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Author(s): Peter C. Valenti

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NEW MIDDLE EASTERN REVIEWS

Creating a New Historiography of the Persian Gulf: The Case of Qatar*

The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar

Frederick F. Anscombe

New York, Columbia University Press, 1997, xiv + 270 pp., \$35 / £24, Paperback

ISBN: 978-0231108393

The Ottomans in Qatar: A History of Anglo-Ottoman Conflicts in the Persian Gulf

Studies on Ottoman Diplomatic History XI

Zekeriya Kur'un

Istanbul, Isis Press, 2002, 238 pp., \$25, Paperback

ISBN: 975-4282137

Basra Körfezi'nde Osmanlı- İngiliz Çekişmesi: Katar'da Osmanlılar 1871-1916

Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları VII. Dizi – Sayı 207

Zekeriya Kur'un

Ankara, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 2004, x + 206 pp., TL 12, Paperback

ISBN: 975-1616662

The Emergence of Qatar: The Turbulent Years 1627-1916

H. Rahman

London, Kegan Paul, 2005, xxx + 282 pp., Hardback

ISBN: 071031213X

BY PETER C. VALENTI

Master Teacher, Liberal Studies Program, New York University; e-mail: pv17@nyu.edu

Within the past decade the possibilities for a more thorough understanding of Qatari history have greatly increased. The body of Qatari historiography has been enhanced by several recent publications that have doubled the amount of works available on the country. No longer do researchers have to rely solely on the two foundational works of Qatari history in English, Rosemarie Said Zahlan's *The Creation of Qatar* (1979) and Jill Crystal's *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (1990).¹ A cursory glance at Gulf historiography published in both English and Arabic from the past 25 years will notice that Zahlan, and later Crystal, make up the majority of any citations and references to Qatar.

* I would like to thank Bernard Haykel, Omar Cheta, and the participants in the New York University Graduate Forum in Ottoman Studies, for their comments on drafts of this essay. An early draft of this article was presented at "Historical Continuities, Political Responsibilities: Unsettling Blind-Spots in Ottoman and Turkish Studies," Graduate Student Conference at the City University of New York in May 2007.

¹ Zahlan later added *The Making of the Modern Gulf States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates* in 1989 (updated 1998).

Despite Qatar's small size and tiny population, it is not a country that should be written off as unimportant. Recent developments in Qatar, which witnessed the discovery of immense natural gas fields and the transfer of US military forces from Saudi Arabia to the country, demonstrate that this emirate plays an important role in economic, political and geostrategic spheres. Its experiments in political reforms and its location as the headquarters of former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's *bête noire*, the Arab satellite news channel Al Jazeera, also kept it in the news over the past decade. Contemporary events aside, the history of this peninsula and its ruling family, the Al Thani, over the course of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century are intimately interwoven with developments in neighboring Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. An exploration of Qatar's history can augment the picture we have of the respective Ottoman and British imperial ventures in the Persian Gulf. Given the significance the Qatar peninsula gained in the latter decades of the 19th century within the British-Ottoman rivalry to gain mastery in the Gulf, it represents an interesting case-study in Ottoman history, especially Istanbul's political strategies during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876-1909). Lastly, it can serve as a useful barometer of trends in Gulf historiography.

Regarding these last two points, Frederick F. Anscombe and Zekeriya Kur'un in particular have greatly enhanced what was—until the publication of their works—an extremely limited and unidimensional (British) view of Qatari history. The almost total reliance on British archival records and the adoption of a British narrative (which, for the sake of brevity, will be called the “British method” in this essay), has characterized publications in both English and Arabic.² Thus the overwhelming majority of English- and Arabic-language Gulf historiography over the decades has used no Ottoman sources (or Persian) and this limits the scope and perspectives of the historiography. If the problem at hand in Gulf historiography was just one of integrating alternate source material, then bringing attention to this critique would be sufficient. However, the issue is more than just this point. Despite not having included Ottoman archival material, historians working on the Gulf have made definitive and influential arguments regarding the nature of the Ottoman presence in the Gulf. The resulting Ottoman historiography embodies themes of Ottoman despotic rule, decline and general weakness in the Gulf. Furthermore, utilizing this “British method” encourages the denigration of any claims Ottoman officials made at the time.

These above issues play an important role in our current conceptualization of the role and emergence of the various Arab states along the western rim of the Persian Gulf. The role and impact of the Ottoman period for these states have remained neglected or contested in their respective historiographical traditions. As a general rule, the Ottoman period serves as a perceived obstacle to (pre-existing) national unity or an interruption of the unfolding narrative of rule by a shaykhly family. These characterizations of the Ottomans usually work as vehicles for nationalist historiography. This has also been the case in the historiography of Greater Syria and Egypt, but there nationalist assumptions have increasingly been questioned. This has yet to happen in Gulf historiography.³ As Ulrike Freitag suggested, this is often due

² The preeminent example of this trend in English-language Gulf historiography is John B. Kelly, and a good example in Arabic is Muhammad Hasan 'Aydarus. John B. Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). Muhammad Hasan 'Aydarus, *al-Haya al-Idariya fi Sanjaq al-Ahsa al-Uthmani, 1871-1913* (Abu Dhabi: Dar al-Mutanabbi li-l-Tiba'a wa-l-Nashr, 1992) and *al-Mawqif al-Baritani min al-Wujud al-Uthmani fi al-Ahsa wa-Qatar 'Am 1888: Dirasa Watha'iqiya Khilal al-Murasalat al-Baritaniya* (Abu Dhabi: Dar al-Mutanabbi li-l-Tiba'a wa-l-Nashr, 1992).

³ For an overview of some of these issues, see Youssef M. Choueri, *Arab History and the Nation-State: A Study in Modern Arab Historiography, 1820-1980* (London: Routledge, 1989); Rifaat Ali Abou-el-Haj, “The Social Uses of the Past: Recent Arab Historiography of Ottoman Rule” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 14, No. 2 (1982): pp. 185-201; Ulrike Freitag, “Writing Arab History: The Search for the Nation” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 21, No. 1 (1994): pp. 19-37; Ulrich W. Haarmann, “Ideology and History,

to the state-sponsored nature of historical scholarship in various Arab countries.⁴ However, as Rifaat Ali Abou-el-Haj noted, while there has been a “dearth of Arab scholarly writing on the Ottoman period” it is not entirely accurate to say that the period has been ignored.⁵ What Abou-el-Haj was suggesting in 1982, and what has remained the case since then, is that there are Arab historians (as well as historians writing in English) who do cover the Ottoman period (usually as a section of a larger work) of a given country but do so as a means to contest Ottoman claims over the country in question and likewise to demonstrate the independence and *raison d’être* of its ruling family.

Into this Gulf historiographic quagmire stepped Anscombe, who in 1997 began a revisionist trend with his book *The Ottoman Gulf: The Creation of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar*. This work revolutionized how historians can approach Gulf history. On the heels of Anscombe was Kur un, who in 2002 wrote *The Ottomans in Qatar: A History of Anglo-Ottoman Conflicts in the Persian Gulf*, which was later reworked into a Turkish-language version in 2004 entitled *Basra Körfezin’nde Osmanlı- ngiliz Çeki mesi: Katar’da Osmanlılar 1871-1916* (henceforth cited as *OQ* and *BK*). These two historians have reintroduced the Ottoman empire back into Gulf history, have raised pointed questions over the claims of various actors in the region, and have dealt with the persistent bugbear of Gulf historiography—limited sources—by introducing the rich Ottoman documentary record available at the Ba bakanlık Archive in Istanbul.

Anscombe’s book begins with a rather simple but earthshaking premise: “It is commonly but inaccurately thought that to Britain goes the credit or blame for the modern political organization of the Persian Gulf’s Arab states. That view underestimates the role of Arab leaders, but more importantly completely ignores the role played by the most important regional state in the pre-World War I period, the Ottoman empire.”⁶ Having launched this opening salvo at the current state of the English- and Arabic-language historiography of the Gulf, Anscombe reveals an impressive array of weapons in his arsenal: a wide array of secondary sources, memoirs and chronicles written in Arabic, English, German, Ottoman Turkish and modern Turkish, the standard published collections of British archival material as well as material culled from the archives themselves, and finally—the *coup de grâce*—an integration of Ottoman archival material. When he gives an overview of the limits of primary sources in Gulf historiography in his “Bibliographical Note” at the end of the book, it only serves to underscore the innovative approach he has taken.⁷ While for the purposes of this review essay most of the focus will be on Anscombe’s work on Qatar, the book has a much wider appeal and utility to historians as it also deals with the processes of state-formation in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and furthermore it is equally at home in Ottoman historiography, similar to studies of the Ottoman periphery along the lines of work by Dina Rizk Khoury and Eugene Rogan.⁸

Identity and Alterity: The Arab Image of the Turk from the Abbasids to Modern Egypt” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 20, No. 2 (1988): pp. 175-96.

⁴ I do not suggest a uniformity of views among Arab historians of the Gulf. This is a contested field for a variety of reasons; some historians favor ruling families, while others criticize them. For a useful article that tries to position Arab historians of the Gulf vis-à-vis class and oil wealth, see Assem Dessouki, “Social and Political Dimensions of the Historiography of the Arab Gulf” in *Statecraft in the Middle East: Oil, Historical Memory, and Popular Culture*, edited by Eric Davis and Nicolas Gavrielides (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991): pp. 92-115.

⁵ Abou-el-Haj, “Social Uses of the Past,” p. 185.

⁶ Anscombe, p. 1.

⁷ Anscombe, pp. 245-49.

⁸ Dina Rizk Khoury, *State and Provincial Society in the Ottoman Empire: Mosul, 1540-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Eugene L. Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Anscombe is self-consciously challenging what could be described as—with no sense of exaggeration—the historiography of the “British Gulf.” For example, in the works of one of the foremost historians of pre-oil Gulf history, John B. Kelly, we find a subtext that argues for both a defensive and pre-existing role for the British in the Gulf in the 19th century that the Ottomans were only serving to disrupt. The Ottomans serve as the antagonist, or interruption, in what is otherwise a smooth unfolding of the narrative of a British Gulf. Kelly portrays Britain as the engine of Gulf history, and this is, he believes, her rightful place.⁹ While this attitude of Kelly (echoed by many other scholars in Europe and the US and duplicated by the Arab scholars reliant on their work and the same archival material) is due both to his particular views of the beneficence of British imperialism and to the “British method,” it gives short-shrift not only to the motives, claims and actions of the Ottoman actors in the region but also to the agency of the various Arab figures as independent actors in the narrative. Thus, Anscombe is trying to revise the depiction of Ottomans and Arabs as simply reacting to, or recipients of, British policies in the Gulf. Furthermore, he is careful not to subsume these local Arab actors within an Anglo-Ottoman binary and continually tries to construct a political and narrative space within which their motives and choices can be analyzed. While perhaps it would have enlivened the book to include quoted passages from the material cited so we could get a better view of the thinking and language of the protagonists, it still remains a critical book and a must-read for all Gulf historians.

Much like Anscombe, Kur un’s work (whether *OQ*, *BK*, or indeed any of his other work) is a treasure trove for the Gulf historian. Kur un has amassed a wealth of primary documents which he often quotes *in extenso*. In a manner similar to the way ‘Abd al-‘Aziz M. Mansur’s work brought English-language archival material on Qatar to the attention of researchers working in Arabic,¹⁰ Kur un’s English book can serve as a mine of information for those historians who are not familiar with the Turkish and Ottoman languages and who wish to augment the British (archival) perspective that dominates the historiography. This is Kur un’s explicit purpose for writing the books, as he makes clear in the foreword of *BK*, and is equally apparent in his Arabic-language works.¹¹ In his mission to introduce Ottoman sources into Gulf historiography and bring them to the attention of outside scholars, Kur un is joined by Suhayl Saban, a Turkish scholar and librarian in Saudi Arabia. Even more than Kur un, Saban’s prodigious collection of publications (over 70 at last count, most written in Arabic with the remainder in Turkish) are meant to serve as guides, indices or translations of Ottoman archival material for Arabic-speaking scholars.¹² Due to his familiarity with all the relevant languages as well as the same archival files used by Kur un, Saban is probably one of the only Turkish scholars who can properly evaluate Kur un’s work in the archives, and he uses and has critiqued Kur un’s work,¹³ but is not aware of Anscombe.¹⁴ As part of Kur un

⁹ See his accolades for the British officials who served in the Gulf: Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, p. 837. Anyone who challenges this narrative is taken to task; in a 1975 book review, he chides another scholar for allegedly ignoring the Ottoman challenge to “the ultimate detriment of the British.” See J.B. Kelly, review of *Britain, India and the Turkish Empire, 1853-1882* by Ram Lakhan Shukla in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* Vol. 38, No. 3 (1975): p. 647.

¹⁰ ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Muhammad Mansur, *al-Tatawwur al-Siyasi li-Qatar fi al-Fatra ma bayna 1868-1916 M.* (Kuwait: Manshurat Dhat al-Salasil, 1975).

¹¹ See the bibliography for a list of these works.

¹² While he is not under review in this essay, there are two relevant works by Saban regarding this discussion on Qatar historiography. See Suhayl Saban, “Qatar fi Ihsa’iya ‘Uthmaniya fi Bidayat al-Qarn al-Rabi’ ‘Ashr al-Hijri” *al-Majalla al-‘Arabiya lil-‘Ulum al-Insaniya* Vol. 19, Issue 73 (2001): pp. 133-54; “Tijarat al-Silah fi al-Jazira al-‘Arabiya wa-l-Khalij min Waqi’ Watha’iq al-Arshif al-‘Uthmani (1310-1328 H/1896-1910 M),” *Majallat Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Wataniya* Vol. 10, No. 2 (1465/ 2004-2005): pp. 273-92.

¹³ Suhayl Saban, “Najd wa-l-Ahsa fi al-Hukm al-‘Uthmani li-Zakariya Kurshun,” *Majallat Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Wataniya* Vol. 7, No. 1 (1422/2001): pp. 282-88.

¹⁴ This statement is based on a personal conversation with him in Riyadh in August 2006.

and Saban's academic roles in Turkey and Saudi Arabia respectively, they are intent on bringing up a new generation of Turkish and Arab historians who integrate Ottoman material into Arabian Peninsula and Gulf historiography.

Given the amazing work with archival material that both Anscombe and Kur'un have presented in their work, it should be assumed that historians writing after them would have an even more precisely drawn roadmap for exploration and several new questions to investigate. However, Habibur Rahman's book *The Emergence of Qatar: The Turbulent Years 1627-1916* is not such a work. Even though he lists both Anscombe's and Kur'un's (*OQ*) books in his bibliography and quotes Ottoman documents from Kur'un, he does not at all seem aware of the historiographic innovation that their works represent. In other words, Rahman's book feels like a very literal reading of the British archive. His book is more of a cribbing of the material: it is entirely descriptive and lacks any analysis. What passes for analysis are trite and uncritical reiterations of a quoted primary document,¹⁵ and in general Rahman accepts at face value the assertions of British actors, and their representation of what motivates Qatari shaykhs, as the real and only historical narrative of events.¹⁶ On only one occasion does Rahman engage with a secondary source, and that is to quibble over an author's citation of an article in a treaty.¹⁷ Even though he lists important Arabic chronicles in his bibliography (Ibn Bishr, Ibn Ghannam, and the anonymous *Lam' al-Shihab fi Sirat Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab*)¹⁸ and often reviews events well-covered by these chronicles (especially regarding the Saudis and their impact on Qatar), he only cites them to make pithy statements, such as a descriptive detail about a town.¹⁹ The same is true for his usage of Anscombe, as crucial episodes that Anscombe deals with extensively that would have helped Rahman, such as the Ottoman Hasa Campaign and subsequent administrative reforms of 1871-73, are either taken entirely from British documents or not discussed at all. As a matter of fact, nothing in the text shows any indication that he actually read Anscombe, and his only reference to him is on page xxvi (as an example of a recently published book on Qatar). Kur'un's utility to Rahman is to provide long quotes that Rahman copies without including or reflecting Kur'un's interpretation of events, the context or the thinking and motives of the Ottoman officials being quoted. The Ottoman material is used to corroborate the depiction of events and the narrative as found in the British records. Furthermore, one is hard-pressed to find the justification for the book's subtitle, *The Turbulent Years 1627-1916*, as essentially all the pre-1700 discussion is found in two paragraphs on pages 15-16, and three paragraphs on the Stone Age to Abbasid Caliphate on pages 1-2. The book's time frame really starts from the 1760s, and briefly at that, with the actual historical narrative beginning in the early 1800s. The purpose of using 1627 as a starting date is that it marks an attack by a Portuguese fleet on the Qatar Peninsula, an event which is preserved in the earliest document to mention a place called Qatar—no doubt this, for the author, proves the antiquity and realness of Qatar as an entity. Furthermore, the editing is poor, there is no standard transliteration and there seems to be no logic or utility for many of the pictures included in the book.

Two main themes emerge in Rahman's book: first, Qatar was a preexisting entity on an eventual path to recognized independence, and the British were the ones who realized and helped Qatar's shaykhs achieve this. Secondly, Rahman uses every opportunity to panegyrize the ruling shaykhs of Qatar, for example: "Shaikh Muhammad bin Thani's move from

¹⁵ For examples, see Rahman, pp. 110, 136-37, 163.

¹⁶ For examples, see Rahman, pp. 17-18, 22, 72, 161-62, 178, 186-87.

¹⁷ Rahman, p. 226, note 81.

¹⁸ Various editions and titles are given to these chronicles. 'Uthman ibn Abdullah ibn Bishr, *'Unwan al-Majd fi Tarikh Najd* (Riyadh: Dar al-Habib, 1999); Husayn ibn Ghannam, *Tarikh Najd* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1994); Anon., *Kitab Lam' al-Shihab fi Sirat Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab*, ed. Ahmad Mustafa Abu Hakima (Beirut: Dar al-Thaqafa, 1967).

¹⁹ Rahman, pp. 16, 21-22, 187.

Fuwairat to Doha thus suggests his far sightedness, determination and spirit of adventure. It was in Doha that he laid the foundations of the al-Thani dynasty, which has produced a lineage of able and progressive rulers.”²⁰ It gets better: the reader is not entirely surprised to read about “Shaikh Abdullah’s position as the most important ruler in the region...”²¹ as s/he was prepared for this debatable assertion on page 7 when Rahman wrote “The political system in Qatar was more complex than in other Gulf countries until the conclusion of the Anglo-Qatari Treaty of 1868.” Given Rahman’s position as an employee in the Research & Studies Department of the Diwan Amiri of the Emir of Qatar, he may see his role as something analogous to court historian.

While Kur un’s work is extremely useful and timely, it is also disappointing. Like Rahman’s book but to a greater degree, *The Ottomans in Qatar* is in need of much better editing and standardization of names and transliteration. In this regard, a second edition of the English language book could alleviate these problems. Also, he is remiss in his overview of the secondary literature in both *OQ* and *BK*. Unfortunately, he only refers to Anscombe once and this is a throw-away citation.²² Since he is trying to (re)assert Ottoman claims over the Gulf, and Qatar specifically, against the tenor of all other Gulf historiography (taken up later in this essay), the near-absence of any English or Arabic secondary literature in the bibliography, and the choice not to address or debate any of the claims of the secondary literature in the body of his books, suggests that he views all their attendant claims as irrelevant. Yet if his purpose is to challenge the traditional Anglocentric historiography, then he needs to display more awareness of it and his short bibliography needs to be revamped. It would serve his purposes to address key arguments made by influential Gulf historians, at the very least Kelly, and counterbalance (point by point) the British archival record’s claims of weak Ottoman administration and control—and hence weak sovereignty—over Qatar, with the large body of Ottoman records which arguably demonstrates the reverse.

His lack of awareness of the secondary literature weakens his arguments elsewhere. He comments in *OQ* on page 32 that there is little information on the Ottoman conquest and activities in the Gulf during the 1500s (conquests which are crucial to the “legal” justification of long-term Ottoman rule over the region), yet this topic was quite well covered in various works by Salih Özbaran in both Turkish and English,²³ Jon E. Mandaville, using Ottoman sources,²⁴ in an article by Abdul Aziz M. Awad,²⁵ and in various works in Arabic.²⁶

²⁰ Rahman, p. 82.

²¹ Rahman, p. 227.

²² Kur un, *OQ*, p. 164; *BK*, p. 182.

²³ Özbaran has many possible works that could have been used by Kur un (up to the publication of his *BK* in 2004), and what follows is a brief list; Kur un only cites the second. Salih Özbaran, *The Ottoman Turks and the Portuguese in the Persian Gulf (1534-1581)* (London: University of London, 1969); “XVI. Yüzyılda Basra Körfezi Sahillerinde Osmanlılar. Basra Beylerbeyli inin Kurulu u,” *İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Tarih Dergisi*, sayı 25 (1971): pp. 53-57; *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu ve Hindistan Yolu: Onaltıncı Yüzyılda Ticaret Yolları Üzerinde Türk-Portekiz Rekabet ve İlişkileri* (İstanbul: Edebiyat Fakültesi Basımevi, 1978); “Two Letters of Dom Alvaro de Noronha from Hormuz: The Turkish Activities along the Coast of Arabia, 1550-1552,” *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi* Vol. 9 (1978): pp. 241-92; *The Importance of the Turkish Archives for the History of Arabia in the XVIth Century, with Particular Reference to the Beylerbeyliks of the Yemen and Lahsa* (İstanbul: n.p., 1979); “A Note on the Ottoman Administration in Arabia in the Sixteenth Century,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1984-85): pp. 93-99; *The Ottoman Response to European Expansion: Studies on Ottoman-Portuguese Relations in the Indian Ocean and Ottoman Administration in the Arab Lands during the Sixteenth Century* (İstanbul: Isis Press, 1994); *Some Remarks on Provincial Organization of the Arab Lands in the Time of Süleyman the Magnificent* (İstanbul: n.p., 1990); *Yemen’den Basra’ya Sınırdaki Osmanlı* (İstanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2004).

²⁴ Jon E. Mandaville, “The Ottoman Province of al-Hasa in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (1970): pp. 486-513.

²⁵ Abdul Aziz M. Awad, “The Gulf in the Seventeenth Century,” *Bulletin of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 12, No. 2 (1985): pp. 123-34.

The much larger problem for both *OQ* and *BK* is their advocacy of what can be seen as nationalistic historiography. Kur un laudably states in the *OQ* preface that “Our style and language may suggest now and then a biased approach with regard to British diplomacy. This should not be judged as the author’s opinion but ought to be acknowledged as the Ottoman approach. Indeed, the objective of the present study is not to find out who has right on his side. The intention is to point to the Ottoman claims on the region and to the eventual results.”²⁷ Yet it quickly becomes apparent that the cumulative effect of citations is less a matter of providing an Ottoman perspective per se, or juxtaposing Ottoman claims against British claims to the Gulf littoral, but rather as evidence of the preponderance of the strength of Ottoman sovereignty in the region(s) in question. This is part of Kur un’s larger two-pronged mission of introducing Ottoman archival material into the historiographical debate—as a means of challenging the aforementioned “British method”—as well as reasserting, through the cumulative evidence of these Ottoman documents, Ottoman sovereignty over the Arab regions of the western Persian Gulf. In introducing so many (and exclusively) Ottoman documents to the discussion, Kur un implies that with this preponderance of material and details, the claims (and thus historical narrative) embedded in these documents must be accepted as the true history of the Gulf, in contradistinction to the British claims and archival material. This methodology is evidenced from Kur un’s earliest monograph, the aptly titled *Necid ve Ahsa’da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti* (Ottoman Rule in Najd and al-Ahsa).²⁸ And this methodology is, ironically, the mirror image of the traditional Arabic- and English-language Gulf historiography, with its total reliance on British archives and perspectives.

In his two books under review, Kur un finds every opportunity to proclaim the veracity of Ottoman claims to Qatar (among other places in the Gulf). For example, when comparing British and Ottoman views of the status of Bahrain as stated in a British sailing manual and its 1891 Ottoman translation, Kur un carefully notes in *OQ* the differences in translation and that the Ottoman version added “at present it is governed by the equitable Ottoman administration.” He then concludes that the Ottoman version “thus reflect[s] the true state of affairs.”²⁹ Kur un’s two books are designed to be a counterargument against the claims made by contemporary British actors in the Gulf, as well as the secondary literature (which bases its arguments on the archival record of these men), that Ottoman sovereignty in Qatar and other parts of the Gulf was nominal or nonexistent. Although the scholarship against which he is writing is missing entirely from the text (which, as mentioned above, is not cited, quoted or even used by Kur un), it remains as an omnipresent metanarrative hovering over the text that he wishes to destroy. The sum of his feelings about these claims is revealed in Kur un’s offhand comment that their allegations are “devoid of all foundation.”³⁰ Instead of cheerleading, Kur un should evaluate the veracity of the claims of either Ottoman or British authorities based on objectively defined criteria, or, more substantially, he should situate these claims as part of a much larger process of Anglo-Ottoman rivalry in the Gulf within which local actors (shaykhs) were playing the rivals off against each other in an attempt to buttress their own local rule. Yet Kur un seems to believe that simply because previous Gulf historiography has depended on British documents to evaluate and dismiss Ottoman legal rights in the region and this perspective is biased (a true point), now that he has shown that

²⁶ Ahmad Muhammad ‘Ubayd Batti, *al-Sira’ al-Burtughali al-‘Uthmani fi al-Qarn al-Sadis ‘Ashar* (Dubai: Nadwat al-Thaqafa wa-l-‘Ulum, 1991); ‘Abd al-Rahman Mahmud Huss, *Qatar mundhu al-‘Ahd al-‘Uthmani ila ‘Ahd Shuyukh Al Thani* (Beirut: Dar Nashr al-Adab, 1962).

²⁷ Kur un, *OQ*, p. 11-12.

²⁸ Hakimiyyet in Turkish means “sovereignty” or “rule.” Zekeriya Kur un, *Necid ve Ahsa’da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti: Vehhabi Hareketi ve Suud Devleti’nin Ortaya Çıktı ı*. Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları VII. Dizi – Sayı 179 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1998).

²⁹ Kur un, *OQ*, p. 17; *BK*, pp. 4-5.

³⁰ Kur un, *OQ*, pp. 20-21.

indeed the Ottomans considered the lands in question as part of the Ottoman empire in their internal correspondence and administrative apparatuses, then it is so.

Ultimately, if Kur un has a point, then the question that needs to be asked is: what is sovereignty? If both sides in this historiographic debate throw the word around yet work with nebulous or no definitions of the term in their works, then how can they—or we as readers—properly evaluate the claims of either the actors or the scholarship?

The Sovereignty Question

Books and sources in English use the word sovereignty, and less commonly, suzerainty, when discussing issues of rule in the Gulf, generally while denying that the Ottoman authorities have any. Most works, with the notable exception of B.J. Slot,³¹ do not establish working definitions of this term and thus rely on official British characterizations of the time. Kur un's English work, *OQ*, uses the word sovereignty frequently as an assertion. His Turkish-language works, *BK*, and *Necid ve Ahsa'da Osmanlı Hakimiyeti*, use the word *hakimiyet* (sovereignty, rule). Arabic works commonly use phrases like *nufudh 'uthmani* (Ottoman influence) when talking about the question of Ottoman rule, while *siyada* (rule, sovereignty) also figures in discussions. Regardless, most authors writing in Arabic use these words without exploring them, generally reiterating the views found in their British sources. A notable exception is Salah al-'Aqqad. Beginning his discussion on the Ottoman presence in the Gulf, he evokes a pre-1870 background when commenting that:

the way we understand Ottoman state and sovereignty is different today. Sometimes [sovereignty] was premised on spiritual leadership and sometimes on military conquest, but it was not linked to the land or citizen as it is commonly today. Thus it is quite difficult to delineate the extent of the reach of Ottoman authority [*al-sulta*] on the shores of the Arabian Peninsula. However, the case of al-Ahsa is different. [Both there] and in Qatar, [Ottoman authority] did extend there for a long period of time...except that the extension of Ottoman authority [*al-sulta*] in the Arabian Peninsula was not consequential until the post-1870 period.³²

Because nearly all of the historiography uses either facile or undefined terminology and simultaneously takes strong positions on the question of Ottoman sovereignty in the Gulf and over Qatar in particular, it would be useful to clarify the relevant terms. Yet unfortunately there is no consensus in the theoretical literature over what constitutes sovereignty.³³ As one writer notes, analysts from both the realist and liberal schools of thought who discuss sovereignty both share similar assumptions about the supposed central power of the state, yet in reality “sovereignty is best conceptualized in terms, not of state control, but of state authority. State control has waxed and waned enormously over time, regions, and issue-areas while the state's claim to ultimate political authority has persisted...” We should not, however, think of this “authority” as equating to “control,” such as control “over economic policy, transborder flows, and so on,” because “in point of fact, there never was a time when state control over anything, including violence, was assured or secure.”³⁴ If we agree with

³¹ B.J. Slot, *Mubarak al-Sabah: Founder of Modern Kuwait 1896-1915* (London: Arabian Publishing, 2005): pp. 15-17, 117-18, 216.

³² Salah al-'Aqqad, *al-Tiyarat al-Siyasiya fi al-Khalij al-'Arabi min Bidayat al-'Usur al-Haditha hatta Uzmah 1990-1991* (Maktabat al-Anjlu al-Misriyah, 1992): p. 167

³³ For an overview of these debates, see: Andrew F. Burghardt, “The Bases of Territorial Claims,” *Geographical Review* Vol. 63, No. 2 (1973): pp. 225-45; Alexander B. Murphy, “Historical Justifications for Territorial Claims,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* Vol. 80, No. 4 (1990): pp. 531-48; Janice E. Thomson, “State Sovereignty in International Relations: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Empirical Research,” *International Studies Quarterly* Vol. 39, No. 2 (1995): pp. 213-33.

³⁴ Thomson, “State Sovereignty in International Relations,” pp. 214, 216.

this last statement, then we have to avoid traditional Weberian assumptions about state monopoly over violence, or rather “that ‘effectively-patrolled territory’ is a prerequisite for recognition as a sovereign state [because] for the first 200 years of the modern state system, states did not monopolize coercion, although they claimed and were generally perceived to be sovereign.”³⁵ What we are left with, then, is a bare minimum definition of sovereignty: “the recognition by internal and external actors that the state has the exclusive authority to intervene coercively in activities within its territory.”³⁶ As is evident, this definition hinges on the issue of “recognition,” which is a factor, especially regarding external/foreign actors, that falls outside the realm of state authority within a given territory. Because of the inherent subjectivity of something like recognition, especially in highly competitive state systems such as the 19th century Persian Gulf, it could be the case that “the quest for empirical measures of sovereignty may well be quixotic.”³⁷

The veracity of historical claims has often been another rubric for determining the validity of sovereignty. So when the Ottoman *Vali* of Baghdad, Midhat Pasha, launched his 1871 Hasa Campaign conquering the coastal areas of the eastern Arabian Peninsula from Kuwait down to Qatar, this campaign was seen as a reassertion of historical Ottoman claims to the Gulf. The counter-argument by British observers was that history did not serve to bolster Ottoman claims of sovereignty over the western shores of the Gulf. Those later historians who favor or exclusively use Ottoman sources, describe the Hasa Campaign as having, for example, “ensured the return of these areas to Ottoman sovereignty.”³⁸ At varying levels of intensity, British officials denied any historical veracity to Ottoman (and Persian) claims to Bahrain and Trucial Oman, and as the 19th century drew to a close, this line of argument was also extended to Ottoman claims over Kuwait and Qatar. However, if we look at, and contextualize, the main representative statements of British policy at the time, J.A. Saldanha’s authoritative *The Persian Gulf Précis* and J.G. Lorimer’s *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia* (both published between 1904 and 1915),³⁹ we must apply a diachronic framework to these views. British assertions regarding the historical validity that underpinned sovereignty emerged over time and did not antecede specific events. The intended purpose of Saldanha and Lorimer’s respective works, as standard reference manuals for officials and policymakers (thus internal and not available to the public), helped solidify the policy stances of later British officials in the early 20th century.⁴⁰ Saldanha’s work is of critical importance; his *Précis* series, in tandem with Lorimer’s *Gazetteer*, forms the citational bedrock of every English-language history of the Gulf and, since they have both been translated into Arabic in 1976, the same can be said of Arabic-language Gulf historiography (though they were long used in English by Arab historians prior to that).

Saldanha gave a long summary of his view of the Ottoman presence in Qatar in his *Persian Gulf Gazetteer: Part I: Historical and Political Materials: Précis of Katar Affairs*

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 225.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 219.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 230.

³⁸ Idris Bostan, “The 1893 Uprising in Qatar and Sheikh Al Sani’s Letter to Abdülhamid II,” *Studies on Turkish-Arab Relations* Vol. 2 (1987): p. 82.

³⁹ For an inside view to how the latter was compiled and some of the sources used (including, frequently, the Bible), see the article by one of Lorimer’s assistants: F. Fraser Hunter, “Reminiscences of the Map of Arabia and the Persian Gulf,” *The Geographical Journal* Vol. 54, No. 6 (1919): pp. 355-63.

⁴⁰ The overwhelming majority of the historiography seems to have forgotten this point. Saldanha and Lorimer were not engaged in a historiographic enterprise; their work was intended, framed and structured as policy guidance. It was not the purpose of the manuals to be neutral, objective intellectual exercises. For an excellent overview on this point, see a review of the work when it was finally released to the public in 1970 by Robin Bidwell, “A British Official Guide to the Gulf,” review of *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia* by J.G. Lorimer, in *The Geographical Journal* Vol. 138, No. 2 (1972): pp. 233-35.

1873-1904.⁴¹ If we take everything at face value in his statements, we notice three points. First, for whatever occluded reasons, Saldanha implies that the British initially accepted Ottoman control over Qatar, and his language suggests a backtracking from that initial position. Secondly, the backtracking on that earlier position was less due to what we might call quantitative elements of sovereignty (a necessary amount of administrators and/or troops), but rather to the difficulties, threats and challenges to British interests in the Gulf (British Indian subjects, British shipping, and uncontested British influence over Bahrain). Lastly, due to the unfolding of these events, the British position (as Saldanha calls them, “disclaimers”) on Ottoman sovereignty over Qatar emerged over time, and not precisely and immediately in 1871.

As Saldanha’s material seems to imply, not only did British interests form the lens through which they determined Ottoman sovereignty, but due to certain unavoidable facts on the ground, British officials had to maintain a mixed—or, as Saldanha apologetically described in his introduction, “complacent”—stance on the Ottoman presence. Saldanha includes an 1893 telegram correspondence between the Government of India and the Foreign Office, in which the Government of India asked for guidance on the decision of 1883,⁴² that is, if “denying Turkish jurisdiction over Katar should be continued.” The Secretary of State wrote back

...Her Majesty’s Government observe that the Turkish authorities, *although they maintain a garrison at Bidaa, appear to have practically no hold on the country. So long as they do not move beyond the limits of the town, the nominal suzerainty of the Porte is recognized; but any attempt to extend Turkish authority is resisted. There seems therefore to be no sufficient reason for allowing the pretensions of Turkey to interfere with our liberty of action, or to prevent Your Excellency’s Government from making such treaties with the Chiefs of Katar as may be considered desirable.* [italics in original]⁴³

For both the Ottomans and British, the status of Qasim ibn Muhammad al-Thani⁴⁴ as (a) paramount shaykh in, and the Ottoman *qa’immaqam* of,⁴⁵ Qatar meant that much of their respective policy deliberations centered around how Qasim should be viewed (as representative of Ottoman authority or not) and whether he should be held responsible for any actions that may affect British interests (which, as the British and sometimes the Ottomans claimed, Qasim instigated). For the Ottoman authorities, and for the subsequent Ottoman historiography as represented by Kur un and Saban, Qasim’s status as *qa’immaqam* and the presence of an Ottoman garrison at Bid’a (later called Doha) were both sufficient and

⁴¹ J.A. Saldanha, *The Persian Gulf Précis*, Vol. IV: *Précise of Bahrein Affairs, 1854-1904; Précise of Katar Affairs, 1873-1904* (Buckinghamshire: Archive Editions, 1986). See the preface (no page) and p. 1. Henceforth written PKA.

⁴² This was a reference to when the British ambassador in Istanbul informed his counterpart in two separate letters that “...I beg leave to remind Your Excellency that the claims of the Porte to rights of sovereignty over the Katar Coast have never been admitted by Her Majesty’s Government” and the British “...were not prepared to waive the rights which they had exercised at intervals during the long period of years of dealing directly with the Arab Chiefs of the Katar Coast when necessary, in order to preserve the peace of the seas or to obtain redress for outrages on British subjects or persons entitled to British protection.” Saldanha notes that “Sheikh Jasim [Qasim] however still persisted in maintaining that Katar belonged to the Turkish Government and that the British Government should have dealing with their officials, not with him...But it will be seen hereafter that he never ceased to make himself obnoxious to the British and their subjects in Katar and was really at the bottom of many of the piracies and outrages against the British Indian trader on the Katar coast.” See Saldanha, PKA, p. 28.

⁴³ Saldanha, PKA, pp. 40-41.

⁴⁴ Due to the pronunciation of the letter qaf (“q”) in the Gulf dialect, nearly all British, Ottoman and Arabic contemporaries referred to him as “Jasim.” The British and Ottoman archival record, as well as the secondary literature, unreflectively reproduce this spelling, and Kur un is no exception; Anscombe calls him Qasim.

⁴⁵ Properly: *q’immaq m*; in modern Turkish: kaymakam.

substantial. For the British, the presence of the garrison and Qasim's *qa'immaqam* status and protestations of loyalty to the Ottoman state were immaterial if the British wished a redress of perceived threats to their interests. This meant bypassing the Ottoman diplomatic channels and going straight to Qasim and holding him personally responsible as an individual and local leader, not as representative of the Ottoman state. As is evident, they questioned the substance of his status as *qa'immaqam*, and as a matter of fact, for some time accepted the idea that the tribal paramountacy in Qatar ascribed to him by the Ottomans was probably limited to only the settled area round Doha.⁴⁶

However, once Qasim began to make overtures to the British for crucial status in the 1890s, we notice an interesting reassessment of the nature of Qasim and the garrison. According to Saldanha, Lord Curzon himself commented on a draft letter being prepared for the Gulf Resident in early 1901, "We want 'to obtain a better hold,' but at the same time it is 'far from our wish to make any show of activity.' We 'do not admit that the Porte is in effective occupation;' but at the same time there is the uncomfortable and complicating fact of the presence of the Turkish garrison at Bidaa..." Furthermore, Qasim was recognized as the leading shaykh of Qatar who had both the authority and ability to control the Qatar peninsula and ensure British interests.⁴⁷

For Kur'un, Ottoman sovereignty begins with the conquests in the Gulf made under Süleyman the Magnificent (Qatar specifically came under the Ottoman fold in 1559) and continues until World War One. He discounts or glosses over interruptions to this long spread of time, whereas Mandaville sees serious rupture of Ottoman rule (see below). In terms of what suffices for Kur'un's definition of sovereignty, he quotes an Ottoman newspaper from 1871 that mentions an Ottoman-built mosque in Hofuf (in present-day eastern Saudi Arabia) with an inscription dated to 962 AH (1554/55 CE) as "evidence of the fact that [Ottoman] sovereignty here went far back into history."⁴⁸ Furthermore, he lists taxes being paid to Istanbul and the mention of the sultan's name during the Friday mosque sermons (*khutba*) "which meant the acceptance of [Ottoman] sovereignty." He adds the flying of the Ottoman flag as part of the formula in the 19th century.⁴⁹ In addition to these core criteria of Kur'un's rubric of sovereignty, it is in his treatment of Qasim that we discern his thinking. We realize early in *OQ* how central the role of local leader is to Kur'un's understanding of how Ottoman sovereignty worked in the Gulf when he argues that "as a matter of fact, the Ottoman state had established effective sovereignty over Qatar at the time. The Sheikh of Qatar had pledged allegiance to the Ottoman state."⁵⁰

Kur'un's assertion underscores the central issue of the sovereignty debate which revolves around the question: who or what represents Ottoman authority in a given area? The presence of an administrative apparatus which both governs for, and represents, the state is crucial for establishing sovereignty. For even if outside powers do not recognize the right of another power to control a territory, if the latter power is indeed in control of that land

⁴⁶ J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia: I Historical, Part 1B: Chapter IV: History of Qatar* (Amersham: Gregg International and Irish Academic Press, 1984): p. 809.

⁴⁷ Saldanha, *PKA*, p. 48. It is interesting to note that according to British sources cited by Saldanha, the British desire for a status quo in the Gulf was ruptured by "aggressive action by the Porte" to establish three mudirates in various parts of the Qatar peninsula forcing British policy movement, while according to Ottoman sources cited by Saban, the establishment of these mudirates was attempted because of prior heavy-handed British policy positions (for example, the contentious port of Khawr 'Udayd, which was claimed by both Ottoman-backed Qasim and the British-backed ruler of Abu Dhabi). See Saldanha, *PKA*, pp. 48-58; Saban, "Qatar fi Ihsa'iyah 'Uthmaniya," p. 139. This idea of an offensive defense against the other side's encroachment is also very evident in Midhat Pasha's reasoning for the 1871 Hasa Campaign. See Anscombe, pp. 24-29.

⁴⁸ Kur'un, *OQ*, p. 32; *BK*, pp. 22-23.

⁴⁹ Kur'un, *OQ*, pp. 34-35; *BK*, pp. 25-26.

⁵⁰ Kur'un, *OQ*, p. 18.

through effective means of governance, then at the very least we can acknowledge a de facto sovereignty. Thus, for example, throughout the 19th century the Ottomans maintained claims on Bahrain, due to its occasional subordination (generally represented by paying taxes) to the Al Sa'ud shaykhs, who at times held Ottoman titles since perhaps the 1840s.⁵¹ However, no Ottoman administrative apparatus was established on Bahrain which accounts for the British view that these Ottoman claims deserved no recognition. On the other hand, Ottoman control over eastern Arabia, called al-Hasa,⁵² did have a variety of Ottoman administrative apparatuses on the ground, including a *mutasarrif* of the Najd Mutasarriflik (Sancak) in Hofuf and garrisons, all under the Baghdad Vilayet administration. The British authorities in the Gulf, though, only recognized Ottoman authority stretching down the Hasa coast to the town of Qatif.

Part of this argument, when parsed in the historiography or in contemporary accounts of British observers in the Gulf, is premised on a general understanding of Ottoman governance. If, for example, we cite the "classic model" of administration in the Ottoman empire, a *vali* or *mutasarrif* or *qa'immaqam* was appointed by the central authority in Istanbul to serve in a given locality, and these individuals served a certain term in office. They both manifested and proved Ottoman authority over the locality in question. The question of their effectiveness, or rather making the presence of Ottoman rule felt in their locality, is a related issue that will be taken up later in this essay.

As British sources were wont to do, they discounted Ottoman sovereignty over a given area because of the lack of a large administrative presence, the lack or "ineffective" nature of Ottoman garrisons,⁵³ or due to the fact that a local ruler was confirmed in his role and he, according to the British view, continued to act independently of Ottoman interests or authority. The 1893 uprising by Qasim is the case in point. Yet, this position taken by the British at that time, and subsequently echoed in the historiography, is ironic, given the nature of British rule over India.⁵⁴ That the princely states of the British Raj and such a large Indian population in relationship to the limited number of British administrators and troops were considered "British India" shows that we cannot accept the British argument that a small presence of Ottoman administrators and troops negated their claims of sovereignty.⁵⁵ Furthermore, if we look at Bahrain, which was considered a British protectorate from 1861 onward and was vociferously defended by British diplomats in Istanbul and elsewhere as being outside Ottoman sovereignty, we notice a further parallel. Very much like the Ottoman authorities in Istanbul appointing, or "accepting," a local ruler as their representative, the British also confirmed a local ruler in Bahrain, that is, the dynasts of the Al Khalifa family (similar to the situation in the Trucial Coast, the present-day United Arab Emirates). The very

⁵¹ Kur un says 1848 in *BK*, p. 31. Midhat Pasha's given reason for his Hasa Campaign of 1871 was ostensibly to intervene in the ongoing Saudi civil war between the brothers Sa'ud and 'Abdullah. The latter, in preparation for Midhat Pasha's campaign, was appointed *qa'immaqam* of Najd in 1871. For greater elaboration, see M.J. Crawford, "Civil War, Foreign Intervention, and the Question of Political Legitimacy: A Nineteenth-Century Saudi Qadi's Dilemma," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 14, No. 3 (1982): p. 237; Kelly, *Britain and the Persian Gulf*, pp. 719-20; Anscombe, pp. 47-49.

⁵² Commonly Hasa; also al-Ahsa, al-Ihsa, and pre-19th century the Ottomans also called it Lahsa. It had imprecise borders but was generally conceived as extending from somewhere outside of Kuwait down to the Trucial Coast—post-1871 it included Qatar, and it could, according to Kur un, have included Qatar pre-1871. See Kur un, *OQ*, p. 33.

⁵³ See Saldanha, *PKA*, pp. 31-32, for an 1887-88 study that evaluates the Ottoman garrison in Doha.

⁵⁴ My comparative attempt here is brief; see Dina Rizk Khoury and Dane Keith Kennedy's more comprehensive Ottoman-British comparative study in a special edition of *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* Vol. 27, No. 2 (2007).

⁵⁵ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002): pp. 142-43, 152-53.

nature and extent of British imperial authority or influence over political and economic affairs in protectorate Bahrain (or Trucial Coast shaykhdoms) was dependent on a local ruler.

We should add that Saldanha was also quite to the point in his views of how to judge Bahrain, and he did so on an Indian model. In his preface to his *Précis of Bahrein Affairs 1854-1904* he argued:

“India” is defined by the General Clauses Act (X of 1897) as including “British India together with any territories of any Native Prince or Chief under the suzerainty of Her Majesty exercised through the Governor-General of India or through any Governor or any other Officer subordinate to the Governor-General of India.” The territory of the Native States is not British territory; nor are their subjects British subjects. But the Sovereignty over them, as Sir Courtenay Ilbert in his *Government of India*, aptly observes, “is divided between the British Government and their rulers in proportions which differ greatly according to the history and importance of the several States and which are regulated partly by treaties of less formal engagements...” ... A perusal of the *Précis* will show perhaps that all these conditions are satisfied in the case of Bahrein. If then Bahrein is under the suzerainty of His Majesty exercised through the Governor-General of India, does it not come in the same category as any Native State in India, and may not its relations to the British Government and other foreign Governments be regulated on the same principles as are applicable to our Native States?⁵⁶

Whether these local rulers in the Gulf acted on behalf of, or in the interests of, the British protectorate system is debatable. Continued British efforts to stamp out piracy and the slave trade, as well as the very visible example of Shaykh Muhammad of Bahrain being forcibly deposed by the British and replaced by his brother in 1868 because of his contravention of British dictates (this was repeated again when Shaykh ‘Isa ibn ‘Ali [r. 1869-1923] was deposed), reveal that British claims of authority over Bahrain were not always a given. Furthermore, not only was the ruler of Bahrain the sole interlocutor and enforcer of the British protectorate system, but he did so without any direct British supervision (in other words, presence) inside Bahrain. Not until the year 1901 was there a British Political Agent in Bahrain; prior to that were non-British Assistant Political Residents⁵⁷ who held a role more akin to facilitating correspondence in Bahrain, and didn’t “carry that weight with the Sheikh which should be expected in the representative of the British Government.”⁵⁸ Until then, correspondence and periodic visits from British officials based in their Gulf headquarters in Bushire sufficed to maintain and justify British defense of the island (sovereignty as per Saldanha?), and British diplomacy in Istanbul on behalf of Bahrain was also meant to protect and demonstrate British claims regarding the island. Finally, even when unofficial or official British representation was present on the island, or anywhere else in the Gulf and Arabia, we notice that the vast majority were not even individuals who came from Britain. They were of Persian, Indian or Arab origin, as British correspondence in the archives reveals, and as ‘Aydarus points out.⁵⁹ Even when we do find an official sent from Britain (by way of the India Government), he was normally surrounded and supported by a staff of Persians and Indians. As James Onley calculated, “men from affluent Arab, Persian, and Indian merchant families served as the Resident’s ‘native agents’ in over half of the political posts within the Gulf Residency.”⁶⁰

As for the issue of garrisons representing some sort of state presence, or demonstrating sovereignty, further comparisons are instructive. Under the protectorate system, various Gulf

⁵⁶ Saldanha, *Précis of Bahrein Affairs 1854-1904*, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁷ James Onley, “Britain’s Native Agents in Arabia and Persia in the Nineteenth Century,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* Vol. 24, No. 1 (2004): p. 132.

⁵⁸ Saldanha, *Précis of Bahrein Affairs, 1854-1904*, p. 147.

⁵⁹ ‘Aydarus, *al-Mawqif*, pp. 25-26. The most interesting work in this regard is Onley, “Britain’s Native Agents.”

⁶⁰ Onley, “Britain’s Native Agents,” p. 129.

shaykhs could and did ask for British aid in moments of crisis, which may have consisted of dispatching naval forces, material support or simply a naval demonstration of power. But what these episodes showed was that there was no permanent British military presence in these places (though at any time there may be British ships, military and civilian, in a given harbor), but that they could come if requested to do so.

Regarding the question of Ottoman authority over Qatar and the surrounding region of Hasa, there were small Ottoman garrisons posted, which as mentioned above, were generally dismissed by British observers as representing no significant Ottoman presence nor constituting sovereignty. However, as ‘Aydarus shows in his analysis of British discussions about the incursion by Shaykh Za’id ibn Khalifa of Abu Dhabi into Qatar to attack Qasim in 1888 as well as tensions between the latter shaykh and Persian authorities across the Gulf, the British feared an expansion of hostilities that would serve as a pretext for the dispatch of more Ottoman soldiers, which would further widen the scope of the respective conflicts. This meant that, as usual, they preferred to maintain the status quo. However, it also seems to suggest that the British recognized that in addition to any Ottoman troops already stationed in the region, the Ottomans could send more because they did have some kind of authority relationship (sovereign-subject?) with Qatar. In other words, Qasim could “play his Ottoman card” to defend his own interests, which would only further serve to prove Ottoman authority over Qatar to the embarrassment of British claims and interests, thus British officials in Bushire wanted to defuse any potential hostilities before such an eventuality.⁶¹

It thus seems that the issue of number and placement of troops was understood more in a symbolic sense than in a concrete territorial sense. Simply because British troops or ships were not permanently stationed on Bahrain doesn’t mean they didn’t consider Bahrain any less their protectorate, nor can it be said that the Ottoman authorities in Istanbul considered their sovereignty any less because they only garrisoned Doha in the Qatar peninsula. The potential for more Ottoman troops to be sent, whether from Hasa or Basra, was always present, and in any case it was not the actual number or placement of these troops in Qatar that demonstrated—to the authorities in Istanbul—that they controlled Qatar. Furthermore, like the British, the significance of naval visits to their territory, as a means of demonstrating control, was something the Ottoman authorities realized was important, thus they established a routine of naval rounds to Qatar and elsewhere (they also saw this as a means to clamp down on gun smuggling).⁶² The troops and ships were symbolic props to an already established, and theoretically locally acknowledged, Ottoman administrative presence in the form of *Qa’immaqam* Qasim al-Thani.⁶³

Ottoman Administrative Practices in the Historiography

The attempt by historians to argue definitively about sovereignty based on the assumed powers and status of local rulers like Qasim is further complicated by the fact that both Ottoman and British administration in the Gulf was evolving over time and somewhat improvised. Since we probably cannot call the protectorate (“trucial”) systems that the British established in the Gulf in the 19th century, which date from 1820-53, properly colonial, they fall into that grey area called “imperialism.” The term imperialism seems to lend itself to a

⁶¹ ‘Aydarus, *al-Mawqif*, pp. 34-39.

⁶² Idris Bostan, “Basra Körfezinin Güney Kesimi ve Osmanlılar (1876-1908),” *Osmanlı Ara tırmaları* Vol. 9 (1989): p. 313.

⁶³ ‘Aydarus argues that it was the lack of Ottoman receptivity (or ability?) to aid Qasim at a particular moment of crisis that served as a catalyst to his desire to reach out to the British. In ‘Aydarus’ narrative this remains as speculation because he only cites British documents so we do not see the negotiations that ensued between Qasim and the Ottoman authorities. See his *al-Mawqif*, p. 38.

more indeterminate or flexible application, but as many in postcolonial studies have shown, colonial practices by the British or any other colonial power were not monolithic, or as Lauren Benton explains, “The colonial legal order was by its very nature a plural legal order. Multiple legal authorities were created out of the imposition of colonial law and the persistence, protection, and invention of indigenous legal practices.”⁶⁴ British protectorates in the Gulf are an example of improvised and flexible imperial practices, sometimes dubbed “indirect rule”; the Ottomans had similar practices.

In this regard, some very useful points are made in the work of Gábor Ágoston,⁶⁵ even though he only briefly deals with the Gulf.⁶⁶ The utility of his analytical framework is that it allows for both a historiographical revision and a new way to approach the issue of sovereignty. Ágoston draws attention to the problematics of previous Ottoman historiography that is limited by its assumptions about the “classic” administrative model and about centralized state control and instead suggests that it was “far more complex than the one-sided command-and-execute relationship put forward by historians in the past.”⁶⁷ Ágoston reminds us of the existence of a variety of flexible or “mixed” administrative arrangements. An interesting form of administration of peripheral territories—especially relevant when we think of Qatar—is what Ágoston calls “condominium,” that is “joint rule of the former power elite and the Ottoman authorities.”⁶⁸ This meant that important state powers over taxes, land, census, law enforcement and courts “remained the prerogatives” of local rulers.⁶⁹ In cases when local or Ottoman authorities could not keep the peace, villages raised militias that were not directly controlled by the government.⁷⁰ Whatever the particular, and location-specific, form of these mixed systems, they “successfully fulfilled [their] main tasks: retention of the conquered territories and military support for renewed conquests...if this was possible with the assistance of local institutions and in accordance with local legal customs, then the Ottoman government usually retained these elements and made no attempts to form the conquered territories in its own image.”⁷¹ While this conclusion of Ágoston’s seems to be the result of his scrutiny of the Hungarian and eastern Anatolian provinces, he generally applies these conclusions also for the “eastern frontiers with regard to certain Turkmen, Kurdish and Arab chieftains, as well as the Georgian princes.” Ultimately, in Ágoston’s view, a major reason for the continuation of these non-“classic” systems was “the existence of the Habsburg and Safavid Empires constitut[ing] the main obstacle to Ottoman central administration in its frontier zones. In other words, the action-radius of Ottoman centralism was greatly reduced by its rivals.”⁷²

While Ágoston’s article is concerned with the 15th-17th centuries, it should be clear that the debate over Ottoman sovereignty in the Gulf in the 19th century must be more properly situated in relation to his observations on the legacy of Ottoman administrative methods. Even though he did not use Mandaville’s 1970 article, he echoes certain points of Mandaville’s narrative, especially regarding post-1670 Ottoman rule. Mandaville, prefiguring Ágoston’s later assertion, stated that, “True to the Ottoman pattern of conquest in the Arab

⁶⁴ Lauren Benton, “Colonial Law and Cultural Difference: Jurisdictional Politics and the Formation of the Colonial State” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* Vol. 41, No. 3 (1999): p. 563.

⁶⁵ Gábor Ágoston, “A Flexible Empire: Authority and Its Limits on the Ottoman Frontiers,” in *Ottoman Borderlands: Issues, Personalities and Political Changes* ed. by Kemal H. Karpat and Robert W. Zens (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003).

⁶⁶ Mostly as it relates to Mosul, Baghdad and Basra, but mention is made of Lahsa (that is, al-Hasa).

⁶⁷ Ágoston, “Flexible Empire,” p. 16.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 23.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 25.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p. 27.

⁷² *ibid.*, p. 29.

lands, a partial integration of the old structure took place.”⁷³ As Mandaville’s evidence shows, Hasa (Lahsa) was “in the middle of the sixteenth century the area [occupied] by Ottoman forces and administered directly by them with varying degrees of effectiveness for the next 130 years.”⁷⁴ Tracing the period of direct rule from 1550-1670, the Ottoman conquest of the eastern shores of the Arabian Peninsula dislodged the local ruling tribe, the Banu Khalid. A directly appointed administration was set up in the newly formed Lahsa Sancak (under the Basra Vilayet), which by 1560 was elevated to the status of Lahsa Vilayet, and Mandaville states that “all of these towns, villages, garrison settlements and nomadic groups [of Lahsa] were administered through the usual Ottoman provincial structure.”⁷⁵ This fact alone disrupts Ágoston’s characterization—or rather, inclusion—of Lahsa as among the non-“classic” models of frontier administration. The frontier nature of Lahsa is also confirmed by Mandaville’s characterization of the Ottoman conquest as a means to guard itself against Portuguese operations in the Gulf, as well as Safavid ambitions, or as Mandaville calls it based on his overview of the language of the correspondence, “a defensive outpost rather than one from which to launch offensive operations.”⁷⁶ While Janissaries were stationed there, perhaps as much as half of the military force was made up of locally enrolled militia (*gönüllüler*).⁷⁷

When the tribal confederation of the Banu Khalid ousted the Ottoman administration in eastern Arabia in 1670, and the end came to direct, or the so-called “classic,” Ottoman rule, the Ottomans recognized the Banu Khalid leader as Ottoman representatives. Kur un states plainly that the Banu Khalid ruled “[on] behalf of the state,”⁷⁸ which is a reference to the Banu Khalid leaders’ subsequent gaining of Ottoman titles as a legal fiction for what was clearly an overthrow of the Ottoman order. Regarding this change, or rather reversion, to rule by the original and local leaders of eastern Arabia, Mandaville’s narrative of Ottoman rule ends here and he concludes that the Banu Khalid “...aided by the Ottoman decentralization of the seventeenth century...returned to power.”⁷⁹ Ironically, the Banu Khalid had been a continuous thorn in the side of Ottoman administration of Lahsa since its conquest, as numerous episodes throughout the 16th-17th centuries indicate; at the same time, Ottoman administrators had also continually tried to co-opt Banu Khalid shaykhs by bestowing lands and salaries.⁸⁰ This situation is reminiscent of (or prefigures) later periods of Ottoman rule in the area, and seems to argue for Ágoston’s “joint rule of the former power elite and the Ottoman authorities” thesis, specifically for the case at hand which is the 19th century. These types of policies are called by Anscombe “tribal politics.”⁸¹ As Anscombe notes,

⁷³ Mandaville, “Ottoman Province of al-Has ,” p. 503; Mandaville does give more specific details that at times contradict Ágoston’s broad brush-strokes.

⁷⁴ Mandaville, “Ottoman Province of al-Has ,” p. 486; his section on the administration of Lahsa is pp. 501-04.

⁷⁵ Mandaville, “Ottoman Province of al-Has ,” p. 502. This included judges and the governors general (Mandaville’s term for *vali*) of Lahsa being appointed and sent usually from “a region in Iraq or more uncommonly Syria. Each gubernatorial term in Lahsa seldom exceeded five years, although a few men seem to have served more than one term. This meant a fairly regular rotation of service through the Syrian, Iraqi and Gulf provinces...” Mandaville has solid evidence for this centralized system until the 1580s. See p. 503; on judges, p. 512. More than 300 years later, Midhat Pasha had the same kind of rotation of officials from Iraq. See Anscombe, pp. 49-50.

⁷⁶ Mandaville, “Ottoman Province of al-Has ,” p. 489.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 491. These “locally enrolled” troops generally came from Basra and Baghdad, though other volunteers seem to have actually come from Lahsa. Mandaville suggests that these locally recruited forces were phased out by the 1580s. For his discussion on the military see “Ottoman Province of al-Has ,” pp. 506-08.

⁷⁸ Kur un, *OQ*, pp. 36-37; see pp. 21-28 in *BK* wherein he skips over this period.

⁷⁹ Mandaville, “Ottoman Province of al-Has ,” p. 488.

⁸⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 499-500, 503.

⁸¹ Anscombe, p. 65-66. He does state that “conditions peculiar to Arabia subverted” the potential of these policies attempting to co-opt local leaders. As well, “outside forces could disrupt with some ease.”

Where a respected shaikh already ruled and was ready to recognize Ottoman supremacy, Midhat [Pasha] was willing to confer official standing, as his appointment of Qasim al-Thani to the *kaymakamlık* of Qatar shows. In other regions Midhat might well expect that impartial outsiders, aided by advice from local notables on the administrative councils, could best control tensions between groups and individuals. As the confusion and novelty surrounding introductions of the new regime died down, changes could be made and more local men included in government.⁸²

Kur un describes this as the Ottomans “mak[ing] use of the traditional power and maintain[ing] sovereignty even though nominally.”⁸³ For Kur un, no matter how they behave (loyally or independently), local elites can be seen as proper representatives of the Ottoman state, and having an Ottoman battalion on the ground doesn’t hurt, either.⁸⁴ As a general rule, Ottoman administration meant making payments to tribal leaders in order to keep the peace, and in the case of places where an official Ottoman presence was not visible, such as in Arabia, this also served as a measure of control.⁸⁵

Is it enough to prove that a local Arab leader was a *qa’immaqam* and thus the threshold of Ottoman sovereignty is crossed? In the case of Bahrain, we see that in correspondence between its ruler Shaykh ‘Isa and Ottoman officials, he didn’t call himself, nor was he called by, any Ottoman titles,⁸⁶ nor were Ottoman officials ever stationed on the island. And even though enough evidence suggests that the Ottomans appointed various 19th-century Saudi rulers as *qa’immaqam*, the most important one, Faysal ibn Turki ibn Sa‘ud (r. 1834-38, 1843-65) signed his letters to Ottoman authorities as “Amir Najd” (despite Kur un quoting such a letter with signature, he continues to call him *qa’immaqam*).⁸⁷ As for Kuwait, soon after Mubarak al-Sabah (r. 1896-1915) came to power, Ottoman officials were aware that he did not call himself a *qa’immaqam*, as at least one of his letters to the Ottoman *vali* of Baghdad makes clear: he signed it “Hakim al-Kuwait wa-ra’is qaba’iliha” (Ruler of Kuwait and head of its tribes).⁸⁸

For both the examples of Kuwait and Najd it is certainly valid to question the extent or even existence of Ottoman sovereignty over these territories. Does the confirmation of a local power (be it from a member of the al-Sabah or Al Sa‘ud) and transfer of Ottoman administrative title to that person constitute effective Ottoman sovereignty over the territory in question? Without any other Ottoman presence, such as a garrison, judges, or port authorities, does this one figure represent enough to constitute the critical mass required of sovereignty? In the Kuwaiti historiography Ottoman sovereignty is usually denied as a matter of course because this would be a recognition of Kuwait’s being administratively subsumed under the Basra Vilayet and thus would supposedly justify Iraqi claims over it (this, of course, ignores the nature of the British-directed Iraqi state creation process). Slot offers the most recent, succinct and polemical argument in this regard.⁸⁹ Mubarak al-Sabah (who is credited as insuring, or creating, Kuwait’s independent existence), was, according to Slot “aim[ing] at preserving his independence by means of a complex balancing act between the

⁸² Anscombe, p. 50. He elaborates, and lists further individuals, on pp. 64-65.

⁸³ Kur un, *OQ*, p. 41.

⁸⁴ Kur un, *OQ*, pp. 141, 150.

⁸⁵ For a nice overview of Ottoman relations with the ‘Ajman tribe in eastern Arabia, including the payments made to its shaykhs, see Zekeriya Kur un, “Basra Körfezi’nde bir Arab A ireti: Acman Urbani (1820-1913),” *Belleten* Vol. 63, No. 236 (1999): pp. 123-63.

⁸⁶ Copies of the correspondence can be found in British Library, London, India Office R/15/2/9.

⁸⁷ Kur un, *BK*, pp. 34-36. For further discussion, see R. Bayly Winder, *Saudi Arabia in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Octagon Books, 1980): pp. 133-34, 179-82, 184-85, 189, 206-07. Also see Anscombe, p. 13 and al-‘Aqqad, *al-Tiyarat al-Siyasiya*, p. 167.

⁸⁸ Ba bakanlık Archive, Istanbul, HR.SYS. 93/8. The file is dated early 1905; Mubarak may have asserted this title instead of *qa’immaqam* post-1899 when he made his secret agreement with the British.

⁸⁹ See my review of his book in *Arab Studies Journal* Vol. 15, No. 1 (2007): pp. 133-37.

two great regional powers. Thus he was trusted as pro-Ottoman in parts of the Ottoman system, while the British never really doubted his fundamental loyalty to them.”⁹⁰ Having said this, Slot discounts any claims the Ottomans had over Kuwait. Anscombe gives a much milder assessment of Mubarak, but still in this vein.

In contradistinction to Ágoston, Slot suggests that the existence of a pre-existing local ruler confirmed by Ottoman authorities in and of itself indicates only nominal—if any—Ottoman sovereignty. Secondly, these areas, such as Kuwait, seem to be preexisting states, of which the role of the British was to confirm and protect. Lastly, the thrust of all of Slot’s discussion is that Ottoman rule in the Gulf was illusory and that various actors in the region simply played along for personal gain. The lack of outside Ottoman officials in Kuwait belies the illusion.

When we turn to Qatar, it remains the most complicated to categorize definitively. From 1871 the head of the al-Thani family also served as the appointed Ottoman *qa’immaqam*. Unlike Kuwait, for which the argument for Ottoman sovereignty rests solely on the various al-Sabah rulers being *qa’immaqams*, the situation in Qatar includes a *qa’immaqam*, the posting of Ottoman officials⁹¹ and garrisons. Furthermore, it is impossible to argue, as Slot does for Mubarak al-Sabah, that Qasim did not accept the appointment as *qa’immaqam*. The Ottoman authorities were correct in viewing him as their *qa’immaqam*; not only did he accept the position, but he identified himself as such, as his signatures on correspondence to Istanbul clearly indicate: “khadimukum Qasim bin Muhammad Thani Qa’immaqam Qatar.”⁹² Despite later claims to the contrary, British authorities in the Gulf, as well as in India and the India Office in London, also initially viewed Qatar as being under Ottoman sovereignty as evidenced by the Saldanha citations above, and they too were aware that Qasim called himself a *qa’immaqam* based on their interception of a 1906 telegram he sent from Bushire to the sultan, which he signed “Kaim Mukam of the Kaza of Katr and Chief of its clans and tribes, the faithful slave Jassim al Thani.”⁹³

On the other hand, as is evidenced by a dispatch in 1885 from the Najd *mutasarrif*, who had jurisdiction over the Qatar Kaza, to the Ottoman Ministry of the Interior, local Ottoman authorities had misgivings about Qasim. He was accused of fomenting Qatari tribes against Ottoman authorities, and the *mutasarrif* argued that there was “a loss of the [Ottoman] state’s authority in Qatar, pointing out that the judicial authorities in [Qatar] do not consult or refer to the government or court, but rather Shaykh Qasim’s men take care of the affairs of the people in the marketplaces and discipline them in accordance with customary principles of the region.”⁹⁴ Other Ottoman officials, writing in the first decade of the 20th century, also felt that Qasim was *undermining* Ottoman sovereignty and they called for immediate reforms (including more officials and troops on the ground) warning that these must be done “in order for Ottoman sovereignty on the western [Gulf] shore not to be nullified [literally: to lead to zero].”⁹⁵ Yet, as Kur un correctly insists, Ottoman authorities consistently considered Qatar

⁹⁰ Slot, *Mubarak al-Sabah*, p. 416.

⁹¹ Judges, and an assistant *qa’immaqam* for Doha, who was at his post from 1893 until his murder in 1894 by Ottoman soldiers.

⁹² In Arabic “Your servant, Qasim bin Muhammad Thani, *Qa’immaqam* of Qatar.” For a copy of an original letter see Bostan, “The 1893 Uprising,” p. 89.

⁹³ British Library, London, India Office L/P&S/10/50, pp. 135-36: Telegram No. 64, dated Bushire, the 23rd February 1906, From Major P.Z. Cox, Political Resident in the Persian Gulf to The Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department.

⁹⁴ Saban, “Qatar fi Ihsa’iya ‘Uthmaniya,” pp. 135-36. These are Saban’s citations from the report. The *mutasarrif* of Najd also suggested a series of reform and building campaigns in Qatar to strengthen Ottoman authority there. See Saban, pp. 137-38.

⁹⁵ Ba bakanlık Archive, Istanbul, DUI MUI 17-4/22, from the General Staff of the Army [Ministry], Third Division, No. 4456 (24 Dhu al-Hijja 1327/24 Kanun Awwal 1325). This file is filled with reports and recommendations such as this one cited.

to be under their full sovereignty, a view they only revised in the 1913 Anglo-Ottoman Convention, in which Qatar was separated from the Najd Sancak while Kuwait was recognized as an autonomous *kaza*. Thus until that date they maintained the claim of sovereignty; afterwards Qatar, like Kuwait, was an administrative oddity which in essence meant independence.⁹⁶ What all of this should have indicated to Kur un was that the record on Qasim is mixed, but in the face of encroaching British interests in the region, the Ottomans had no other recourse but to rely on him and point to him as the lynchpin of their sovereignty in Qatar. Whether or not this was “real” sovereignty is less important than its role in Ottoman political strategy in the face of British competition. Kur un should be more cautious and not imitate this example of Ottoman rhetoric, nor accept their version of reality any more than one should accept the British view, nor hold it up for more than it was: political expediency.

A middle way through this muddle comes in Anscombe’s thoughtful approach when he takes up the issue of the Ottoman incorporation of Qatar in 1871. “To determine which picture is more accurate—” he writes

the Qataris as a proudly independent group, cajoled into reluctant service of Ottoman interests by a respected tribal leader, or as devoted subjects of the sultan—is difficult; probably neither version was completely true... It is nevertheless certain that Qasim, and probably also [his father] Muhammad, saw the advantage of accepting Ottoman suzerainty in principle in order to strengthen Qatar against enemies or rivals in Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, and Najd. Qasim indeed won Ottoman recognition as the heir apparent to the shaykhdom.

As had the Kuwaiti shaykhs, the Al Thani would even accept the formal appointment of a few officials by Istanbul, such as a judge, but any prolonged troop presence would make them fear for their independence of action.⁹⁷

In other words, if we do not integrate the motives of Arab actors in this drama, nor see them as equal components of the process, then we are left with a very unsatisfying choice of viewing this issue (among many) as a British versus Ottoman binary.

Putting Qatar in Context

This issue of defining sovereignty may seem immaterial, and it is probably best to say there is no definitive answer. But at the very least it must be brought to the surface because it affects the manner in which the scholars under review (and other Gulf historians) interpret their material. For a concrete example, consider the “flag episode” of 1871. During the 1871 Hasa Campaign, when the energetic and famous *Vali* of Baghdad, Midhat Pasha, used the dynastic strife between the two sons of the late Saudi ruler Faysal to reestablish what he saw as lapsed Ottoman rule over the east coast of Arabia, Qatar was reincorporated back into the Ottoman fold. Midhat Pasha saw this as an opportune moment to solidify long-held but vague notions of Ottoman rule over the area through the guise of military aid for ‘Abdullah ibn Faysal, who had been ousted by his brother Sa‘ud in Riyadh. The largest military campaign of the Ottomans since the 1500s in the Gulf, Midhat Pasha’s (re)conquests resulted in the creation of the aforementioned Najd Mutasarriflik, which consisted of Hofuf, Mubarriz, Qatif and Qatar (the latter long seen as part of Najd; Qatar was subsumed as part of Hasa which was part of Najd). During the campaign, the ruler of Kuwait, ‘Abdullah al-Sabah, who was

⁹⁶ Saban feels that the CUP takeover of government in Istanbul in 1908 proved disastrous for Ottoman attempts to face off against the British and thus they lost any remaining Ottoman influence in Qatar, leading to the 1913 treaty. Saban, “Qatar fi Ihsa’iya ‘Uthmaniya,” pp. 139-40.

⁹⁷ Anscombe, p. 33.

participating in the Ottoman campaign, sailed to Doha on behalf of the Ottoman force carrying four Ottoman flags which were to be flown in certain towns in the Qatar peninsula.

Rahman gives his typical descriptive history, which is essentially cribbed from the British India Office's Political and Secret Department records (L/P&S). Working through British eyes, this episode is described as a "severe blow to British prestige in the peninsula," also intended to "stop the encroachment by the tribes in the north-west of Qatar" and "put the brake on the operation of the Anglo-Qatari Treaty of 1868."⁹⁸ Rahman claims that the flags were "accepted," that Muhammad ibn Thani and his son Qasim were "unable to refuse to hoist [the flag]" and that ultimately, according to a British investigation, these two "had hoisted the Ottoman flag willingly." Rahman quotes a long passage from a report by Midhat Pasha as cited and translated by Kur'un—one of the few times Rahman quotes Kur'un—but he doesn't explain, or notice, the significance of this passage. Why Rahman picked that report out of the many compiled and translated by Kur'un is unclear, and how Rahman could wade through Kur'un's dense details and argument regarding the 1871 campaign without addressing them is also puzzling.

For Kur'un, in both his books, it is clear that Qasim and his father Muhammad were eager to have Ottoman forces come to Qatar and furthermore that the Ottomans were acting, as Midhat Pasha described it, "upon the desire evinced by these two men" to send the flags to them.⁹⁹ Kur'un describes a chaotic episode in Qatar prior to the coming of the Ottomans due to the Saudi civil war. However, for Kur'un this does not necessarily explain the Al Thani's motivations. What the flag episode means to Kur'un is that the British were supporting the Saudi strife in the hope of undermining Ottoman authority in the area and, ultimately, the flag episode was evidence that since the Al Thani had turned to the Ottoman authorities this "prov[ed] thus [the Ottomans] had been the traditional proprietors of Qatar."¹⁰⁰ This episode is symbolic for the later resonance it has in the whole question of Ottoman sovereignty over Qatar, since for Kur'un, it shows that the Ottomans had long been considered, and continued to be considered, ultimate rulers over Qatar. The purpose of detailing this episode is less to analyze what happened or the motivations behind actions taken by the major participants, but rather to emphasize the polemic: this proves Ottoman control over Qatar.

Anscombe, on the other hand, steers us through this material with great skill. Citing many of the same documents used by Kur'un, but without quoting from them, his purpose is to discern why these men were taking these actions—what motivated them. He is not citing the documents as proof of a larger metanarrative or polemic. Most importantly, Anscombe doesn't simplify this as an instance of Anglo-Ottoman rivalry playing out on and through localities. He connects the episode to local developments and a wider understanding of the motivations of local actors. They are players in the narrative in a way they are not in Rahman or Kur'un (though Rahman's ultimate goal is to laud the skill and inevitable rise of the Al Thani). Anscombe reminds us that when Sa'ud ibn Faysal was dislodged from Riyadh during the Saudi civil war, he retreated to his long-time supporters the Murra and 'Ajman tribes, who were based around and in Qatar. Sa'ud and his allies ravaged Qatar (this is why Rahman's citation of Kur'un is so strange because the Midhat Pasha passage clearly indicates this problem, and therefore, the motivation for the Al Thani to seek Ottoman protection). Anscombe also situates the Al Thani within the ongoing Bahrain-Qatar rivalry.¹⁰¹ In other words, the request for Ottoman aid, and thus the flags, was a way of defending Al Thani rule vis-à-vis threats from the Saudi conflict as well as warding off threats from British-protected Bahrain. For Anscombe, "the flags thus marked the important and most distant points of Al

⁹⁸ Rahman, pp. 94, 96.

⁹⁹ Kur'un, *OQ*, p. 59.

¹⁰⁰ Kur'un, *OQ*, pp. 60 and 63.

¹⁰¹ Anscombe, pp. 31-32.

Thani territory, adding the weight of the sultan's state to their inviolability." Furthermore, and ultimately, Anscombe gives agency to local actors: "Qasim al-Thani and his father used the Ottoman presence when it suited them, notably as a shield for defense and an excuse for non-cooperation with British demands. The two Al Thani shaikhs accordingly tailored their accounts of Great Power involvement in Qatar to suit the differing interests of their Ottoman and British audiences."¹⁰² Understanding the situation in this light explains the difference between Ottoman documents (as relied upon by Kur un) and British documents (as relied upon by Rahman and every other historian of Qatar and the Gulf). The fact that Anscombe consults both types of sources, as well as Arabic secondary sources, allows him not only to realize the discrepancy but more importantly to give voice to the goals and thinking of local actors. In other words, given the paucity of Arabic-language archival material in the Gulf, it is only with a synthesis and comparison of the British and Ottoman archival material—and perhaps "reading between the lines" of these letters written by local actors to the Great Powers found in those archives—that local input and interests in historical developments can be acknowledged, and that we can therefore gain a more multidimensional and nuanced view of historical processes.

Conclusion

Given not only the emergence of new ways of thinking about rule in the "Ottoman periphery"—the Ottoman Gulf being quintessentially periphery—but also the plethora of Ottoman archival correspondence with and from local actors in the Gulf, we can no longer isolate political developments in this region from the rest of the developments and governmentalities that were emerging in the rest of the Ottoman empire in the 19th century, which actually drew on a longer and older history of administrative practices. The additional fact that it was the famed reformer Midhat Pasha who, while serving his tenure as *vali* of Baghdad, initiated a new relationship and administrative apparatus in the territories of eastern Arabia, should demonstrate the synchronous nature of developments in the Gulf and those in the rest of the empire. It should also be evident that as much as the British discounted Ottoman rule in Qatar as well as other emirates in the Gulf, they utilized similar administrative apparatuses and that their views of what constituted sovereignty were based less on objective criteria and more on political interests. Finally, historians should approach archival material cautiously and situate the claims, whether of British or Ottoman officials or local Arab leaders, within a wider context of evolving thinking and practices, interests and rivalries.

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¹⁰² Anscombe, p. 32.

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