred years, the people of this belt have added nothing whatever to human advancement. Those natives of the tropic and sub-tropics who have not been under direct European influence have not during that time made a single contribution of the first importance to art, literature, science, manufacture or invention”<sup>117</sup>

Unsurprisingly, this mission gained only one convert in ten years—and even this one was questionable. The British Consul in the East, Sir Albert Wratishaw cited in his memoir that the presumed convert had turned Protestant to seek the protection of foreigners for embezzling the funds of the Baghdad regiment.<sup>118</sup> As the missionaries lowered their evangelical expectations much like other Protestant missionaries in other parts of Arabia, they continued their medical work without direct evangelical encounters. Meanwhile the Arabian Mission did have the help of the locals. These helpers were members of Christian communities in Baghdad, Mosul and other cities in Central Turkey. In 1900, there were ten native helpers and in 1909, the number increased to twenty-five helpers as hospital assistants.<sup>119</sup>

One of the first accomplished projects for the Arabian Mission was the building of a hospital. The Lansing Memorial Hospital opened its doors in 1911 under the supervision of Dr. Arthur Bennett who was a Protestant medical touring missionary. Because there were no other medical facilities in the region for hundreds of miles, Dr. Arthur Bennett handled as many as 18,000 medical treatments in one year.<sup>120</sup> The services of Dr. Bennett and Mrs. Christine Bennett both supported by the Arabian Mission paved the way to the acceptance of the American missionaries among the reluctant locals. Dr. Bennett’s writings to his fellows at the University of Michigan encouraged other students to join his mission. Chase F. Shaw an engineer from the

<sup>117</sup> Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ*, 59.

<sup>118</sup> Albert Charles Wratishaw, *A Consul in the East* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1924), 144.

<sup>119</sup> Mason, *The History of the Arabian Mission*, 113.

<sup>120</sup> *Michigan in Arabia*.

*Student Volunteer Movement* at the University of Michigan arrived in January 17 1911 as part of a medical and industrial mission to Basra. He was one of the volunteers assigned to design and build two steel framed hospitals and a dwelling house for \$ 15,000. Shaw wrote in a student's circular: "Dr. Bennett had established strong ties with the locals." he added: "Dr. Bennett is very friendly with the Turks" and that Shaw himself had made some friends among the Turks. Though the Ottoman authorities had confiscated some of the mission's items; they asked the students to draw some plans for the Ottoman custom house.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, limited resources and only a few missionaries continued to be the hampering issue during the first ten years of the Arabian Mission. A contributor to the Quarterly of *Michigan in Arabia* highlights the importance of such a mission: "It is significant, to say the least. When one learns that in all of Arabia there are less than one – half as many missionaries as there are physicians in Grand Rapids." With communications like these between different American institutions and the missionaries on the ground, new group of missionaries joined the task. Another accomplishment which was realized a couple of years after the construction of the hospital was the construction of the Basra chapel in 1913 with the support and funds of the British community. The British consul and his wife contributed \$2000 toward construction of the building.<sup>122</sup>

In the second decade of the mission, twenty-one regular missionaries joined the mission in Basra and other stations. These missionaries came from different denominations and different professions, nurses, doctors and evangelical workers. Among the new missionaries John Van Ess stood out as an important evangelical worker. A graduate of the Theological Seminary of Princeton, Van Ess arrived in Basra in 1902 to

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<sup>121</sup>*Michigan in Arabia*

<sup>122</sup> Mason. *History of the Arabian Mission*, 152.

replace an established missionary who passed away of smallpox. Unlike the preceding missionaries, Van Ess mastered Arabic and made concrete relations with the sheikhs and the chiefs of the areas' tribes. Van Ess toured the areas surrounding Basra. He was considered the first white man to visit the Ma'dan or the dwellers of the marsh area north of Basra. Armed with a dentistry toolbox and a Kerosene-burning magic lantern, Rev. Van Ess toured the area and pulled aching teeth from many Arabs. Though he did not have any medical training, the locals called him "The doctor", a title he kept until his last days. Besides treating aching teeth, Van Ess's magic lantern images of New York and Paris gathered villages around him. At night, after the long lines of patients ended, Rev. Van Ess addressed his listeners in perfect Arabic, amazing his audiences with slides on the life of the Christ.<sup>123</sup> John Van Ess became the Arabic teacher for all of the missionaries that came after him until the end of the 1940s. He established an Arabic language exam process in Bahrain station for all of the missionaries from the Arabian Mission and even wrote a book on teaching Arabic. John met Dorothy Firman- another missionary from New England in 1909 while taking her Arabic exams in Bahrain. John married Dorothy in 1911 and they moved to Basra.

Dr. Bennet, with his strong ties with the local elites and the Ottoman authorities managed to obtain the required permits to start a missionary school. Nevertheless, the Van Ess couple claimed that Reverend Van Ess traveled to Istanbul with Dr. Bennett to obtain the permits from the Ottoman Sultan himself.<sup>124</sup> John Van Ess along with his

<sup>123</sup> Bergman, H. J." The Diplomatic Missionary: John Van Ess in Iraq." *The Muslim World* 72(1982): 180–196.

<sup>124</sup> It is unclear how John Van Ess obtained the required permits for the school; however, in a letter date October 1970, Dorothy Van Ess wrote to Rev. John Diskin that the negotiation started in 1908. She added: "I'm sure that the insertion at the clause allowing Bible teaching in both schools was from the influence of a personal friend of my husband. Inconsistency was a factor always to be counted on when dealing with the

newly wed wife opened the first American School for boys and the first American School for girls in 1912. Both schools continued to operate with a mutable number of students until 1968.

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Turkish Government.” She concluded her letter with a hint that the U.S. government may have intervened: “Usually an appeal was made to the American Ambassador in Turkey to try to push things through” From the Private collection of Dorothy Van Ess at Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78- M 124, folder 34.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Education in Basra before the High Hope

In 1912, John Van Ess was able to secure the required permits from the Ottoman Sultan to open a missionary school and to teach a Bible class. The school opened its door under the name School of High Hope for boys and in the same year, Dorothy Van Ess inaugurated the School of Women's Hope, which became known later as the American School for Girls. From this point on, and for the purpose of this study, the name High Hope will refer to both schools unless otherwise indicated.

When the American missionaries opened their schools in Basra, education was underperforming in the port as well as in other parts of Mesopotamia. Besides a handful of primary classes each run by a single or couple of teachers, a traditional classroom system called *kuttab* was the main source of education. These attached-to-mosques classes were run by *mullas* or religious teachers who through a monotonous reciting of Quranic phrases, taught students how to read the holy book and how to write basic sentences. For middle and high schools in Basra, there were only two secondary schools and one college for recruiting teachers<sup>125</sup>. Sayyid Mohammad Abdul Hussain, an education inspector in the 1920s, identified in his book *al-Ma`arif fi'l-`Iraq `ala `ahd al-ihtilal* [*Education in Iraq in the Age of Occupation*] many setbacks of the education system in Mesopotamia. The first problem was the inappropriate curriculum where primary schools ran for six years, teaching complicated grammar and impractical sciences. The second problem was the lack of professional teachers, which led to the third problem, the insufficient number of classes and the inadequate number of schools.

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<sup>125</sup> Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State*, 26.

Because of these setbacks, schools suffered from eighty percent drop out. The problem was that by the time students finish 6 to 8 years of primary school, most of them had turned sixteen or seventeen years of age. The knowledge they obtained was not worth the years they'd spent in school as they could not earn a living to support their families with such knowledge. Hence, their fathers would pull them out of school before finishing elementary education.<sup>126</sup> The education system also lacked the government support at levels anywhere near that which private schools enjoyed. Churches and Synagogues funded deficient schools. Christian schools of local Chaldeans, Syrians, and Armenians maintained their own schools, and the Jewish community had one Jewish school, the Alliance Israelite School. Additionally, the general instruction language for all of the schools in Mesopotamia was the Turkish language. In most of the Ottoman Arab – speaking land, religious instruction was compulsory and of Sunni theology. Henceforth, education secluded the non-Muslim population and half of the Basran Muslims who were Shiites.

Although John Van Ess and his wife had boasted on several occasions that the schools of High Hope were the first and the only schools in which the Arabic language was the official language of instruction, there was one school in Basra that used Arabic in classrooms (long before the founding of High Hope). Sulayman Faydi, a nationalist resident of Basra, established the school in 1908. The school lasted one year under Faydi's care because the party of *Union and Entente* had asked Mr. Faydi to change the name of the school from *Tidhkar al Huriya* [Freedom's relic] to *School of Union and Entente*, and make Turkish language the language of instruction. Mr. Faydi rejected the

<sup>126</sup>Muhammad Abdul Hussain, *al-Ma`arif fi'l-`Iraq `ala `ahd al-ihtilal* (Baghdad: almaktaba alassryia, 1922), 16.

language issue and resigned from the administrative position. In its third year, the school lost the majority of students and the Turkish authority converted the school's building to a meeting center for the party of *Union and Entente*.<sup>127</sup>

On the other hand, girls' education was limited to the *kuttab* system for Muslim girls and to religious schools for Christian and Jewish students. Besides reading religious books and writing simple sentences, the majority of girls in Basra did not have any opportunities to attend standard schooling. Even prominent families in Basra would only school their girls up until their teens. Perhaps the biggest concern the missionaries faced in 1912 was not whether to have boys enrolled in the School of High Hope; the biggest concern was whether Muslim families would be willing to send their girls to a foreign Christian school.

### **The Students of High Hope**

At the beginning, High Hope School attracted wealthy and prominent families. There was no other high school for boys and no equal primary education for girls. While the boys' school was a secondary and high school, the girls' education program was a four-year primary school. From the beginning, both programs for boys and girls addressed the issue of language. Under the Ottoman rule, Arabic language was neither the official language in schools nor for government business. When the boys' school of High Hope opened its door to a diverse body of students, it added Turkish and French to its language selection for students. Later on, and because the children of the Sheikh of Muhammara joined the school with their own tutor, Farsi was added.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Faydi, *Mudhakkirāt Sulaymān Fayḍī*, 80.

<sup>128</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Pioneers in the Arab World* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1974), 70.



The children of the latter became the first residents for the annexed boarding department (Figure 5). After two years, the number of students from the early days of the program jumped from 80 to 146 students, with half of the enrolled students being Muslims.<sup>129</sup>



Figure 5 The Van Esses with the first group of High Hope's students. From the Private collection of Dorothy Van Ess at Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78- M 124, folder 34.

The Women's Hope opened several months after the boys' school in a little house in the old section of Basra city, furnished with school equipment and a piano from America. Despite the concerns of Dorothy Van Ess of not having any students, the first day of school brought an Armenian student. Soon the daughters of the Persian Consul followed, and in few weeks, twenty girls- Muslims, Christians, and Jews- were admitted

<sup>129</sup> Mason, *History of the Arabian Mission*, 151.

to the American school.<sup>130</sup> The enrollment grew steadily and within two years, the number rose from 29 to 94 girls (Figures 6 and 7).



Figure 6 Outside playing in the girl's school yard.  
From the Private collection of Dorothy Van Ess at Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78- M 124, folder 34.



Figure 7 Male students of High Hope primary school.  
From the Private collection of Dorothy Van Ess at Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78- M 124, folder 34.

<sup>130</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Pioneers in the Arab World*, 74.

Both schools followed the study courses of primary and high school courses in America. Rather than the class system, the schools employed the “group system” where students were divided into groups according to their level of competency in each subject. The system worked well for the occasions of interrupted schooling of individuals without affecting the progress of the group. Also, it evaluated the natural ability of each student and placed each student at the right level. This system proved to be one of the reasons for the success of the schools. Students who were unable of attend regular classes because of their financial circumstances or because of work responsibility were able to resume their education whenever they could without drastically affecting the progress of other students.

The growth of the two schools in the first year did not mean that the general society embraced the missionary schools. In fact, there was a lot of resistance from the locals to enroll their children in Christian schools, especially the female students. Dorothy Van Ess in her account reflected on the difficulty of establishing evangelical schools in the Basrans society:

“The ancient wall of Muslim tradition, prejudice, and distrust is far more potent barrier than any technical one, and differences of race, creed, language, habit of thoughts and ethical standards make a high wall between western teacher and eastern parent and child.”<sup>131</sup>

Dorothy Van Ess noted that despite the fact that the school attracted many Muslim fathers because of the modern education it offered; many Muslims were alarmed at the growing popularity of a Christian foreign school. A pamphlet was published in Zobeir [Zubair], a town near Basra, warning the populace about the school. The pamphlet asked: “Who puts his child male or female, into the schools of the Protestants, and they commissioned by the chiefs of their sect, to invite them to Christianity?” The pamphlet

<sup>131</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Pioneers in the Arab world*, 69.

continued to inquire: “they declare themselves to be teachers, together with the open assertion that they are missionaries, and among their wiles is companionship with doctors who care for the sick. They give free medicine to the poor to turn the hearts of the people to them..... Is this permissible according to the law of Islam, or not permissible?”

The pamphlet also advances to the question of permission: “It is not permissible to one who believes in God and the last day, that he give over his child, male or female to other teachers than Muslims.” The pamphlet continued to alert the following: “There is a great danger in mixing with them, and danger to our families, and our relatives and our tribes, and danger to the government of our city.”<sup>132</sup> However, such objections did not affect the school’s enrollment of Muslim pupils nor did they reduce the religious rejection. Mrs. Van Ess shared that although Muslim families liked the moral atmosphere of the school, some complained about the Bible studies and some repeatedly requested that Muslim children be excused from these classes.

The rejection of the missionary educational work was overcome by several measures. Dorothy Van Ess and her teachers succeeded in conquering the wall of distrust by establishing relations with their students’ families. Through daily visits to students’ mothers, and teachers’ participation in students’ wedding celebrations, and students’ or siblings’ circumcision festivities, teachers were able to connect to their students’ lives.<sup>133</sup> Another way to interact with the community was a designated day for prayers meeting. On Tuesdays and Thursdays of some years, Dorothy played host to the mothers of her students. The social aspect of the gathering encouraged these women to attend, whether

<sup>132</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Pioneers in the Arab World*, 70, 71.

<sup>133</sup> Mrs. Sulaiman, a student of the American school remembers during a personal interview with the author, that her mother invited Mrs. Sulaiman’s teacher to the family celebration of her young brother’s circumcision.

out of curiosity or out of simple joy. During these visits, Mrs. Van Ess would show her guests some American magazines, discuss with them aspects of American life, and inquire about their exclusion life. Most importantly, Mrs. Van Ess shared with them stories from Scripture, and sometimes she sang to them hymns and songs. The conversations during these visits would be religious, cultural, political, and may have included civility teaching. Dorothy Van Ess reflects in her book *Fatima and her Sisters* on the secluded world of these women that, when she used to entertain her Arabic female guests with American magazines, one of the guests asked her about an illustration of a man's head on a rooster if these creatures do exist in America.<sup>134</sup> Another outreach measure Van Ess and the women missionaries deployed was the distribution of garments and quilts to the needy attendees of prayer meetings.<sup>135</sup> Poor women attended these prayer meetings not just to socialize, but also to display their needs. An added aspect that toned down the rejection to the missionary school was the fact that the Turkish Sultan, who was the Caliph of the Muslims, had approved the teaching of the Bible in the schools of High Hope. This rhetoric was used often by the missionaries to retort the society's objection to any Christian teaching.<sup>136</sup>

After the first successful year of the American School for Girls in Basra, Dorothy Van Ess and her fellow Arabian Mission teachers expanded their school to include after-school programs, like Sunday school and sport clubs. At the beginning, the girl's club project was small and informal. It started outside the school at a poor settlement of mud-huts near the girl's school. On Sundays, after the worship time, Mrs. Dorothy Van Ess

<sup>134</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Fatima and her Sisters*, 107.

<sup>135</sup> *Arabia Neglected*, Report of the Arabian Mission, 1913.

<sup>136</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Pioneers in the Arab World*, 76.



and Miss Rachel Jackson gathered boys and girls for an hour or so for a story time (Figure 8).



Figure 8 A home visit to a mud-hut, Thursday prayer meeting with Mrs. Bilkert and Mrs. Van Ess.

From the Private collection of Dorothy Van Ess at Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78- M 124, folder 34.

The next year, a daily Bible school started at the compound of the boy's school. This program was longer, larger, and it included plays, gymnastics, handwork, and health and habit talks.<sup>137</sup> Dorothy Van Ess explained in her private notes that the missionaries thought that underprivileged girls would benefit much more from a weekday program rather than just a Sunday program. To fill a definite need and to leave an impression on the young girls' lives in the poor settlement, missionaries sought to accommodate and alter their program to fit the needs and the circumstances of these students. Hence, the missionaries decided to run the clubs on other days. Mrs. Van Ess explained, "We could

<sup>137</sup> Dorothy Van Ess Papers, 1905-1975; typed Notes and clips from reports and magazines, 1941-1948. 78-M 124, folder 34. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

work more enthusiastically with poor regged [sic], unhygienic children if we were not dressed in our best Sunday clothes.”<sup>138</sup> In this statement, Van Ess demonstrates the Us/Them distinction between the missionaries and their students. This distinction surfaced throughout Dorothy’s writings about her home-visits with students and their mothers. Edward Said considered these meetings “intimate estrangement”, a quality of Orientalism.<sup>139</sup>

By the end of the first year, the number of girls had increased steadily and the whole community was invited to a play of Queen Esther and King Ahasuerus. The families’ objection to Christian teaching was breaking down as more girls were enrolled in the American school despite the Ottoman hurdles. For the boys’ school, the progress and the growth happened quickly during the first year of the foundation. Several key players in the city had registered their boys in the School of High Hope. Sayyid Talib, the head of the Naqib family, the Sheikh of Muhammara, and Haji Rais, the Prime Minister of the latter sheikh had developed friendship with the missionaries and had conducted many visits to John Van Ess’s house. The five boys of Sheikh Khaza’al of Muhammara were the first borders in the annex building of the school. Several grandsons of Khaza’al came with their uncles and the sons and nephews of Haji Rais, the Prime Minister of the Sheikh, all joined the school in its first year. Dorothy Van Ess noted in her memoir that Sheikh Mubarak of Kuwait who was a mutual friend to the missionaries and to the Sheikh of Muhammara had advised the latter to register his children in the school of High Hope. Also three sons and a grandson of Sayyid Talib Pasha were among the students of the school. Mrs. Van Ess, in the same account, bragged about her excellent relations with

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 248, 260.

Sheikh Mubarak and his wife and noted that the Sheikh had given her an expensive piece of jewelry in gratitude for her care of his friend's children.<sup>140</sup>

Both schools continued to grow either because of their founders' inclusive relations, or because of their outreach methods (Figure 9). However, the biggest stride happened after the British occupation of Basra in 1914.



Figure 9 Different views of the school of High Hope, 1912-1914.

From the Private collection of Dorothy Van Ess at Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78- M 124, folder 34.

<sup>140</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Pioneers in the Arab World*, 72.



## The High Hope Schools during Occupation

British interests in Mesopotamia were derived from its interest in protecting the Indian Ocean commercial route. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain secured several treaties with the sheikhs of the Arabian Peninsula. The mutual benefit was to protect the British ships in the Persian Gulf from piracy in returns for British protections of these mini kingdoms. On the Arabian Peninsula and in the Persian Gulf, the British made treaties with the Sultan of Oman, with the ruler of Bahrain, with the sheikhs of Qatar, and with the sheikhs of Kuwait in which they were established as paramount sheikhs.<sup>141</sup> Bahrain, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar signed piracy treaties with the British, in addition to other regulating agreements preventing the slave trade, land grant to other powers, and regulating the relations of these kingdoms with other powers. In addition to securing the trade route, British interests grew after the discovery of oil in southwest Persia. Other Western powers, including Germany, showed strong interest in the area prior to WWI. The German concession of Baghdad Railway of 1903 had rights over any discovered minerals within 20 kilometers on either side of the track.<sup>142</sup> However, no minerals were discovered in the area before the war, with the exception of South West Persia. Within seven years of the first discovery of substantial quantities of oil in the region, Britain attained a majority share in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1914. As soon as the British announced the war on Turkey, twelve Arab officers in the Turkey army met in John Van Ess's house to discuss the war situation.<sup>143</sup> One of these officers who later became the Prime Minister of Iraq in 1930, Nuri al Saeed, defected from the Turkish

<sup>141</sup> Daivid Cannadines, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 73.

<sup>142</sup> Peter Sluglett, *Britain In Iraq Contriving King and Country 1914-1932* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>143</sup> Bergman, "The Diplomatic Missionary: John Van Ess in Iraq", 184.

army and hid at the Lansing hospital in Basra for more than two weeks.<sup>144</sup> Those Arab officers were willing to fight against Turkey if such would lead to Arab independence. In addition to those officers, five paramount sheikhs also met in Van Ess's house and wrote a statement supporting the Allies.<sup>145</sup>

An Indian Expeditionary Force of 5,500 men was dispatched to Basra as a cautious measure. The British Mesopotamia campaign at the beginning of the war had a distinct objective: to prevent any Ottoman maneuvers in the Persian Gulf and to secure the treaty in place with the emirates of the Persian Gulf. However, facing very little resistance encouraged the British army to move forward to occupy the port. Although the British faced minimal resistance, the locals did not welcome the British with open arms. Sir Percy Cox the Chief Political Officer, noted to his advisers on the eve of the occupation that "The local authorities in Mesopotamia appear to be more hostile than those in Constantinople"<sup>146</sup> Basra was stirred with anti-Allies propaganda. Armed mobs paraded through the port alleys, calling for a holy war against the infidels, the British. Calls from the Shite religious cities for Jihad reached Basra and encouraged insurgency. Many foreigners, including the American missionaries feared the future of their businesses. Upon realizing the danger in the streets, John Van Ess and Dr. Bennett offered the Lansing hospital and the two schools for the accommodation of the wounded Ottoman soldiers. The hospital continued to operate under the Red Crescent as British troops advanced towards the city. When the Ottomans started their withdrawal and deserting the port, looters and gangs occupied the street. On November 21 1914, British troops occupied Basra, captured the *wali* of Basra, took 1,200 prisoners, and restored

<sup>144</sup>Faydi, *Mudhakkirāt Sulaymān Fayḍī*, 393.

<sup>145</sup>Bergman, "The Diplomatic Missionary: John Van Ess in Iraq", 185.

<sup>146</sup>Sluglett, *Britain In Iraq Contriving King and Country 1914-1932*, 8.

order. The Lansing hospital continued, providing services to Arab and Ottoman wounded soldiers under the newly-installed Red Cross.<sup>147</sup> Soon, the paramount sheikhs switched allegiance from Turkey to the British authority, and resistance became limited to some areas on the edge of the marshes. The British Occupied Authority rewarded the friendly sheikhs with confiscated lands and monthly subsidies, assuring them and the population in Basra of the British continuous intentions to remain in the region.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, an additional assurance to the Sheikhs of Muhammara and Kuwait was issued secretly, securing the Sheikhs' control over the date lands on the banks of Shatt-al-Arab, exempting them from taxation, and allowing them to keep the land "forever".<sup>149</sup>

The American consul in Bombay Henry D. Baker attached two clippings from the *Times of India* in a dispatch dated November 25<sup>th</sup> 1914. In one of the clippings, the editorial states: "if one half the stories which have reached Bombay are true, the local Arabs will welcome the arrival of the British forces as a means of relief from intolerable spoliation."<sup>150</sup> On December 14, 1914, the British occupied Qurna, completing their control of the entire area of Shatt al-Arab.

It took almost two years for Britain to add Baghdad to its military campaign. Turkish troops fought the British troops on multiple fronts, but never again in Basra. The Turkish army was defeated in Suez in 1915 and failed to retake Shaiba (south of Basra) in the same year. Encouraged by their winning, the British forces marched to take other cities along the Euphrates. After several setbacks and failing fronts in Kut and Ctesiphon, the British army reached Baghdad in March of 1917. During the occupation of several

<sup>147</sup> Mason, *History of the Arabian Mission*, 174.

<sup>148</sup> Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State*, 55.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>150</sup> Majd, *Iraq in World War I: from Ottoman rule to British conquest*, 91.

cities north of Basra, British subjects in Baghdad were arrested and chased by the Turkish authority, including the British Consul. The American Consul, Brissel became in charge of the British interests.<sup>151</sup> British subjects, women and children, and British Indians escaped Baghdad to Basra. Brissel reported in 1915 on the situation of these subjects: “I have reason to believe that the Turkish Government would permit these people to leave Turkish Arabia via Bassorah [sic].” Some of these deported subjects were receiving pensions from the British government, or were employees of British firms. The American Consul became responsible to provide financial assistance to these people. The deportation continued not only for British subjects and suspected foreigners, but Jews and Protestants were accused of helping the British.<sup>152</sup> After losing several battles around Baghdad, the British gained a political advantage in the form of a rebellion against the Turks by the Sharif of Mecca in 1916. Finally, as 45,000 British rifles advanced towards Baghdad, they met a much smaller Turkish force and occupied the city in March of 1917. It seems from the absence of the American Consul’s reports that the Consul had fled the scene before the British invasion.

Several scenarios were discussed in London about the future of the two *wilayas*, Baghdad and Basra. For Basra, it was decided that the port should be annexed to the British government. As for Baghdad, it was decided that a British protectorate should be established with an Arab representation. Other British officers were convinced that the two *wilayas* had to have the same administration system. Among such officers was Sir Percy Cox, who termed the two provinces “United Mesopotamia”. Until 1917, London

<sup>151</sup> Majd, *Iraq in World War I: from Ottoman rule to British conquest*, 154.

<sup>152</sup> Majd, *Iraq in World War I: from Ottoman rule to British conquest*, 175.

remained firm in its position of keeping Basra and Baghdad separated even with the occupation of Baghdad.<sup>153</sup>

The result of war was a mix of blessings and blight for the local population and for the foreign workers. Some areas, especially the urban locations, experienced improved security, while the security of rural area stayed under the sheikhs' obligations. Other improvements were realized in the health sector and infrastructure. On the other hand, the most valuable blessings for the missionaries were the ensuing protection and the support of the British. Like the American Presbyterian missionaries in India, American missionaries in Basra regarded the British authorities as Protestant protectors and advisers. Samuel Zwemer of the Arabian Mission had welcomed the British intervention in Arabia. In his book *Mohammed or Christ*, Zwemer reminds that “out of the two hundreds and one million Mohammedans [sic], ninety and a half millions are under the British rule or protection, and another seventy-six under other western or Christian governments”. He rejoiced: “Doors which have been almost closed for centuries are now open.”<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, the missionaries welcomed the advances and the new sanitation and medical arrangement which the British installed. Besides the removal of the Ottoman restriction on schools, medical service and travel, the need for English speakers to work with the British opened more doors for the schools of High Hope. Dorothy Van Ess wrote in her report to the American Consul: “With the arrival of the British, any knowledge of English became an asset and the enrolment increased still faster.”<sup>155</sup> Prominent families were interested in teaching their children English;

<sup>153</sup> Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State*, 59.

<sup>154</sup> Zwemer, *Mohammed or Christ*, i, 57.58.

<sup>155</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, Van Ess Papers 1905-1975. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78- M 124, folder 34.

especially after the British occupation, such that their children could secure jobs with the occupier. Another economic benefit for the American missionary schools was the direct British financial support. When the British Civil Administration for the Occupied Territories started new programs in sanitation, irrigation, and public safety, investment in education remained limited. Beside some increase in the number of schools and in the budget of Ministry of Education, the British were only mildly interested in the education of its subjects. However, the British administration's need for literate personnel and bookkeepers enticed the authorities to support the American schools through state annual funding of 5,000 rupee to boys' school and 1,200 rupee for the girls' school.<sup>156</sup> The civil administration also gave John Van Ess, the principal of the boys' school, three conditions in return for the annual fund. The first British condition was to open a class, preparing future teachers, with a minimum of three graduates per year. These graduates soon-to-be-teachers had to be Muslims, and of good ethics. The second condition was to allow the British Education Inspector to monitor the missionary school. The third condition was the most important for the missionaries. This condition gave John Van Ess the control and power to open schools not just in Basra but also in all of the surrounding hinterlands. In general, the British Education Inspector granted financial support to other private schools like Chaldean schools and Jesuits schools. Another important step in Basra's education after the British occupation was the adoption of Arabic as the official language in all of the elementary schools. In addition, English language was enforced in the senior years.

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<sup>156</sup>Ahmed, Ibrahim Khalil, *Tatawwar al- Talim al -watani fi al- Iraq, 1869- 1932*, (Basra: Arab Gulf Studies Publications, 1982), 72.

Rupee is an Indian currency. each rupee was equal to \$35.19 in 1917 in 1925 282.85 is equal to \$100 [http://www.likeforex.com/currency-converter/indian-rupee-inr\\_usd-us-dollar.htm/1917](http://www.likeforex.com/currency-converter/indian-rupee-inr_usd-us-dollar.htm/1917) (accessed 04/10/2013)

However, Van Ess suggested to the British Inspector to teach English along with Arabic right from the first elementary years to attract the local families to the missionary school. As explained before, many families wanted their boys to learn English to secure jobs with the occupation authorities. With British backing, John Van Ess demonstrated a great deal of power among Basrans and among education officials.

Another development in education which demonstrates the influential position of Van Ess after the British occupation was the adoption of the “group system” rather than “class system” for teaching in all of the elementary schools in Basra and the surrounding areas. Hence, John Van Ess became the first Deputy of Education or the Superintendent for the Basra area after the British occupation.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, the Civil Administration for the Occupied Territories did not invest in other high schools and let the schools of High Hope fulfill the high demands.<sup>158</sup>

John Van Ess’s influence on education continued to grow even after the establishment of Iraq under the British Mandate. He continued to act as a deputy for the Director of Education of Iraq. He undertook the task of setting up the school system. He recruited a number of Arab men to work as teachers. He prepared four schools with equipment and staff. The first government school to be opened after the British occupation was in Abul-Khassib, a suburb of Basra. John Van Ess was asked to secure teachers and equipment and to undertake the set-up of the school. However, due to his travel at the time of the inauguration of the school, the headmaster of the school asked Mrs. Van Ess to open the school on her husband’s behalf.<sup>159</sup> It seems that the missionary couple during the first five years of their schools had succeeded in gaining the respect and the trust of

<sup>157</sup> Khalil, *Tatawwar al- Talim al –watani fi al- Iraq*, 72.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid,73.

<sup>159</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Pioneers in the Arab World*, 94.

the locals. The new British authority quickly realized the position of the American missionaries and took advantage of this situation to pursue its own interests.

Mrs. Bell, the adviser for the Chief Political Officer, Sir Percy Cox, arrived in Basra in 1914 to help in drawing maps for the British army in their campaigns towards Baghdad. Mrs. Bell had visited the area before the war as a traveler, and as an archeologist, and had established some ties with Arab tribes. When the British occupied Baghdad, Mrs. Bell was summoned to Baghdad and was given the title the Oriental Secretary. Mrs. Bell met John Van Ess in 1916 and soon recognized his position in Basra. She described the Reverend in a letter to her father: "He is not quite so attractive, but he knows all the Arabs here and is going to put me on to people from whom I can get information, for which I shall be very grateful."<sup>160</sup> On other occasions, Mrs. Bell praised John Van Ess's efforts in keeping the communications running between the occupation authority and the nobles, she wrote:

"He is the most invigorating companion, he knows the place as no one else does, and thanks Heaven he gives an extremely encouraging account of the state of Arab feeling. We really are on the top of the wave."<sup>161</sup>

John Van Ess became the facilitator for important talks between the Arab tribes and their paramount sheikhs and nobles and the British occupation authority. Dorothy Van Ess recalls the night in 1914 when a tribal sheikh visited the Van Ess's house, requesting the Reverend deliver a message to the British forces. The sheikh claimed that the Ottoman had offered him \$125,000 to join his twelve thousand men to fight against the British. The message to the British included a demand for \$200,000 to abandon the

<sup>160</sup> Bell, Gertrude. Gertrude Bell to Sir Hugh Bell 1916-1926 letters. Basra: Newcastle University Library. [http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letter\\_details.php?letter\\_id=218](http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letter_details.php?letter_id=218) (accessed on 08/01/2013).

<sup>161</sup> Bell, Gertrude. Gertrude Bell to Sir Hugh Bell 1916-1926 letters. Basra: Newcastle University Library. [http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letter\\_details.php?letter\\_id=385](http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letter_details.php?letter_id=385) (accessed on 11/07/2013).



Turks and to join the British forces. The message and its rejection were delivered to the British and back to the sheikh at the Van Ess's house. However, there were other brokers in the talks between the British and the Arab notables. Mrs. Van Ess noted that the Van Ess's friend, Sayyid Talib had made advances to the British through his two good friends, Sheikh of Muhammara and Sheikh Mubarak of Kuwait.<sup>162</sup> The American missionary's house became a meeting place for some of these talks. Mrs. Bell wrote in a letter to her father that she was planning to sit at Mr. Van Ess's house when visitors from all of the Arab notables were received.

There were other needed services from the Van Ess family besides being a host for behind-the-doors arrangements. After the occupation, records of the Ottoman government in Basra were destroyed or taken away by the Ottoman officers when they left the port. Part of these records was a list of pension earners. When the British asked the head men of each district to prepare a list of families whom deserved the pension, the list was suspiciously selective. The British Civil administration asked Dorothy Van Ess to investigate the list and to recommend names of needy families as a neutral party, as a philanthropist, and as a language and cultural expert.<sup>163</sup> Mrs. Van Ess completed her house-visits investigation, accompanied by an Arab Christian woman. Her advice to the British on this issue brought with it a goodwill reputation to the mission and to the British. In addition, this operation bestowed another powerful affirmation of the missionaries' growing position as self-appointed civilizing agents among the deprived and the needy.

<sup>162</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Pioneers in the Arab World*, 89.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

It is unclear how the missionaries, especially John Van Ess, became involved in the British-Arab talks. Were his language expertise and his extended ties, the only reasons for his involvement? Was his role based on his neutrality as an American trusted by the locals or a Protestant missionary who believed in the British civilizing mission? Was John Van Ess a solo functionary or a proxy for the American officials at the Department of State? Did Mr. Van Ess contact the State Department during his furlough visit to the United States in 1915? And how did the United States regard the British occupation of Basra?

One of Van Ess's roles in Basra after the British occupation was his language contribution. In addition to his role in education, John wrote the *Spoken Arabic of Mesopotamia* in 1918 at the request of the British military government.<sup>164</sup> He also wrote *Practical Written Arabic*, and his first book went through many printings and was used by the military as well as the oil companies. In addition, the American Government reprinted the second edition of *Spoken Arabic of Mesopotamia* during WWII.<sup>165</sup> During the years of the British occupation, John Van Ess gained a lot of influence with the British authorities. His language expertise, his knowledge of the customs and traditions of the society, and his ties with the most influential nobles of the city secured him a seat in the British talks with the dignitaries of Basra.

Another role of John Van Ess was his official diplomatic role. Amidst the war and due to the departure of all American Consuls and Acting Agents from the region, John Van Ess became a temporary American Consul in Basra from 1914 to July of 1915.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>164</sup> John Van Ess, *Spoken Arabic of Mesopotamia* (University Press, 1917).

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>166</sup> Bergman, H. J. "The Diplomatic Missionary: John Van Ess in Iraq", 185.

Upon his departure for a furlough, John Van Ess appointed another American citizen to be a temporary Consul without waiting for instructions from the State Department.<sup>167</sup>

John Van Ess also became a facilitator for British philanthropic activities and assisted in recruiting locals for British building projects. When Colonel John Ward, the Port Director reclaimed a large tract of land to use as for grain storage, he approached John Van Ess to recruit “coolies” to work as laborers. Rv. Van Ess sent his students to nearby villages to convince the populace to provide laborers. The port housed and fed a considerable number of workers in this project, which later became the first block of Basra Airport.<sup>168</sup>

The British authority continued to favor the school of High Hope in funding. In the British report on education of 1919, the assigned grant for the Protestant school was 14,000 Rs., while Latin Catholic school was granted 13,000 Rs., Shite schools were granted 3,500 Rs., Sunni schools got 2,430 Rs., and Jewish schools 800 Rs.<sup>169</sup> It is worth mentioning that some of the Jewish schools in Baghdad and Basra refused the grant because they did not want the supervision of the British Department of Education.

After the occupation of Baghdad, education became under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance headed by a Palestinian educator. In 1918, and during the British mandate, the Department of Education came under the care of Major H. Bowman.<sup>170</sup> Still, the number of primary schools in all of Mesopotamia did not exceed twenty schools. During the leadership of Bowman, the funding for education increased from

<sup>167</sup> U.S Consulate in Basra. *Correspondence. 1918-1925*. C36., 1918 - 1925 ARC Identifier 1313207 / MLR Number UD 137, National Archives, College Park, 1918.

<sup>168</sup> Bergman, H. J. “The Diplomatic Missionary: John Van Ess in Iraq”, 188.

<sup>169</sup> United Kingdom. “The Creation of Modern Iraq India Office Political and Secret files”, BII-6 microfiche #520-530 & BII-3 microfiche #111-116, 1914-1921.

<sup>170</sup> Abdul Hussain, 12.

35,000 Rs. to 989,250 Rs. Also new elementary and high schools opened under his supervision. For the British officers running the administration of Iraq, education of the subjects was not as essential as their fear of the “instigator for Bolshevism”<sup>171</sup>. However, Bowman did institute some reforms in the educational system in Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra. In an education report prepared by the British Mandate government, the number of schools was doubled in the months between 1918 and 1920. In addition, technical and commercial education was introduced to the system.<sup>172</sup> In the same report, the writer (H. Bowman) indicated that the number of new schools needed was 17 with 40 new positions. The government of England did not want to undertake these additional expenditures, hence was reluctant in expanding the reforms. Upon examining of this report, it needs to be noted that the writer of the report did not include Basra in his recommendation and data analysis. The report’s survey and evaluation on the situation of schools in Mesopotamia included the cities of Baghdad, Kirkuk, Hilla, Kerbala and Mosul. One of few paragraphs on Basra mentioned the opening of a commercial school in 1920 and the Teacher Training School, which was in place before the occupation. In a list of required education deputies in the three major cities of Baghdad, Mosul and Basra, only a need for a clerk to undertake the paperwork in Basra was requested in the report. The report concluded with suggested grants to some schools including all of the Jewish schools, the Islamiyah School in Mosul, and a projected English School in Mosul, similar to Victoria College in Alexandria.<sup>173</sup> In another report prepared by the education Inspector of the Middle Euphrates region in 1920, Sayyid Muhammad Abdul Hussain,

<sup>171</sup>Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country*, 194.

<sup>172</sup>United Kingdom. “The Creation of Modern Iraq India Office Political and Secret files”, (BII-6 microfiche #520-530 & BII-3 microfiche #111-116, 1914-1921), 2.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 8

the writer viewed the situation of education in Iraq with its complicated hurdles and noted that the situation in Basra was different “since it is under the care of Van Ess”.<sup>174</sup>

Examining the British report and the local report, it seems that people as well as the British Occupation Authority trusted John Van Ess and left the responsibility of the district’s education under his leadership. However, more reforms in education happened after 1920 with the support of King Faisal, who increased the number of schools to 90 and also increased the funding for the Department of Education.<sup>175</sup>

When the United States entered the war in 1917 and President Woodrow Wilson gave his speech on national self-determination, an implication appeared that did not agree with the Sykes –Picot agreement of 1916. This secret agreement between the Prime Minister of Britain and the Prime Minister of France divided the Arab lands outside the Arab Peninsula into regions of future British and French control. However, some officials in London supported the concept of self-determination in Syria and Mesopotamia. At the end, British officials ruled out annexation and declared their intentions for a permanent British Protectorate.<sup>176</sup> In Syria, ex- military officers were calling for independence for Iraq and Syria under the leadership of Faisal Bin Hussain. In Basra, there were no ex-Ottoman officers and the elites of Basra did not object to imperial rule. After the return of Sayyid Talib from his exile in India, he reaffirmed his extended influence in the society and among the tribes. Sayyid Talib traveled to Baghdad to assure a seat in the mandate train.<sup>177</sup> The British authority recognized the influential position of Talib but did not

<sup>174</sup> Abdul Hussain, *al-Ma`arif fi'l-`Iraq `ala `ahd al-ihtilal* (Baghdad: almaktaba alassryia, 1922),11.

<sup>175</sup> Abdul Hussain, 22.

<sup>176</sup> Visser, *Basra, the Failed Gulf State*, 62.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 67.

approve of his ways of conducting his business. The national movement did not appear in Basra during this time, and few supported the movement of Faisal Bin Hussain.

In the summer of 1920, an uprising started in most of the occupied territories against the British authority. Inspired by the officers' movement in Syria and ignited by the Shite scholars in the holy cities, tribes and urban civilians joined the uprising in many cities, which continued until autumn of 1920. However, Basra did not join the revolt. Some officials attributed it to Sayyid Talib's instructions to remain passive and some accredited it to a general content with the British rule of Basra. However, the British appreciated Sayyid Talib's advice, and they sent him to Baghdad to assemble a committee of ex-deputies from the Ottoman Parliament of the three *wilayas* Baghdad, Basra and Mosul. The committee's purpose was to organize a general election for a constituent assembly for a new state under the British mandate.<sup>178</sup> Though the landlords and most of the elites in Basra did not join the uprising, some Basrans traveled to Baghdad and supported the national movement. In coffee shops and mosques, calls for independence contrasted with the resolutions of the Divisional Council, which condemned the national movements in Baghdad. After the suppression of the 1920 uprising, the British government decided to apply the Mandate scheme to all of Mesopotamia and to consider Basra a province within the body of the State. In 1921, a British Mandate was in its place under the leadership of the British High Commissioner Sir Percy Cox and an Arab representation. Faisal bin Hussain became the king of Iraq after losing his crown in Syria to a French mandate rule.

Yet in Basra, a different scheme was forming among some of the elites. In April of 1921, a group of elites signed a petition to Sir Percy Cox, asking for a separate

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 68.

administration of Basra under the British direct rule. The petition reasoned that Basra had a unique position within Mesopotamia because of its international commercial ties. The petition added another elevated character to independence— Basra’s connections to many ethnic people. The petition advocated that this multi-cultural aspect of the port could promote advancement faster than the rest of the country, which can add to the reasons for independence. The petition called for a separate state for Basra governed by a local, and assigned by the British government. It also suggested the name of the new entity as the United States of Iraq and Basra.<sup>179</sup> However, the separation movement did not last for a long time. It lacked the support of the British authority and dissolved slowly as the separatists listened to King Faisal’s inauguration speech in Basra. Sayyid Muhammad Abdul Hussain was working as a journalist in Basra at the time. He reported in *Dhikra Faisal Alawwal* [Memorial of Faisal I] that as soon as the separatists heard the eloquent speech of the king, they changed their minds and discarded their original plan.<sup>180</sup>

The schools of High Hope continued to flourish under the leadership of the Van Esses. The Basra station became an education station after the closing of the Lansing hospital in 1917. During the early days of the war, this hospital hosted prisoners of war under the Red Cross flag. Among such prisoners were patients of a deadly typhus. The entire staff of the hospital fell to this epidemic. Dr. Bennett and his wife were both infected and only one survived the ordeal. Christine Iverson Bennett was remembered in a grand funeral by Sir Percy Cox, the High Commissioner who expressed his deep sympathy to the mission and his gratitude to the service of Mrs. Bennett in Basra.<sup>181</sup> After the closing of the hospital due to the lack of medical personnel, no attempt was made to

<sup>179</sup> Faydi, *Mudhakkirāt Sulaymān Fayḍī*, 308.

<sup>180</sup> Muhammad Abdul Hussain, *Dhikra Faisal Alawwal* (Baghdad:Matba’at al-Shàb, 1933), 17.

<sup>181</sup> Mason, *History of the Arabian Mission*, 185.

reopen a civil hospital especially with the opening of a British hospital in Basra, the Maude Hospital.

After the closing of the Lansing hospital, the boys' school of High Hope moved to the premises of the hospital using the funds of \$25,000, which was raised by Van Ess during his furlough visit to the United States. The old building hosted the primary, elementary and boarding rooms. A new building was erected for the upper classes using a generous donation of 1,3000 Rs. from an American contributor. In 1921, there were inquiries from the ex-Sultan of Zanzibar to enroll his sons in the school and the number of boys jumped that year to 200 students. The girls' school had its own share of donations; the Women's Board of Commission granted the school a fund of \$ 25,000 from its Jubilee Fund for land and buildings. In 1921, the girls' school opened a branch school in Ashar, which became a coordinate school with the mother school.<sup>182</sup>

In 1917, an Indian traveler visited Basra and wrote about the compound of the school in Ashar. After describing the area and its public baths, Cursetjee wrote: "leaving this bath-house you come up with the American mission quarters, with their schools, hospital, dispensary, workshops and resident bungalows." He added a word in favor of the American missionaries and their efforts:

"The practical good sense, tact and ready tolerance with which their work is conducted makes them welcome and popular and all who have come in contact with them and experienced their benevolent activities speak of them with high appreciation."<sup>183</sup>

It's fascinating that a traveler would write on the schools and the surrounding buildings as a prominent feature of the city. Moreover, Cursetjee's statement is a good manifestation of the high status that the school and its teachers had reached after the

<sup>182</sup> Ibid,188.

<sup>183</sup> Cursetjee, *The land of the Date*, 157.



British occupation. Cursetjee's paragraph on the well-received missionaries reflects either an English flavor opinion or Cursetjee own findings from the locals.

When the British troops established their Y.M.C.A centers, the American missionaries were encouraged to use the facilities to meet with the troops and the locals. Rv. Van Ess and Dr. Cantine served at the center, and Mr. Pennings was loaned to the "Y" for a year. The services included holding chapel, conducting classes, and advising refugees and travelers. During the advancement of the British troops towards Baghdad, many foreigners and non-Muslim Arabs fled to Basra. Some of these refugees stayed at the "Y" huts and some stayed in a large camp near Basra. The American missionaries handled some of the problems which the refugees brought. They provided shelters and relief. The women missionaries also provided services at the "Y" in forms of relief work and donation campaigns.<sup>184</sup> Some of the American missionaries, because of their strong ties with the locals, facilitated the migration of some refugees, especially the Armenians to the United States. In a letter received by the American Consulate in Basra in January of 1920, John Van Ess asked the Consul to pay for the expenses of two Armenian women to travel to New York City. The reply dispatched by the American Consul Oscar Heizer, stated his willingness to help with the paperwork involved in issuing a visa but expressed the unfeasibility to provide the funds.<sup>185</sup> There was another request from the Arabian Mission to the American Consul to facilitate the travel of a Christian boy to the United States. The letter requested coverage for the expenses of the travel and funding to help with the immigration papers.<sup>186</sup>

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, 190.

<sup>185</sup> U.S Consulate in Basra. *Correspondence. 1918-1925*. C36., 1918 - 1925 ARC Identifier 1313207 / MLR Number UD 137, National Archives, College Park, 1918.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., the letter is hand written to the American Consul S. Dods. Signed but not dated.

### High Hope under the Mandate

Under the first year of King Faisal's monarchy, the number of elementary schools jumped from 88 schools in all of Iraq to 151 schools, and from 8001 students to 15225 students. The number kept growing to 177 schools in 1924 and upwards over the ensuing years. In the girls' school, the numbers were much smaller. In 1921, there were only 3 schools nationwide, which grew to: two schools in Basra, seven in Baghdad and three in Mosul. In 1925 the number jumped to 27 schools, serving 4051 girls.<sup>187</sup> During these early years, other mission schools opened programs for boys and girls. In Baghdad, The Mercy Society of Mary's Daughters opened a Catholic school in 1923 and in the same year the Chaldean School for boys opened in Basra.

Despite the large growth of public schools in Iraq from 21 schools in 1921 to 50 schools in 1925, High Hope still attracted the children of the elites and some of the students from the surrounding villages around town.<sup>188</sup> The school compound had a basketball court and a playground. It offered different kinds of sports, which attracted boys and their families. With the donations from home and grants from the Mandate government, the schools and their influence strengthened the position of the missionaries.

Under the military rule of the British, the mission and the schools started to reap the fruit of twenty years of missionary work in preaching and education. The *Christian Intelligencer and Mission Field* of the Reformed Church noted in its edition of May 24<sup>th</sup> 1922 that the *Arabian Mission* in Basra had made a "splendid record" in its education efforts. It alluded also that other mission schools might be established in Iraq with the

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>188</sup> Hilali, *Tarikh al-ta-lim fi al-iraq fi al-ahd al-intidab al- Barritani 1921-1932*, 105.

help of the British government and with the support of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. The article promised that: “Baghdad should most certainly be an educational center as well as an evangelistic one.” The publication ended the praising article with a quote from a 1921 report of the Arabian Mission: “Education is the axe at the tree of Islam and the two are quite incompatible.”<sup>189</sup> This particular sentence reveals a preconceived view of some of the missionaries at the time. This statement might have been the editor’s opinion, not Van Ess’s own writing, yet, many missionaries believed that the time was right for an evangelizing education center. Soon, another American mission started a girls’ school in Baghdad in 1924, the American School for Girls, teaching sciences, language and ethics.

The Mandate era lasted for 12 years during which the ministry of education like other ministries in the Iraqi government was run by British advisers. However, after the first year of Major Bowman’s assignment, an Iraqi and a British director shared the responsibility of education in the country. The excessive number of students repeating grades, and the large number of drop out students, reflected the poor quality of education during this time. Despite the growth in the number of schools and in the number of teachers and students, only one third of students passed the final exams in the elementary schools in 1921.<sup>190</sup> In 1926, out of the 673 students taking the exam, only 236 passed the finals. However, as the quality of teaching improved and the number of classes increased, the numbers of successful students grew to 1048 out of 1596 participated students.<sup>191</sup>

<sup>189</sup>The Christian Intelligencer and Mission Field, <http://books.google.com/books?id=HG4xAQAAMAAJ&q=basrah#v=snippet&q=basrah&f=false> (accessed on 02/28/2013).

<sup>190</sup> The exam proved a failure when only 40 students passed the exam out of the 150 participants Hilali, Abd Razzaq, *Tarikh al-ta-lim fi al-iraq fi al-ahd al-intidab al- Barritani 1921-1932*, 105.

<sup>191</sup> Paul Monroe, *Report of the Educational inquiry commission* (Baghdad: Government Press, 1932),44.

Despite the prestigious status of Van Ess in Basra and among British officials, Iraqi officials regarded Van Ess a “snobbish priest” and regretted his influence in Basra’s education system. When Tālib Mushtāq received his mission as a Director of Education in Basra in 1924, he asked for the dossier of the American missionary school to prepare for an inspection visit. The office responded that there were no official papers from the school. Mushtāq became annoyed when he learned that the national office of education did not have the American school’s schedule for classes nor had any inspection visit reports from an Iraqi official since the establishment of the office in 1921. Mushtāq surprised Van Ess with a visit and observed one of the classes. Mr. Mushtāq pointed out the fact that the language of teaching was English and that most of the teachers were Americans. He also noted that all of the classes’ signs were in English. When returning to the room of Van Ess, Mushtāq pointed out the lack of inspection visits and Van Ess explained: “Our school is an American school and the government of the United States has not recognized the government of Iraq yet..... for this reason it is not allowed to the education inspectors to visit our school”. Mushtāq responded that “If the Government of the United States does not recognize the Government of Iraq then the Iraqi Government does not recognize its school either.” The Director of Education in Basra left the office of Van Ess with the intention to inform the Director General of the situation of the American school, asking the Education Directorate to inspect all private and foreign schools regularly and to request weekly statistics of the names of students and their attendance. The Education Directorate’s recommendations or rather orders included the above requests and included two additional rules. First, every private school should furnish the Directorate with a list of their instruction books and an original copy of each

of these books; and secondly, all of the classes' signs should be written in Arabic with English translation, provided that the English letters are smaller than the Arabic letters and written underneath the Arabic titles<sup>192</sup>. Soon after, an agreement was signed to prevent further hurdles for the American schools.

The Ministry of Education during the year of 1924 (it was still under the control of a British adviser) signed an agreement with the United States government regarding the American schools in all of Iraq. The agreement stated four important points: first, the American government had the right to adopt any curriculum in its schools; second, the agreement requested a guarantee from the Iraqi government to consult the American government in any changes or reforms in the Iraqi education system; third, the Iraqi government had no right to interfere in religion classes in the missionary schools; and lastly, the Iraqi government had no right to interfere in the adopted curriculum of the American schools such as the starting time of classes or the system of administrations in these schools.<sup>193</sup>

The American schools and other private and foreign schools in Basra continued to operate without much interference from the national government. With the British control of some offices and with the status of experts like John Van Ess, Basrans in general did not mind the inference of such figures nor their obstruction to national sentiment as Talib Mushtāq noted angrily in his memoirs.<sup>194</sup>

It appears that between 1914 and 1931, John Van Ess gained a substantial role in education beyond his school and even beyond Basra. His role as Deputy of Education in Basra and his agreement with the British authority to secure funds for his school and to

<sup>192</sup> Tālib Mushtāq, *Awraq Ayyāmi*, 151, 152, 153.

<sup>193</sup> Hilali, *Tarikh al-ta-lim fi al-iraq fi al-ahd al-intidab al- Barritani 1921-1932*, 250.

<sup>194</sup> Tālib Mushtāq, *Awraq Ayyāmi*, 155.

monopolize the education needs to High Hope School had entitled him a position not many missionaries or diplomats have had in the region. In addition to his role in education, his controversial role in the British talks with the local elites and nobles jolts some legitimate questions. Though there is no concrete evidence that Van Ess's involvement was supported or even initiated by the government of the United States, his one-year furlough in 1915 and the interference of the United States government in the education system in 1924 on behalf of the American missionary schools in Mesopotamia may reveal an evolving interest of the US government.

This chapter also reveals the beginning of national seeds in the department of education. The national education officials did not appreciate the lack of control over the missionary school nor did they approve of the decisive role of John Van Ess in the future of education in the region. However, the protection and support of the British authority, and the legislation action of the American government prevented any obstacles the nationalists may have provoked against the mission and its schools.

## CHAPTER THREE

### High Hope and the National Education System

During the years of the British Mandate, the schools of High Hope continued to flourish with the support of the British officers and the condoning of the Iraqi government. In 1923, the boys' school moved to a new location. At the new place, there was a basketball court and a playground, which both were open not just to the students but also to the whole community. In the same year, the school adopted a policy of recruiting three year short-term teachers from America to teach English and athletics and to act as big brothers to the students. The first short termer was Rev. George Gooslink, who years after, replaced Van Ess and became the school principal. John Van Ess Jr., the son of the two missionaries, joined the school as a short termer after he graduated from Princeton University.

During this period, the students body at both schools was a mixture of elite children and poor villagers. The girls' school maintained a steady number of students. Miss Charlotte Kellien recorded in the mission annual report that Muslim girls still comprised the biggest number of students. She also reported that the Jewish school had lost some students to High Hope and that the missionaries welcomed them. Because the use of Arabic language was not enforced in the Jewish school, and because the school was overcrowded, these students were usually "unsatisfactory pupils" unless the school accepted them in the first grade.<sup>195</sup> In 1929, Mrs. Sophie Suleiman, a student from Basra's Jewish community attended the American school with her four-year-old sister. She remembers the diverse yet harmonious student body: "out of the seventy-five to

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<sup>195</sup> *Neglected Arabia*, 1930, 11.

eighty students of the school, we had thirty- three Christians in the whole school. We also had nine Jewish girls, but most of the students were Muslims.” Mrs. Suleiman remembers her class: “Most of the girls were from rich families and daughters of officials.”<sup>196</sup> This fact is evident in the appearance of these students and the way they were dressed in the school picture of 1929 (Figure 1). On the other hand, the boys’ school with an enrollment of 150 students was majority Chaldean Catholics. When the Chaldean school closed its doors, most of the Christian students wanted to move to High Hope, however, Van Ess did not want to crowd his school with them, fearing that the school would lose its Muslim population. Mr. Gooslink recalls in his letters to his family:

“By now Mr. Van Ess has a pretty black name among the Chaldeans because he won’t accept their children. They try all sorts of things. Some have been attending our church services regularly for some weeks hoping that we will accept them as Protestants, because we do take a certain number of Protestant children, because there aren’t very many of them in Basrah[sic] and they have no school of their own. But the Catholics could very easily have a big school if they knew how to get along with each other.”<sup>197</sup>

It seems that the American missionaries wanted to maintain their Muslim students’ majority. They preserved their numbers through different measures. Besides outreach measures to Muslim families and rejecting Christian students, American missionaries modified their curriculum to appeal to Muslim families. Mrs. Suleiman, the student of High Hope, remembers the classes she attended in 1929: drawing, sewing, music, math, and reading. She implies that she did not have any Christian education during her two years of attending the school, a fact that may conflict with Mrs. Van Ess’s notes on the boys’ school around the same period: “the majority of the students were Muslims, but Bible classes were required and John’s classes in Christian ethics were

<sup>196</sup> From a phone call interview with Mrs. Sophie Suleiman from her house in Beverly Hills date 01/20/2013. Mrs. Suleiman was born in Basra in 1921. She attended the *High Hope* school from 1928 – 1929. She attended the Alliance Jewish School until 1931 then the State public schools. Mrs. Suleiman left Basra in 1958.

<sup>197</sup> George Gosselink, [http://www.gosselink.us/dear\\_folks/appendb.html](http://www.gosselink.us/dear_folks/appendb.html) (accessed 02/16/2013).



among the most popular courses.”<sup>198</sup> Mrs. Suleiman might have forgotten the Christian educational component. However, there are other possible reasons for this disparity. One possibility is that during the years 1929 and 1930, the school did not provide Christian education or the claimed Christian curriculum was not as dominant as advertised.

Another reason might be that the gospel teaching was embedded within the curriculum in such a way that a six year old did not comprehend it as religious education. Lastly one should recall Lewis Scudder’s observation regarding discrepancy in the missionaries’ self-reporting: “a contrast between what missionaries wrote and what they actually did has a fair degree of disparity”.<sup>199</sup> There is no doubt that the missionaries of High Hope did introduce Christian education in the schools; however, when, where, how, and in what quantity is not always clear.

The year 1930 witnessed a hard time economically. The date trade was bad that year.<sup>200</sup> Even though the number of sold scriptures in the Bible shop rose from 229 in 1929 to 1608 in 1930, the missionary schools lost some of their students. The increased number of sold scripture can be explained, as most of the buyers were students from the government schools. The missionaries’ tours continued around the city and in the date-packing stations despite the fruitless results of previous years. However, the economic hard times made the women more responsive to the missionaries invites. The Thursday afternoon praying meeting thrived with attendees. These meetings started usually with “reading” as the attendees call it, which contained hymns singing and Bible reading, followed by serving tea and socializing.<sup>201</sup> It is understandable that the prayer attendees

<sup>198</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Pioneers in the Arab World*, 142.

<sup>199</sup> Scudder, *The Arabian Mission's Story*, 417.

<sup>200</sup> *Arabia Neglected*, 1930.

<sup>201</sup> *Neglected Arabia*, 1931.

and because of their hardship, were attracted to the meetings to socialize and perhaps latch onto some of the charity aid.

The early years of the 1930s witnessed big changes in the region in education and sovereignty. These changes became the largest transformation in the history of Basra and Mesopotamia. In June 1929, the newly elected Labor Party government in London announced its intent to support Iraq's admission to the League of Nations. Under the pressure of the nationalists' persistence to oppose any Anglo Arab treaty, the British government promised to negotiate a new treaty, recognizing Iraq's independence. In 1932 Iraq became a member of the League of Nations and the twenty-five -year British Mandate was terminated after only eleven years.

Just before these historical events swept the region, John Van Ess reported on several achievements of the school. Mr. Van Ess reported in 1931 that because of the limited space, the school had turned away more than 50 students. Students from all over Iraq had attended the High Hope, from Mosul, Nassiriya, Baghdad, and from villages more than twenty miles away. While the number of graduates did not exceed eight students (3 Muslims, 3 Christians, and 2 Jews) a night school began that year, with over a hundred boys and men attending the evening classes of Arabic and English. The instructors for these classes were students of High Hope who worked for two hours each evening, five days a week. Van Ess proudly reported in the same year that the first High Hope graduate to attain a government scholarship to England to study as master mariner a position which formed the nucleus of the future Iraqi navy. In addition, the Bilkert Memorial Library was opened that year at the school compound.<sup>202</sup> It was furnished with

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<sup>202</sup> Henry Bilkert was a missionary who was killed in a Bedouin ambush in 1929.

more than one thousand Arabic books and two hundred English books, some of which were from the library of Rev. John Van Ess.

With the several venues of the missionaries' work, the school of High Hope for Boys reached 421 students, which included full time, part-time, day-school, clubs and evening school attendees.<sup>203</sup> For the regular school, the numbers were 286 students, 205 Muslims, 60 Christians, 19 Jews, and 2 Hindus.<sup>204</sup> John Van Ess taught seven Bible classes daily to different levels at the middle and high school, while other teachers taught another seven religion classes in the elementary school. For the girls' school, that year marked the highest year in graduation rate— five girls attained their diplomas. Three missionaries and five other teachers taught 117 girls, 57 Christians, 44 Muslims and 16 Jews.

As mentioned before, the year 1932 witnessed a great transformation in the political life in general and in the status of the school in particular. The formation of the Iraqi state encouraged two integrated developments for the country which became a two-edged sword against the missionaries. Nationalism and public education transformed the new state. The newly established government undertook a campaign in education reforms. Up until 1932, the school curriculum was borrowed from the West with minimal modification. Whether under the Ottoman control or under the British Mandate, the education system lacked a national curriculum and an independent approach. Upon the realization that education must be the most important force in remolding the newly rising Iraqi nation, demands were made to meet the needs of the country and to address the

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<sup>203</sup> *Neglected Arabia*, 1931.

<sup>204</sup> *Neglected Arabia*, 1932, 9

problems in education.<sup>205</sup> The years following witnessed a series of reforms and laws which seriously jeopardized the wellbeing of the American missionary schools.

The reforms included: the standardization of final exams for senior classes, increasing the number of schools, increasing the quality of teachers, and the standardization of curriculum and of method of teachings in primary, secondary and high schools. The reforms in education became a thorn in High Hope's flesh. Since the professions of law and medicine and the government posts were exclusive for the graduates of the government's schools, the elite children left the private schools and flocked to public education. The new system enforced a unified national exam to be taken during the students' senior year. The system was criticized by Van Ess on several occasions as cruel because of its length (two hours for eight days in the hot summers of Basra).<sup>206</sup> Dr. Latif Jiji, an Iraqi Jew from Basra, reflected on his parents' decision to send him and his brothers to public schools in 1933: "My parents thought that I would have a better chance of admission to the College of Medicine if I was a graduate of a government high school". He stated that government schools taught the materials of the national standardized exam and covered the expected testing questions of the national exam, therefore most Jews in Iraq did not attend Jewish schools.<sup>207</sup> In addition, a strict system of inspection and centralization was enforced on all foreign schools to adhere to the national curriculum. Both foreign and missionary schools lost the flexibility in the methods of teaching and the material covered in their classes.

<sup>205</sup> Akrawi, Matta. "Curriculum Construction in the Public Primary Schools of Iraq in the Light of a Study of the Political, Economic, Social, Hygienic and Educational Conditions and Problems of the Country, with Some Reference to the Education of Teachers" PhD diss. (New York, Columbia University Press, 1943), 2.

<sup>206</sup> John and Dorothy Van Ess. John and Dorothy Van Ess to Allison Van Ess Brewer 1937-1941 letters. Basra. (Cambridge: Mount Holyoke College Library), June 25<sup>th</sup> 1939.

<sup>207</sup> Interview to Latif Jiji at his house in Manhattan, November 21, 2012.

Sati Al-husri, the Director of General Education from 1921-1927, wrote in his published diaries that prior to the formation of the Iraqi national government, only religious and missionary schools acquired financial help from the government. During the early years of the national government, many educators and officials recognized the need to support local private schools rather than supporting missionary schools. Al-husri notes that before taking any measures against the missionary schools, the Council of Ministers issued a decision to consider any non-governmental school a private school if its students were 90% Iraqis. Despite Al-husri's efforts to argue the subordination of western administrated foreign schools to the British authorities, the decision stayed in effect for many years with the support of the British High Commissioner. The decision had another effect as under the national government, financial support depended on the number of students enrolled in each school. Al-husri attributed the decision to the Minister of Finance at the time, Sassoon Haskell who wanted to support the Israelite Alliance School with its outstanding number of students.<sup>208</sup>

However, neither financial support nor curriculum standardization affected the schools of High Hope more than the growth of nationalism among the youth. The enrollment in foreign schools witnessed a decrease not just in Basra but also in Baghdad. The foreign schools lost their appeal as nationalist movements viewed any western representation as an imperial tool. Van Ess expressed the transformation in the public arena in a report he prepared for the American Consul: "The barometer of goodwill towards foreigners was falling in proportion, as the tide of nationalism was rising."<sup>209</sup>

<sup>208</sup> Abū Khaldūn Saṭī' Alhusri, *Mudhakkirātī, fī al-'Irāq 1921-1941* (Beirut: dar al-Tali'ah, 1967), 167.

<sup>209</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, Van Ess Papers 1905-1975. Typed Notes and clips from reports and magazines. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78- M 124, folder 34.

This standardization of the Iraqi education curriculum forced the schools of High Hope to adopt some of the state's courses and its methods of instruction to facilitate the students' passing of the national exam. Dorothy Van Ess in many articles and occasions commended the results of the High Hope schools in the national exam and accredited the continuous popularity of the school to the exam's results. In her books and private notes, she explained the changes in courses and in students body after 1932:

“Since the state school did not appeal to, nor have any room for, boys of the depressed classes, who indeed constitute the great majority of the population, we determined to specialize in taht[sic] group.”<sup>210</sup>

To keep the schools running with satisfactory numbers, the missionaries decided to direct their efforts toward attracting the underprivileged children in villages and settlements. In fact, rural residents constituted one third of the whole population of Iraq.<sup>211</sup> Just outside the compound of the boys' school in Ashar and the girls' school in Basra, small villages of mud or reed houses, which were scattered along the river banks housed the farmers. The owners of these farms were usually wealthy nobles living in the city. However, farmers lived in poor situations. Their huts were made of clay or mud walls, and the roof was made of reeds bundled together to form mats (Figure10). Several huts formed one home and several homes were packed together for support. These huts were a fire hazard and the helpless occupants occasionally lost their homes to fire. There was no running water or electricity and the inhabitants got all of their water needs from the river. Most of the barefoot children who joined the schools of High Hope came from these settlements. The American missionaries provided quilts and blankets to the children

<sup>210</sup> Notes by Dorothy Van Ess on the history of school dated 1953-1954 from the archives of Schlesinger Library.

<sup>211</sup> Paul Monroe, *Report of the Educational inquiry commission*, (Baghdad: Government Press, 1932).

of the clubs who lost everything they owned to successive fires, and to those children who lived in these miserable circumstances.



Figure 10 Students from the mud-hut settlement.

From the Private collection of Dorothy Van Ess at Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78-M 124, folder 34.

The deprived youth did not have a place in the crowded state schools nor were they interested in a formal six years of schooling. Furthermore, the law of 1936 to exempt the school-enrolled students from military services only if they passed the national examination, encouraged more boys to enroll in the missionary school and forced the missionaries to implement the materials covered in the national examination. This law actually increased the enrollment of students and gave the national Department of Education some control over the schools of High Hope.

The school's approach to attracting villagers extended its efforts to social work in rural areas. Mrs. Gooslink who joined the Arabian Mission team in 1922 reported from the girls' school of Ashar in 1935:

“the keynote of our work with the women this year is friendship. Very few of our women, know the meaning of true friendship, a friendship which forgets self, which sees with the eye of love, and thinks always the noblest and best.”

Mrs. Gooslink added that Thursday afternoon gathering attracted more women in winter than summer from among the poor and the middle class.<sup>212</sup> Mr. Gooslink admitted that the mission’s aim is to provide for the boys who live in these temporary settlements, something that they will not get in other places. On the other hand, Rev. Van Ess praised the poor and earnest village boys and acknowledged the effect of the school on the community as these boys continued to enlighten their environment after graduation.

With the continuous low enrollment of elite children in both schools, the missionaries, men and women, focused on addressing the needs of rural areas. Mr. Gooslink reported on the outreach method and results: “it’s interesting to know that as soon as we get one school boy from a certain village, we soon get several more and in many cases their sisters will become interested in the girls club as well”. He appraised the women’s efforts in this aspect through girls clubs and evening classes. Mr. Gooslink even suggested adopting the same means for boys as it opens up for mission “the whole field of rural reconstruction”.

It seems that the women missionaries were more active in social work than their husbands and colleagues. They continued to attract poor girls and women to their praying meetings and clubs. However, socializing with upper and middle classes still comprised part of their weekly activities. Mrs. Van Ess divided the women in the Basrans society into three groups. The first group of women was from the elite families; dressed in European clothes, traveled to Turkey, Egypt, and “acquired a superficial sophistication” they were described as the ones with “a veneer of modern civilization.” The second group

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<sup>212</sup> *Neglected Arabia*, 1935, 7.



was the middle class women, who dressed in black veils, and in the face of rising nationalism, they clung to their faith. The third group was the women of the mat-huts settlement. Van Ess noted that all of the three groups had distinctive characteristics, which could be connected to the Christian message. The first type could be easily approached and could be connected through our shared civilized living manners. “They make charming friends but they are indifferent to religion.” The second type was religious. It understood and respected people of religious convictions. Mrs. Van Ess reported, “We, the missionaries, can connect with such group.” The third group made a direct appeal to the missionaries because of their tremendous needs. The missionaries acknowledged the hunger of these women physically and spiritually. Van Ess concluded in her report that: “with all, our only “technique” is in cultivating our friendship, entering into the joys and sorrows and problems of our friend’s lives, and trying to show them the creative power of Christ’s way of life.”<sup>213</sup> The clubs and the “one-day school” attracted not just illiterate girls but also girls who attended *kuttab* or Quran schools. They came on Fridays, the off day for the Muslim schools, to the clubs to learn sewing, to play games, and to take Bible lessons. During their missionary class, girls learned how to wash their faces and treat their sick eyes, and they learned Bible stories and hymns. Poor girls who came on Wednesdays, took home not just stories and joy, but also received a free tin of clean water.<sup>214</sup>

The girls club became an agency for influencing young girls and their homes. While the number of enrolled students in the High Hope for Girls did not exceed 110 during its best years, the number of enrolled girls in the clubs exceeded two hundred

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<sup>213</sup> *Neglected Arabia*, 1930.

<sup>214</sup> *Neglected Arabia*, 1935.

(table 2). Joining the program were poor girls who could not afford regular school and those who could not spare the time to attend everyday school because of household work or farming responsibilities. They embraced the opportunity to learn how to read in a one-afternoon-a-week program. Girls of the mud-hut settlement from Basra and the suburbs came in generations. Daughters of former students continued the traditions of their mothers. They attended Christmas celebrations, sewing exhibitions and other gatherings.<sup>215</sup> Mrs. Van Ess explained the influence of the club in the lives of the girls: “for that day they have a normal child’s life.” The girls sang, played, recited, sewed, and dramatized (Figure 11). While the clubs were the backbone of the evangelical work of the mission, home visits to upper class women had another effect. Missionaries discussed peace and war, problems of the world in general, and Arabs’ and Jews’ conflicts in particular.<sup>216</sup>



Figure 11 Girls in a sewing club- 1940.

From the Private collection of Dorothy Van Ess at Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78- M 124, folder 34.

<sup>215</sup> While the number of the school enrollment did not exceed 60-80 students, the number for the clubs reached the 250 girls. Arabian Mission. *Neglected Arabia*. (New York: Arabian Mission, 1938, 1940),

<sup>216</sup> *Neglected Arabia*, 1945.

At the beginning, Thursday was the designated day to run the club, which continued for many years until its growth led to expanding the program to Tuesday and Wednesday for older children. The Tuesday club was for ages 7-12 with activities like singing, reciting psalms, reading short Bible stories, and sewing. The Wednesday club had a different program; it focused on organizing games, singing, reciting psalms, and acting out Christmas stories during December of every year. At the end of each program year, the missionaries held a Christmas party with a lantern show which involved singing and giving gifts like oranges and sweets.<sup>217</sup> Girls that attended clubs learned different kinds of stitches, such as sewing a bib or a mat and the girls' production was sold to visitors during exhibitions. The Basra community enjoyed the annual field day or sports day, of these clubs. The school usually held the event in spring and ended it with a picnic out in the desert.<sup>218</sup>

The clubs also introduced girl scouts to the program to teach Arab girls teamwork, which in Van Ess's own words was a needed skill that the girls very much lacked. An English teacher, Joy Dowson from Hills Company, led the scouting program and divided the patrol into four groups with distinctive colors for competing in sports and activities. The main aim for these clubs was not to teach teamwork or sewing, but to reach out to illiterate girls in poor communities outside the school. These activities provided an outlet for poor girls to play, to express their feelings, and to escape from their secluded environments for a couple of hours. This largely explains why the mission did not have

<sup>217</sup> Dorothy Van Ess Papers, 1905-1975; typed Notes and clips from reports and magazines, 1941-1948. 78-M 124, folder 34. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

any problem recruiting girls to attend the growing clubs. Missionaries often reflected on how much these girls enjoyed their time at the clubs (Figure12). The girls even begged to stay after class and to extend the club time longer into the summer.<sup>219</sup> The activities of the clubs comprised most of the education reports for the years 1930-1950s. It became the crown jewels of the Arabian Mission.



Figure 12 Students of the clubs, Dorothy Van Ess is standing on the left- 1949  
From the Private collection of Dorothy Van Ess at Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78- M 124, folder 34.

Not all clubs were for handcrafts and entertaining time (Figure 11). In addition to drama classes and handwork, older girls' clubs taught classes in family life, childcare, and hygiene. Soon, girls learned simple measures to prevent germs from spreading and to keep their eyes free from the bad eye disease that was a big problem during the harvest

<sup>219</sup> Arabian Mission. *Arabia Calling*. (Gerrards Cross: Archive Edition, 1949).

time of dates.<sup>220</sup> Eventually, measures of hygiene were learned and applied not just by the students but also by the students' mothers at the family home.<sup>221</sup> Miss Kellien expressed in the mission report how the students of High Hope were cleaner than others staying home and that the "poorest and most ignorant mothers learn that a clean handkerchief is a necessity on schooldays."<sup>222</sup> Such accounts on hygiene and teaching civilizing manners are another reminder of how Orientalists, identity politics, and social benefit could commingle in complex ways.

### **Nationalism**

During the 1930s the Iraqi education system witnessed the influence of American universities' graduates. These enthusiastic youths brought with them concepts like the PTA and decentralization of education along with new reforms in administration and methods of learning. One of these graduates was Muḥammad Fāḍil al-Jamālī who became Director General of Education in Iraq in 1934, the Inspector General of Education in 1935 and 1936, and the Director General of Public Instruction from 1937-1942. Dr. al-Jamālī requested the help of his professor at Columbia University, Dr. Paul Monroe, to visit Iraq and to chair the Education Survey Committee in 1932. Dr. Monroe and two members of the International Institute of Teachers College arrived in Baghdad that year and started a two-month survey of the government schools, private schools, mission schools, and religious schools in Baghdad, Basra, and regions south and north of Baghdad. The recommended modifications to the Iraqi education system included improvement in the quality of teachers, and increasing the number of schools in rural

<sup>220</sup> It is unknown to the author the type of disease that was spreading during the harvest of dates in Basra.

<sup>221</sup> Arabian Mission, *Arabia Calling*, 1938.

<sup>222</sup> *Neglected Arabia*, 1930, 11.

areas. Dr. Monroe visited the schools of High Hope and approved of the methods of learning with some reservations. Monroe's reservations included not just High Hope but the entire village schools and the schools instructing villagers. His main concern was that the curriculum in these schools was an urban curriculum which did not reflect farming and village life experiences and applications.<sup>223</sup> However, Dr. Monroe acknowledged the necessity of teaching personal health and hygiene, which was part of High Hope's curriculum. The school won the warm approval of Dr. Monroe, as John Van Ess reported to the American Consul.<sup>224</sup>

During the late of 1930s, the rhetoric of nationalists became palpable in Basra. Secretive communist cells attracted young men, Shia clergies became verbally active in their opposition; and teachers and intellectuals inspired by other pan Arab movements controlled the streets and the media. In addition, Syrian, Egyptian and Palestinian teachers occupied most of the teaching positions in the Iraqi government schools because of the shortage in professional Iraqi teachers. Most of these Arab teachers were anti-British and anti-imperialist. They controlled the political discussion inside the classroom and affected the national curriculum by commissioning their books into the Iraqi education system, specifically history lessons.<sup>225</sup> Dr. Latif Jiji remembers the verbal and physical abuse of his Palestinian teacher in government elementary school. Dr. Jiji ascribes the behavior against him to his Jewish heritage.<sup>226</sup> However, such abuse was a norm in most of the schools and among most of the teachers and students regardless of

<sup>223</sup> Paul Monroe, *Report of the Educational inquiry commission*, 27

<sup>224</sup> Ess, Dorothy Van. Van Ess Papers 1905-1975. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78- M 124, folder 34

<sup>225</sup> Simon Reeve, "The teaching of history in Iraq before the Rashid Ali Coup on 1941" *Middle Eastern Studies* 22(1986): 37-51, 40.

<sup>226</sup> Dr. Latif Jiji, interviewed by Israa Alhassani, documenting his early life in Basra, Nov.2012.

ethnicity and background. On the other hand, Dr. Jiji's sister, a student in the American School of Girls in Basra, remembers the kind and fair treatment of her American teachers and contrasts with the cruel behavior of one Syrian math teacher. In general, government schools had different environments and the state teachers directed their classes into different discourse. In 1935, Mr. Gerald Penning replaced Mr. Van Ess during the latter's furlough in the States. Mr. Gerald Penning admitted in the annual report of *Neglected Arabia* that even though the Islamic religion in Basra was less evident than in any other station of the Arabian Mission, the mission colporteur reported a hard time that year at the date gardens. The colporteur was shut out, openly opposed, and even pelted with dates for the first time. That year, religion and politics became tangled in Basra as Mr. G. Penning expressed it, "Islam became a badge of nationalism".<sup>227</sup>

As much as the American missionaries were democrats at heart and believers in freedom and in the rights of self-determination, nationalism meant the rejection of any imperial manifestation even in the form of American missionaries. American missionaries like John Van Ess understood the new challenges and sought ways to overcome this upcoming front. He described the situation:

"Over the last twenty-seven years, three thousand students attended the school only small percentage graduates. Hundreds of them are employed by the state, their children, boys and girls are on higher levels of thinking and living and their children will be of higher still. Before nationalism, we foreign educators must step back, bear its unpleasant features, and be confident of the complete physical and spiritual emancipation that must result."<sup>228</sup>

Most of the missionaries who attended the Cairo conference of 1906 employed the recommendations of the conference, which indicated that the missionaries had to show sympathy to the demands of the young educated locals for social reforms,

<sup>227</sup> *Neglected Arabia*, 1935, 9

<sup>228</sup> *Neglected Arabia*, 1939.



independence, and self-governing goals.<sup>229</sup> Though, most of the missionaries encouraged reforms and respected the people's will of self-determination, the facts on the ground did not serve the aims of the mission. Pan-Arab enthusiasts, teachers and students, influenced by nationalists from Egypt, Syria and Palestine discussed colonialism and imperialism and their tools in classrooms, coffee shops and the media. At the same time, American missionaries were also aware of the growing Pan-Arab calls. In a published collection of essays addressed to the students of High Hope as lectures in religion and ethics class, Reverend Van Ess pointed to the economic and political fruits of Pan-Arab unity:

“You cannot injure, for example the little finger without injuring the thumb. The whole Arab East must be regarded as a unit, each country in it needing every other and each needing the whole. And the basis of this unity must be economic before it is political..... The Arab East would be bound together with economic ties which are far stronger than any other ties. This is the Arab unity which I desire to see, a unity which at the same time feeds the hungry and gives the young men scope for their activities.”<sup>230</sup>

However, American missionaries tried to disassociate themselves from the imperial project and to prove their efforts in encouraging national sentiment. In Basra, Gerald Penning from the Arabian Mission attributed the national movements after the declaration of Iraq as a sovereign state, to the missionary seeds of reforms in the minds of the High Hope's students. He wrote:

“Hundreds of our graduates have been deeply influenced by the atmosphere of the school and the Bible instruction there received. Scattered through the whole of Iraq, they are known for their excellent character and exert a power for good. If not Christians, they are open-minded and are our friends throughout the country. Now Iraq has attained nationhood and all foreign direction is rapidly being withdrawn, many are beginning to realize that liberty is not enough, that character is also required to keep liberty from becoming license, a liability rather than an asset. It is safe to say that in all Iraq there is no one influence that has done and is doing more to produce that kind of character than our school.”<sup>231</sup>

<sup>229</sup> *Methods of mission work among Moslem*, “Work among Illiterate Moslems”,66-67.

<sup>230</sup> John Van Ess, *Living Issues*, 19.

<sup>231</sup> *Arabia Neglected*, 1940.



Following the lead of Turkey and Iran which nationalized their education systems, Iraq implemented similar actions. In a letter from John Van Ess to his daughter Allison in 1940, John expressed his distress due to the expulsion of American missionaries from Iran after the nationalization of Iranian education. In 1940, Iraq followed the example of Turkey and Iran in unifying its education system. A new law was crafted to prohibit primary school students from attending foreign or private schools. The new law also placed some restrictions on teaching certain subjects in secondary school except by teachers appointed by the government. The United States government presented a formal protest against this violation of treaties (the 1926 agreement with Iraq) and commitments. A final draft was reached after the United States' objection and the interference of prominent families on the behalf of the American Missionary family in Basra to continue with the enrollment of students in primary schools as before. However, the schools had to be registered under the name The Protestant Arabic Congregation to have a legalized status.<sup>232</sup> The Iraqi government assured the United States that there was no discrimination against the American schools. After that, the relationships between the Iraqi Education Department and the schools continued after that to be cordial and friendly. Both schools were saved from closing and were left alone without much government intervention.

Missionaries' teaching methods and American teaching material must have instilled American values and new ideas in Iraqi youth in classrooms, in clubs, and in sports activities. In the school field day of 1940, the missionaries made silver medals for the winners and Mrs. Van Ess fastened them with ribbon in national colors.<sup>233</sup>

Nonetheless, the most tangible evidence of the American influence was in the Iraqi

<sup>232</sup> Private papers of Dorothy Van Ess from the Archives of Schlesinger Library.

<sup>233</sup> John and Dorothy Van Ess, John and Dorothy Van Ess to Allison Van Ess Brewer 1937-1941 letters. Basra. (Cambridge: Mount Holyoke College Library), April 30<sup>th</sup> 1940.

youths' political views. Whether in the forming of political opposition in the 1940s against the monarchy or in the forming of national independence forces against British interference, exposure to American concepts of democracy and freedom carved a new way of thinking for Iraqi youth. The American school and the missionaries definitely did not instigate the national zeal of their students but they certainly contributed to the maturity of the students' political thinking, whether boys or girls.

One of the most famous nationalist graduates of the American school in Basra was Yusuf Salman or Comrade Fahd. Though his name was never mentioned by the missionaries' accounts and journals as one of the students who became a prominent figure in Iraqi society, Fahd played an important role in the Iraqi political arena. Fahd Salman was the son of a Christian sweet vender. His family migrated from Mosul to Basra when Fahd was seven years old and attended the Christian Syrian School in Basra in 1908. With the start of WWI and the arrival of the British, Fahd's father admitted Fahd to High Hope to learn English and to secure a job with the occupier. Nevertheless, Fahd left the school after two years because of his father's sickness. He worked with the British authority until he moved to Nassiria to work in a mill.<sup>234</sup> Perhaps his two years of American schooling did not initiate his communist thinking, but American ideas surfaced throughout his political activities. On a poster he hung in Nassiria urging workers to endorse each other to run for parliament in 1932, Fahd wrote under the hammer and the sickle "no taxation without representation."<sup>235</sup> Under Fahd's leadership, the Iraqi Communist Party's main goal was to "support the democratic system through the respect

<sup>234</sup> Nassiria is a city south of Iraq. It's the old location of the Sumerian Ur- home of Abraham.

<sup>235</sup> Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba 'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), 144.

and the implication of the Iraqi Constitution.”<sup>236</sup> In 1947, Fahd, who became the Secretary General of the Iraqi Communist Party, was arrested by the Iraqi government and put on trial for treason. The trial’s verdict of his being sentenced to death was altered under public pressure to life imprisonment. In 1948 and after an uprising by the national forces, Fahd and two members of the party were put back on trial and were sentenced to death again. This time the sentence was carried out and on February 1949; Fahd was hanged with the other two party members in a public square in Baghdad.<sup>237</sup>

Other students of the American school in Basra became activists and Communists, like Zackarya Dicca who left the Communist Party in the thirties and Abdul Hamid Alkhatib who attended another American school in Beirut, the American University.<sup>238</sup> While the missionaries of the American School in Basra neglected to mention Fahd in their annual reports, they included another controversial figure in their files. Behjet Atyia, a classmate of Fahd’s in 1914 acted against Fahd when he became the Chief for the Criminal Investigation Department in Basra during the 1940s.<sup>239</sup>

While the school affected the political orientation of the boys through exposure to new ideas, books and debates, and sporting activities, the clubs for girls influenced different aspects of the lives of the girls. The missionaries realized the importance of these clubs for the wellbeing of the community and for the future of the country. In a 1940 education report of the Arabian Mission, Dorothy Van Ess stated:

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<sup>236</sup> Salem Obeid Alnouman, *Al-hizb al- shuyui al- Iraqi bi kiyadat fahad* (Damascus: al mada Publication Company. 2007),75.

<sup>237</sup> Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963: Capital, Power, and Ideology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 96.

<sup>238</sup> Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba 'thists, and Free Officers*, 66, 68.

<sup>239</sup> Dorothy Van Ess Papers, 1905-1975.

It should be the Mission's opportunity, as nationalism develops and the educated generation emerges, to make the intelligent women of the country conscious of their civic and social obligations, to help them integrate themselves into the corporate life of the community, and to build a better world for their children.<sup>240</sup>

The girls' clubs helped the future women to be mindful of their social obligations, they introduced measures of hygiene and lessons in child care, they called for vaccination awareness, and they prompted literacy campaigns.<sup>241</sup>

As the winds of WWII reached the region, nationalism encountered imperialist powers in several battles. Young Syrians who were anti-colonialism, who were living in Iraq, and who were teaching in the Iraqi schools, increasingly fed the anti-British climate. Nazi propaganda occupied most of the opposition newspapers in the Iraqi political street. They joined the exile leaders of the Palestinian rebellion to stir up the Arab street against the British and their allies, the Jews. At the same time, Zionist cells hid in Baghdad and recruited young Jews. Not to mention the Communist cells who were also active at the time, and who formed the Iraqi Communist Party. On the eve of the WWII, Germany, Italy and Japan had political and economic interests in the Iraqi army and in the Iraqi economy.

When the monarchy in Baghdad was threatened by a pro-Nazi coup by Iraqi army officers in 1941, London responded militarily with a quick occupation of Basra. During the summer months of 1941, pogroms erupted against the Jews in Baghdad and Basra. German propaganda encouraged the discrimination against the Jews especially as the Iraqi Jewry sympathized with the British occupation. In addition, a series of bombings in Baghdad, which was blamed on the Iraqi Jews, and the discovery of a Zionist spy-ring, instigated a violent dispossession of Jewish property. The situation was worse in

<sup>240</sup> Arabian Mission. *Arabia Neglected* (Gerrards Cross: Archive Edition, 1940).

<sup>241</sup> For more information on vaccination campaign see Israa Alhassani, "Gospel teaching" in the Schools of *High Hope: a case study of American education in Basra 1910-1968*.

Baghdad than in Basra, which encouraged many families to flee to Basra and hide with their relatives in the port city. Dr. Latif Jiji remembers these days: “My father’s cousin came from Baghdad with his family and their belongings to hide in our house. Gangs surrounded our house and tried to force themselves inside”. Dr. Latif remembers that neither the British nor the police tried to stop the pogroms. Only his father’s Kurdish helpers stopped the gangs and protected the house and its inhabitants with arms and weapons.”<sup>242</sup> During these horror-filled days, the missionaries tried to continue their classes. Mrs. Kellien, who joined the mission in 1915 remembered these days as tension and uncertainty shadowed the work and the hope of the missionaries. She reported that frantic fathers came to school to pull out their daughters. These fathers did not want any association with foreigners, not even the friendly ones.<sup>243</sup> The coup leaders’ rule did not last more than four months; the British occupiers installed a pro-Allied government which lasted until 1958.

Following this distressful year, the number of students in missionary primary school decreased in 1942 because of the economic situation as the annual report of the mission stated. Some students left school because they could not afford clothing. The mission used to provide garments to the poor but the increased number of needy made it harder for the missionaries as the price of clothing had risen. The fear of association with westerners might have been another reason for the decrease in enrollment. On the other hand, government school students who failed in the national exam for more than one time often joined High Hope in middle School. Despite the hard economic situation and the hostility against the missionaries, the High Hope’s boys presented two plays that year.

<sup>242</sup> Dr. Latif Jiji, interviewed by Israa Alhassani, documenting his early life in Basra, Nov.2012.

<sup>243</sup> *Neglected Arabia*, 1941, 11.

They managed to earn \$150 for the first play which they donated to local charity, while the second play generated \$135 which was donated to the Red Cross.

The shadows of the war had some effects on the mission in other aspects. The missionaries found themselves obliged to contribute to the war efforts. Mrs. Kellien wrote that women missionaries worked as war workers. They visited hospitals and distributed gifts from the Red Cross.<sup>244</sup>Canteen work started in Basra in 1943. Simple prepared food was offered after Sunday service on the lawn of the church. Soon, the number of attendees increased and it was called St. Peter's Church Recreation Hall for men in the service and the seamen. American missionaries served food and cold drinks to men who came to socialize, to read newspapers and to listen to the radio. On Christmas and New Year evenings, a big dinner was provided. The missionaries' homes became hostels for American administration officials. During these years, the Van Ess family was stationed in the US. In January 1942, the State Department commissioned John Van Ess to visit the Arab rulers as a special envoy of the president. The purpose of the trip was to rally the Arabs behind the Allied side or to at least remain neutral in the ongoing war. The trip did not happen due to some "insuperable difficulties."<sup>245</sup> However, the couple stayed in New York City for a whole year, writing and attending conferences for the State Department. Dorothy was also active as executive secretary to the Women's Department of the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America. In 1943, the couple returned to Basra.

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<sup>244</sup> *Neglected Arabia*, 1943.

<sup>245</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Pioneers in the Arab World*, 153.

### **The End of a Mission**

The last twenty years of the Arabian Mission in Basra was marked by three important events which shook the foundation of the schools and shifted the position of the mission: the 1948 War between the Arab and the Jews, the Iraqi Revolution of 1958, and the 1967 War with Israel were the final nails in the coffin of American presence in Basra in the last century.

With the establishment of the State of Israel in Palestine in 1948, the displacement of thousands of Palestinian refugees and the failing of the Arab regimes in providing adequate weapons to their armies in the war, strikes and demonstrations filled the streets of Arab cities including Basra. High Hope's boys and girls participated in these demonstrations. Conducted by the students unions, some of these demonstrations were against the Jews and some were against social injustice. Actually, the first student union in Basra was formed in High Hope with the advice and encouragement of Mr. Gooslink, the Principal of the school.<sup>246</sup> Despite the difficulty of these days, very few missionaries' accounts described the situation of the school and the mission. Even the results of the 1950 law, which empowered the government to deprive any Iraqi Jew of Iraqi citizenship, did not appear in any annual report of the mission. The Schools of High Hope lost all of their Jewish students between 1941 and 1950, yet this fact was not mention in their education reports.

Between 1943 and 1949, John Van Ess spent most of his time writing and receiving guests in his house in Basra. He assigned Mr. Gooslink to take most of his previous responsibilities. During 1943, Van Ess published *Meet The Arab*, a book that was commissioned by the late king of Iraq, King Faisal. According to Van Ess, the King

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<sup>246</sup> *Arabia Calling*, 1949.

met with Van Ess in Basra just before the king's death. He told the Reverend: "You are one of the very very few who have come to this land to give and not to get." According to the Van Ess's account: "the King took the reverend's hand and said to him slowly and seriously: By the milk of your mother, swear to me that you will always tell my people, the truth about themselves."<sup>247</sup> John Van Ess's encounter with the king was not his first. The Van Ess family were guests at the palace in Baghdad more than once. Actually, Dorothy Van Ess had visited the queen of Iraq in 1923 accompanied by Gertrude Bell.<sup>248</sup> On several occasions the two missionaries described the official meetings and the intimate discussions between the king and the American missionary about the welfare of Iraq. John Van Ess wrote the book and several articles about the Arabs in the years following the death of the King, articles like "Personal Side Light on Iraq," "Seven Innings in Mesopotamia," "The Arab Mind," and "A Solution for Palestine."<sup>249</sup> Despite the popularity of the book and the United Nations organizations' recognition of its contributions to the American audience awareness, the book provoked several groups. In Iraq, the book was banned for a while for several reasons: one of these reasons was the phrase "If Mohammed was a prophet, as some historians affirm..." the phrase indicates a doubt of the prophecy of Mohammed; another reasons was because of favorable phrases about Ibn Sa'ud, the ruler of Saudi Arabia, and the rival of the late king of Iraq.<sup>250</sup> *Meet the Arab* has a retorted book by David Baarsum Perley, the secretary of Assyrian National Federation in which the author attacked John Van Ess on the subject of the controversy between Iraq and the Assyrians. Perley accused Van Ess of reviving

<sup>247</sup> *Asia*, April 1942, 229.

<sup>248</sup> Van Ess, *Pioneers in the Arab World*, 119.

<sup>249</sup> These articles were published in *Asia* between 1942- 1943.

<sup>250</sup> Bergman, H. J." *The Diplomatic Missionary: John Van Ess in Iraq*, 193.



“unpleasant facts from the past to upset the present.” He even belittled Van Ess, “as an American Missionary stationed in Basra where he served the Arabs for forty years without making the slightest impression upon them in his teaching of Christianity.”<sup>251</sup> Perley went on with his accusation in regards to Van Ess’s subjectivity to the Arab, he retorted: “when an author permits himself to become super-saturated with a blind admiration for the Arab and Arab viewpoint, he can no longer be disturbed by the activities of such their pro-Fascist leaders.” Perley’s accusation came in response to Van Ess’s reflections on the Assyrian rebellion of 1932 against the Iraqi Army. However, Perley’s book did not affect the popularity of *Meet the Arab* in the States and in Britain.

In 1949, Reverend John Van Ess passed away after a long period of illness. He died in Basra on the eve of his planned departure to the United States for a medical leave. Mr. Van Ess was buried in the mission graveyard next to his son John Van Ess Jr. who died on January 11<sup>th</sup> 1942 because of a tropical disease. Before he died, John Van Ess had accepted a post with the State Department as a special consultant on Near East affairs. After his death, Mrs. Van Ess took the position upon her return to the United States from Iraq.<sup>252</sup> Dorothy Van Ess returned to Basra in 1957 to write her book *Fatima and Her Sisters* about the women and the girls of Basra. Dorothy retired in 1955 and spent her days traveling between Kuwait and Jerusalem.<sup>253</sup> Before she left Basra for the last time, a religion teacher told Mrs. Van Ess upon being asked about the role of Islam in schools:

“A good Arab must be a good Muslim. You see Islam is woven into the very fabric of our history and our society. It is a whole way of life. We religious

<sup>251</sup> David Barsum Perley, *Wither Christian Missions*, (Assyrian International News Agency, 1946), 2.

<sup>252</sup> Bergman, H. J. “The Diplomatic Missionary: John Van Ess in Iraq”, 195.

<sup>253</sup> Dorothy Van Ess, *Fatima and Her Sisters*, 167.

teachers must make it clear that it is not just a historical heritage but it has vitality and validity for the present day.”<sup>254</sup>

After her last trip, Dorothy Van Ess recognized that things had changed forever for education, women, and the lives of Basrans.

After the departure of the Van Ess family, other missionaries stationed in Basra, continued with the same methods that the Van Esses’ had exhibit since 1920s. The girls’ clubs continued to be the highlights of the mission activities in the annual reports of 1956 and 1957. Mrs. Gooslink took over this responsibility after the departure of Mrs. Van Ess. The enrollment of the clubs was around 140 girls. However, the numbers for the girls’ school did not exceed the 140 students. The sewing clubs continued to recruit students for other clubs. In the summer, a daily vacation Bible school registered 52 girls, all from high school students. For the boys’ school, the year marked a high demand for higher education. The report explained that all schools were filled, whether mission or public schools. The report also noted that many students transferred to public schools to be eligible for the new government schools of commerce, craft, and teacher training, as preference was given to students coming from government lower schools. The report also noted the shortage in teachers. Despite the fact that the school for Training Teachers was free of charge, the teachers were obliged to work in government schools until they finished the number of service hours which equaled their training hours. The report acknowledged the challenges in recruiting teachers to the mission school. In addition to the teachers’ obligation to government school, the pension system and the better salaries in government schools attracted most of the teachers to these schools.<sup>255</sup>

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>255</sup> *Arabia Calling*, The annual report of the Arabia Mission of 1957.

The discrepancy between the government and the mission salaries for the teachers posed a real problem for the school in 1956. In addition, the Iraqi government had begun a year earlier with its projects of Village Life Improvement and Adult Education programs. These projects attracted the Iraqi teachers more than any missionary school. That year, the enrollment in the girls' school reached between 82-110 students in four grades under the leadership of Ms. Rachel Jackson. When Ms. Jackson left for furlough, Mrs. Hoogvene took over with the assistance of Sit Zahoorra, an Iraqi Christian. The boys' school continued to operate with manageable numbers and activities, and in that year the basketball team won the championship for southern Iraq.

In 1958, Iraq witnessed the end of an era. An Iraqi officer name Abdul Karim Qasim seized the power in a coup from the Iraqi monarchy and ruled the country until 1963. Again, very little was said about this revolution by the missionaries. In the annual report of the mission of 1960, the report distinguished between the harsh words of the government against imperialism and missionaries alike, and the students of High Hope who remained loyal and friendly to their teachers and administration. In 1960, Mr. and Mrs. Gooslink were the only Protestant missionaries in Basra. Other five missionaries from the United Mission in Iraq were allowed to return to Baghdad after the revolution to serve in the girls' school there. In 1962, the boys' school became part of the United Mission in Iraq, which was centered in Baghdad.

After the revolution, education witnessed tremendous energy. The transformation was not just in the size and number of government schools but in establishing adult classes for men and women in formal education. Change was on its way to the province of Basra and its surrounding rural areas. The schools of High Hope inaugurated a new

building in 1965 for the boys' school. In a published article, a graduate from High Hope gave a speech at the opening ceremonies of the new building. The graduate praised the leadership and the faculty of the school: "I bow my head in respect to Dr. Gooslink and others who denied themselves and left their homeland and came to our country to give us the assistance we so greatly need." He added a statement in remembrance of John Van Ess: "He was the ablest and the wisest educator I have ever met. He taught his students the love of freedom, dependability, and good work which produce good character."<sup>256</sup>

During the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, the American missionary school faced a multi-layered risk. The Arab teachers who worked with the missionaries were concerned with the army's draft and war consequences. On the other hand, the American missionaries feared government reaction against the United States citizens and against any local who worked with them. In addition, the school suffered from limited staff and an absence of English teachers. Closing the girls' school during this time created a vacuum in girls' education that had to be filled by the staff of the boys' school. Mrs. Vi Blacks taught English at High Hope for boys and conducted classes at her home for other students. Soon the missionaries' fears became a reality; on June 7<sup>th</sup> 1967 it was decided to evacuate the missionary families, Bob Blacks and Larry Richard, the business manager of the school of High Hope were escorted by three Iraqi soldiers to the Iranian border.<sup>257</sup> In 1968, the Iraqi government decided to close every private school in the country and to expel all foreign teachers.

A letter by the Joint Committee for the United Mission in Iraq dated March 1970 indicated the termination of the work of the Joint Committee and referred to a protest by

<sup>256</sup> The Church Herald, 17-31.

<sup>257</sup> Ess, Dorothy Van. Van Ess Papers 1905-1975. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 78- M 124, folder 34.

the US Government to restitute the property of the Arabian Mission in Iraq. Despite the termination of the work of the United Missions in Iraq, it seems that this organization kept a close eye on the political events in Iraq. The same letter of 1970 ended with the following paragraph:

“We rejoice at apparent cessation of hostilities in the north of Iraq and the reported agreement between the government and Kurds, providing for local autonomy, and special rights for the Kurdish minority. We hope this may open the way for help at last for the needy villages and refugees in the north.”<sup>258</sup>

The Arabian Mission ended its services in 1974 after celebrating eighty-five years of social, educational, and evangelical work. The Reformed Church of American took this decision as an indication of the futility of such work in the region. The fast progress in education and in the medical field in the stations of the Arabian Mission in the post-revolutionary period weakened the influence and the contributions of the mission’s hospitals and schools. In addition, the evangelical work in the region did not achieve what the mission had hoped for. Other American schools in Iraq faced the same fate as High Hope. All American schools were nationalized after 1968 and handed over with their properties to the Iraqi government. Baghdad College for Boys, which was established by the Jesuits of New England in 1934, still operates today as one of the best government school in Iraq. Baghdad High School for Girls in Mansur, which was established in 1925 by an American educator, continues to graduate girls today. The Iraqi government under the Ba’ath party considered the political challenges it faced and determined that [American schools] “are unable to understand the stage at which our

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid

nation is living, not they can comprehend our national problems and our struggle with imperialism and Zionism, nor they are favorable to our striving and inspirations.”<sup>259</sup>

There are no records on the fate of High Hope schools after 1968. The city lost some of its records during the 1980 Iran-Iraq war and the First Gulf War of 1991. Today the Chaldean Church still operates in Basra even though its congregation has declined. Ethnic and religious conflicts forced the Christian residents to leave the port city. The city lost its ethnic diversity long before the departure of the Arabian Mission. Jewish families left after the pogroms of 1940s, and European and Asian merchants lost their trade privileges in the 1960s. However, until the last day of the school, the majority of High Hope students were still from the date-harvesting settlements, which comprised one of the biggest sections of the population.

This chapter has followed the evolution of the Arabian Mission and its schools during the transitional era of Iraq from a protectorate under the British Mandate to its full independence. This era proved to be challenging to the missionaries and their institutions as they lost the support of their Protestant ally. They faced a series of national education reforms, which swayed the majority of Basra’s students towards public education. Lastly, this era became a transformational epoch for the mission. The missionaries’ decision to appeal to the underprivileged children of nearby settlements evolved High Hope Schools from elite American missionary schools to institutes of social changes. The schools extended their reach via clubs, evening classes, and after school activities. Nevertheless, this epoch did not last and was interrupted by a series of upheavals in which the US government’s disposition affected the outcomes of these mayhems. Naturally, the

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<sup>259</sup> Anthony Shadid. “The American Age, Iraq”, 237.

American missionary schools had to swallow the blades of their government's policies. Almost overnight, American missionaries came to be associated with imperial projects. In addition to survival struggles amidst the imperial intervention, the Arabian Mission lost one of its main leaders. The death of John Van Ess left a vacuum that no other missionary was able to fill. With the departure of the Van Ess family from Basra, the mission was unable to maintain its status in the society.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this case study is not to determine if the American missionaries in Basra were cultural imperialists, nor to determine if they were a vehicle for colonialism steered by the British officials. Many writers, especially Arab historians have already assigned such labels to the Protestant American missionaries of the Arabian Mission. To be sure, the examination of earlier writings of the missionaries in the education reports of the Arabian Mission reveals that the American missionaries had a superior attitude and had a tendency to support Arab subordination to colonial powers. John Van Ess was a key player in the Arabian Mission. His writings in the education reports of the mission and in other theological publications were consistent with Edward Said's definition of Orientalism; Van Ess's thoughts and utterances echo the racial bigotry of many other American missionaries of the time. He demonstrated power in his interactions with the elites of the city and with Iraqi education officials, and he maintained a father-figure image among the young generation of Basrans and even was named the "spiritual father of the youths in all of Basra *liwa* [district]" by an Iraqi educator from the opposition. He culturally distinguished himself as superior to the locals who he educated. In addition, his involvement with Basra's politics and with the power brokers right from the beginning of the mission shadowed his march as an evangelical missionary. Dorothy Van Ess's writings on her part in the civilizing mission of the mud-hut settlements reveal another aspect of Orientalism and cultural prejudice. Nevertheless, this study is in line the efforts of other recent works of new generations of historians, like Ussama Makdisi, who resist simplistically labeling American missionaries as cultural imperialists.<sup>260</sup> In my opinion,

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<sup>260</sup>Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 216.



studies of American missionaries in the Muslim World have exhausted this dimension of inquiry. It is time to examine other aspects of the American-Muslim interaction, and to bring new cases to the table.

For this reason, this case study has explored the institutions and the related discourses on education and religion between an Arab community and a group of American missionaries in one of its earliest encounters in south Iraq. The site of interaction is the Schools of High Hope, which have not been studied before. In addition, this thesis traces the evolution of the Arabian Mission from its beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as an evangelical movement, targeting the Muslims in the region to the dismantling of the mission in late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The mission passed through several challenging periods during its early days and managed to overcome the prejudice and the rejection of Muslims through its medical and education services.

The arrival of the British in 1914 tipped the scale in favor of the American missionaries and opened doors for the mission in politics, economics and religion. The presence of British power enabled American missionaries like John Van Ess and his wife Dorothy Van Ess to employ their expertise and to leverage their prominence in conducting talks with the native nobles and elites of Basra. Furthermore, the British engaged the Schools of High Hope in preparing local empire-serving subjects. During the British Mandate, the American missionaries continued their prominent role in education in the region. John Van Ess became the first Deputy of Education in Basra, inaugurating new schools, assigning teachers, and securing funds for the Schools of High Hope from the mandate government. After Iraq was granted independence in 1932, pan-Arab and national movements swept the region and gave rise to Iraq's national education system.

The Arabian Mission faced a new challenge in keeping the Schools of High Hope viable. The public schools attracted the children of the elites with their exclusive privileges to attend law, medical or engineering schools. Moreover, the education reforms of 1936 threatened the wellbeing of the American schools and the continuation of the mission's exhibition in Basra. However, the missionaries' plan to appeal to the children of the date-harvesters and the students from the temporary mud-hut settlements around the schools proved to be an effective adaptation. These children did not have seats in public schools nor did they have the time and the money to enroll in full-time classes. The American missionaries became social reformers, changing the education demography in the region for years and years, if not forever. Over time, the schools expanded their services to these children to include evening schools and clubs. The girls' clubs became the most influential agencies among the underprivileged groups around Basra. The agencies brought vaccination awareness campaigns, hygiene education, family and childcare instructions, and literacy classes to this class of society. However, the 1940s brought other challenges and frontline issues to the American missionaries. The first political blow to the mission was the 1948 War between the Arabs and Israel. The Arabs loss of Palestine as a consequence of the war, along with the American government's support for Israel, put the American missionaries under new scrutiny. For the first time in Basra, American missionaries were perceived in local media as imperialists and representatives of their government's actions according to a missionary's account. The American missionaries did not regain their prominent status in the years following the 1958 Revolution, and the 1967 War was the last straw; it was a crisis that the Arabian Mission would not survive.

This case study of the Arabian Mission's involvement in Basra is similar to many Protestant missions' experiences in the region; however, a key difference involves chronology. In India, and in Egypt, American missionaries arrived to their established stations after the colonization of these areas. Right from the start of their missions, they were associated with the colonial project. In Syria and in Basra, American missionaries preceded the British and established their presence and purpose with less overt colonial baggage. At the time, America was not an imperial presence in the Middle East like Britain, which gave American missionaries more space and credibility before the full unfolding of the imperial post-colonial upheavals in the Middle East (especially after WWII). However, the experiences in a small city like Basra cannot be simplistically compared to the experiences of the American missionaries in a region like the Levant. In Syria and Lebanon, American missionaries encountered Muslims and Eastern Christians. The Maronite community as a majority in Lebanon distinguishes the region and differentiates it from Basra. Basra, on the other hand, is different from any Arab city in Iraq. Though, it did not have the population, the size, or the centrality of Baghdad, it had the ethnic diversity, water access, and trade connections with India, Europe, and the Americas. The city, whether under the Ottoman domain or under the British Mandate, did not witness a real resistance to foreign intervention. Its maritime connections with Asia, Africa, and Europe, and its trade and political connection with neighboring Iran and the Persian Gulf emirates, gave it a kind of balanced independent disposition toward the wider world. No one axis of influence, locally or geopolitically, dominated. Because of its location and its economic position, the city attracted people from many ethnicities and many religious groups. This specific quality enabled the American missionaries to meld

with other foreign merchants and missions. The existence of an American commercial consulate helped the missionaries establish their mission and Basra's diversity facilitated its acceptance of a Christian mission in the port. Finally, because of its political independence as an Ottoman *wilaya*, Basra did not witness overt national sentiment until it became part of the state of Iraq. Therefore, for more than twenty years the Arabian Mission was able to establish local roots without a strong explicit association with Western imperialism and with minimal direct national resistance. At the same time, and because the power brokers in the city were the local elites and the nobles, the American missionaries were able to secure their position in the port with the assistance of the endorsements of these individuals.

John Van Ess, with his Arabic language expertise and his social skills, carved an effective way for American missionaries to deal with Arabs and Muslims. His influence extended to Protestant missions in the Muslim world and beyond. Van Ess's published papers, books, and lectures in Protestant conferences guided the new reforms in Christian missions and changed the way missionaries wrote about and dealt with Muslims. His writings on the Palestinian issue, and on the independence of Iraq, echoed the missionaries' reforming calls to recruit missionaries who have sensitive appreciation and understanding of the changing currents of political, economic, social, and religious life.<sup>261</sup> His experience and success in education and his presence in the British talks with the locals brought him the attention of his government. He represented his country as a

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<sup>261</sup> Daivda Finney, *Tomorrow's Egypt* (Women's General Missionary Society: Pittsburgh, 1939), 206. Finney records the conclusion of Protestant Mission conference in Madras of 1902, where four qualities of effective missionary were discussed. These qualities were revisited in the Cairo Conference of 1906, where John Van Ess was an active participant. The four qualities for a missionary are: to have experience, to have the capacity to inspire people, to have the ability to be free from racial, cultural and spiritual superiority, and finally to have sensitive appreciation and understanding of the changing currents of political, economic, social, and religious life.

Consul during WWI and was assigned as a Special Envoy to the Middle East during WWII. Lastly, his efforts in educating the children of temporary settlements of date harvesters changed the education demography in Iraq. When the Iraqi government decided to start village literacy campaigns in Basra in the 1950s, many of the employed teachers had been students of High Hope School.

The historiography of the missionaries' work in the Middle East still has many gaps to fill. Most of the missionaries' writing and the historians' studies concentrate on the influence of the missionaries on the societies, which they inhabited. Very few historians have analyzed how these societies impacted the missionaries themselves. The Schools of High Hope evolved over time and transformed not just the young generations of the country, but also transformed the missionaries' attitudes and ideas, as reflected in their writings. Much more could be learned through analysis of the writings of John Van Ess, examining how his perceptions of both his mission and those to be missionized changed over time. Such an inquiry would likely elicit the idea of an evolving encounter with many players involved (missionaries, students, colonial administrators, rural laborers, etc.). It also underlines that influence flowed continuously in all directions and changed in nature with the flux of history.

Undeniably, there was a cultural, religious, and an imperial conversation between the American missionaries and the students of High Hope and their parents during the fifty years of the Arabian Mission's existence in Basra. The outcome of this cross-cultural encounter is neither limited to the handful of converts won by the missionaries nor in the number of attendees at the schools' weekly prayer meetings. These numbers suggest fairly limited, although successful evangelization. But such activities must also

be weighed with other modes of interaction (educational, political, and even medical). In a basic way, those involved were seeking to build cultural bridges between the communities, human constructions with both deep beauty and severe flaws.

The present situation in Basra is not as it was a hundred years ago nor are the Arab-American relations. It is problematic to compare the American presence in the Middle East today with its first encounters as missionaries and diplomats beginning in 1896. However, this study of the Schools of High Hope reminds us that the American-Arab encounter that continues to unfold in Iraq is a complex matter with a deep history; a history neither entirely positive nor negative. But, to end on a hopeful note, we might draw inspiration from those Americans and Basrans of the past who sought to come together out of mutual concern and for mutual benefit, and in so doing enriched life in southern Iraq. While history rarely offers clear lessons for the present, this is certainly a sentiment to build on.

“When we come to a realization that each people needs every other, and that each has something to contribute to the common good, we can begin to build a new world in which the *differences* between us shall constitute a pattern which in its totality shall present a splendid and coordinated picture.”

John Van Ess  
 “Personal Side Lights on Iraq”  
*Asia*, April 1942

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