

The Hopeless Struggle of The Ottomans Against The Spread of Shi'a in The 19th Century Province of Baghdad*

Assoc. Prof. İsmail Safa ÜSTÜN**

Özet

İran'da Safevîlerin kurulmasıyla (1501) birlikte, atebât kasabalarının bulunduğu Bağdat, Osmanlılar ile Safevîler arasında yüzyıllar boyu devam eden bir mücadele ve rekabete konu olmuştur. Bu sebeple, İran ve Bağdad, Osmanlı – İran münasebetleri tarihi boyunca ve yakın zamanlarda, sürekli olarak birbirlerini etkileye gelmişlerdir.

Şii dünyasının atebâti ziyareti, yüzyıllarca Bağdat eyaletindeki Osmanlı devlet adamlarının şüphesini çekmiştir. XVIII. yüzyıl sonları -XIX. yüzyıl başlarından itibaren, Şii'lerin eyalette giderek yayılmaları karşısında yetkililer önlem almaya koyulmuşlardı. Fakat bu mücadele, Şii ulemanın sahip olduğu malî ve kurumsal yapıları karşısında yetersiz kalmakta ve hattâ umutsuz görünmekteydi.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Osmanlı, Bağdat, İran, Şîa, ulemâ, atebât.

Abstract

From the establishment of Safawids in 1501 in Iran, there had been a continuous struggle and rivalry between the Ottomans and Safawids over the control of Baghdad where the atebat cities were. Therefore, Iran and Baghdad, constantly effected each other throughout history Ottoman-Persian relationship and modern times.

The pilgrims of shi'i world to atebats had always aroused the suspicions of the Ottoman authorities for centuries. The Ottoman officials had taken some precautions against the spread of shi'is in the province that began from late eighteenth-early nineteenth century. However, this struggle appeared to be inefficient and even hopeless *vis-a-vis* the financial and institutional structure of shi'i ulema.

Key Words: Ottomans, Baghdad, Iran, shi'a, ulema, atebat.

From the establishment of Safawids in 1501 in Iran, there had been a continuous struggle and rivalry between the Ottomans and Safawids over the control of Baghdad where six of Imams of twelver shi'a were buried. Baghdad was crucial for the Safawids basically for two reasons; first, they claimed to be descendent of the Prophet, through Musa Kazım (d.799), the seventh Imam. And secondly, they officially adopted the twelver shi'a. For both reasons, they

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** Marmara University The Faculty of Divinity.

laid claim over Baghdad, as a means to justify their political and religious authority based on shi'i Islam *vis-a-vis* the Ottomans claiming to be the sole defenders of sunni Islam. As a result, Baghdad and its around had been a battlefield between the Ottomans and Safawids for centuries. The Ottomans and Qajars inherited the same tensions from the previous centuries in their relations over Baghdad throughout the nineteenth century. Likewise, the tension was inherited by modern Iraq and Iran.

Today, it appears that the invasion of Iraq by the American led coalition opened a new chapter in the relations between Iran and Iraq. After almost a quarter of a century interruption by Saddam, American led invasion gave a chance for the emergence of a shi'i power in Iraq which in fact was anticipated. But what was not anticipated was the degree of the relations between the shi'is of Iraq and Iran. However, history repeated again and the powerfull relations between both areas reappeared.

However, the problems that Iran faced because of Baghdad, is beyond this article. In this article, I will try to point at the "shi'i threat" in the province of Baghdad in the nineteenth century which was considered identical with Iran by the Ottoman authorities. While doing this, I will try to display how the struggle of the authorities against the spread of shi'ia in the province appeared to be hopeless.

Emergence of "The Shi'i Threat" in The Province of Baghdad

I think we can say that it was towards the end of 18th and early 19th century that shi'a started to spread in the province. Studies so far on this¹ and the Ottoman archive papers acknowledge this. For example, Necip Paşa (d.1852)² who was appointed governor of Baghdad (1842-1850) held previous authorities responsible for the spread of shi'a in the province and warned Istanbul that the province became shi'a by two third. Paşa also noted that *taziye* ceremonies which were performed secretly in *sirdabs* in previous times, were held openly during the time of Ali Rıza Paşa³, the previous governor (1831-1842). Because, Ali Rıza Paşa himself was a *bektaşî*, and therefore inclined to the shi'is. Necip Paşa argues

¹ Juan R. I. Cole, "Indian Money and The Shrine Cities of Iraq, 1786-1850", in *MES* 22,4, (October, 1986). Yitzhak Nakash, *The Shiis of Iraq*, (New Jersey, 1994). Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars of Nineteenth-Century Iraq, The Ulama of Najaf and Karbala*, (England, 1998).

² See, Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmanî*, (Matbaa-yı Âmiire, 1311), IV, 545.

³ It was Ali Rıza Paşa who saved Baghdad from *Memlûks*. See, Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmanî*, I: 568-9.

that this encouraged the shi'is in the province.⁴

I think there is no doubt about the fact that the main factor that led to the spread of shi'a in the province was *atebat*.⁵ But, the question of why shi'is spread in the province towards the end of 18th and early 19th century would be explained by a few factors.

First of all, it should be noted that the central authority was weakened by Memluk rules (1750-1831) which emerged after the attacks of Nadir Shah (d.1747) on the province. As the Ottoman historian Mustafa Nuri Paşa put it, "Memluks used to recognize the authority of Ottomans and obey the rules of her, yet the authority of the state was not as respected as it should had been".⁶

Namık Paşa who investigated the Karbala incidents⁷ in 1843, also held Memluks and Ali Rıza Paşa responsible for disorder in the province;

"Although the state owes most of her power to the province of Baghdad, yet it was neglected, and was left to Memluks. So, they governed the province as they wished to. Later on, the province was handed to Ali Rıza Paşa. He had no real power. He, together with the people around him, had distributed the income of the province arbitrarily, throughout thirteen years of his rule".⁸

Secondly, we should mention the Indian donations to *atebats* from the end of 18th century. The effect of these donations to shi'i population and the province as a whole, was very deep indeed. Through the first wave of money from India, a canal (known as *hindiye* canal) had been opened in 1793 which created a population around it.⁹ As a result, Arab tribes had become open to the propagation of shi'i *ulema*.

However this project appears to attract the suspicion of the authorities.

⁴ Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA), Mesâil-i Mühimme, No. 1831-1840, (Kerbela Meselesine Dair). Dr. Ali al-Vardi, *Lamahâatun İjtimâiyyatun min Târîkhi Irâq'îl-Hadîth*, (Mektebetü'l-Haydariyye, Najaf, 1417 / 1375) I, 109-110.

⁵ See, İsmail Safa Üstün, "Bağdat Eyaletinde Atebâtlara Gelen Şii Ziyaretçiler (19.Yüzyıl-20.Yüzyıl Başları)" *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları*, Temmuz-Ağustos 2006, 169-191.

⁶ Mustafa Nuri Paşa, *Netayic'ül-Vuku'at*, 4 vols. ed. Prof. Dr. Neşet Çağatay, (Ankara, 1980), III-IV, 260,

⁷ Necip Paşa sieged and recaptured the city of Karbala in 1842 which was under the control of gangs and mobs, refusing the authority of Baghdad. But, upon the death of a few thousand shi'i in Karbala during the siege, a serious tension appeared between the Ottomans and Iran. BOA, Mesâil-i Mühimme, No. 1831-1840, (Kerbela Meselesine Dair). See more on this, İsmail Safa Üstün, "1843 Yılı Kerbelâ Olaylarının Osmanlı-İran Münasebetlerine Etkisi", *Türkiye Günlüğü*, Kasım-Aralık, 2000.

⁸ BOA, Mesâil-i Mühimme, No. 1831-1840, (Kerbela Meselesine Dair).

⁹ Nakash, *The Shiis of Iraq*, 19-20.

Though at a later date, around 1893, according to the Ottoman authorities, "for years British and even Iranians, by attempting to build a canal between eu-prathes and tigris under the disguise of visitations, they desired to create vineyards and gardens and settle their own citizens there".¹⁰

Also, the so called *Oudth* bequest¹¹ which was amounted 12.000 sterlin / 13.000 *lira* per year, provided shi'i *ulema* a huge advantage *vis-a-vis* sunni educational activities in the province, which I will be back again. This amount alone which shi'i *ulema* were receiving per year, was more than ten percent of the whole annual income of trusts (*evkaf*) (about 12.000.000 *kuruş* / 120.000 *lira*) in the whole province of Baghdad in 1886.¹²

Thirdly, we should mention the wahhabi attacks in early 19th century on *atebats*.¹³ In fact, these attacks made shi'is even stronger.

According to the report of Necip Paşa, the city wall around Karbala was built against wahhabi attacks. By means of this wall which was 1,5 mile in length and on which even artillery was deployed, the people of Karbala was able to defend themselves against the governors of Baghdad, first eleven-month of siege of Davud Paşa in 1824, later on, the attack of Ali Rıza Paşa in 1831, and finally that of Necip Paşa in 1842. In here, the Indian connection appears again. Necip Paşa says that the wall of which construction was started 30-40 years ago during the rule of Great Süleyman Paşa, was completed by the donations sent by "one of the shahs of India".¹⁴

Besides, by the support of *mütesellim* Abdolvahhab, this wall was providing a safe haven for surrounding tribes, along with the items they plundered.¹⁵

Moreover, because of wahhabi attacks, Iran was directly getting involved into the affairs of *atebat*. Namık Paşa says that the people of Karbala had applied Fath Ali Shah (d.1834) for help when they were attacked by wahhabis. In response to this cry for help, Fath Ali Shah had sent 300 soldiers to Karbala to protect the

¹⁰ 04 / Zilkade / 1310, BOA, Askerî Marûzât (Y.PRK.ASK), 90 / 82.

¹¹ See, İsmail Safa Üstün, "19. Yüzyılda Hindistan'dan Atebatlara Gönderilen Teberular: 'Vesikayı Hindiyye Hayır İçin mi, Siyaset İçin mi?' ", *Türk Kültürü İncelemeleri Dergisi*, İstanbul 2007, 79-120. Colé, "Indian Money".

¹² 6 Eylül 1303 / Zilhicce 1304, BOA, EV.d, 1/1 / 26113. Meir Litvak, "The Finances of the Ulama' Communities of Najaf and Karbala', 1796-1904" *Die Welt Des Islams*, XL March, 2000, 41-66.

¹³ See, Hasan-ı Fasaî, *Farsname-i Nasrî*, (Eng. by Herbert Busse, *History of Persia Under Qajar Rule*), (US, 1972),103.

¹⁴ BOA, Mesâil-i Mühimme, No. 1831-1840, (Kerbelâ Meselesine Dair).

¹⁵ BOA, Mesâil-i Mühimme, No. 1831-1840, (Kerbelâ Meselesine Dair).

town. In 1843 Namık Paşa says that one of the gang leaders in Karbala, Muhammad Ali Khan whom we witness during the Karbala incident of 1842, was one of the sons of these soldiers. Two-three years later after sending these troops, Fath Ali Shah had cut their salaries. As a result, some of them settled in the town, some moved to some other places. Namık Paşa mentions that this Muhammad Ali Khan went to Tahran just a few years before Shah died, in order to obtain a *ferman* concerning voluntary guardianship of the town. And Shah gave him a *ferman* and sent him back to Karbala.¹⁶

So, wahhabi attack, although indirectly, helped to the creation of a semi-autonomous Karbala to promote a shi'i identity in the province. Moreover, for Necip Pasha, Karbala, under the control of shi'i gangs, had become an example for the remaining *atebat* towns.¹⁷

Finally, the implementation of *Tanzimat* principles also contributed to the spread of shi'a in the province. *Tanzimat* principles which meant the transferring the local powers to Istanbul, led to the suspicion of the locals, for these principles threatened the economical and political autonomies of tribes.

When Necip Paşa arrived the province, some places were only nominally accepting the authority of Istanbul, by sending only a nominal amount of tax to the central budget.

For example, in Karbala where income was about 3.500 or more purse of *akça*, *mutesellim* Sayyid Abdulvahhab appointed by Ali Rıza Paşa, used to send only 300-400 purse of *akça* to Baghdad and share the remaining with the gangs in the city.¹⁸

Some more glue about the reactions of locals to centralization can also be seen in the report of Namık Paşa. Namık Paşa was suprized that surrounding sunnis were not at all happy about the capture of Karbala by Necip Paşa. Namık Paşa says that previously in a similar circumstance "sunnis used to be very happy by chanting we have done this and that to shi'is". So, it appears that Necip Paşa's intrervention was regarded intervention to their autonomy, rather than a sunni victory over shi'is.¹⁹

¹⁶ BOA, Mesâil-i Mühimme, No. 1831-1840, (Kerbelâ Meselesine Dair).

¹⁷ BOA, Mesâil-i Mühimme, No. 1831-1840, (Kerbelâ Meselesine Dair).

¹⁸ BOA, Mesâil-i Mühimme, No. 1831-1840, (Kerbelâ Meselesine Dair).

¹⁹ BOA, Mesâil-i Mühimme, No.1831-1840, (Kerbelâ Meselesine Dair).

Was Shi'a Really a Threat in The Province?

It was regarded so. This can easily be traced in the reports of the authorities in Baghdad sent to Istanbul that shi'is were identified with Iran and therefore were regarded as threat. The main factor agitating these worries was Iranian visitors to *atebat*.

Again Necip Paşa in 1842 was clearly talking about "Iran's secret intentions of invasion of the province under the disguise of visitations". Necip Paşa says that the two third of the visitors were settling and only one third were going back to Iran, which in fact was a part of a plan of invasion by Iran. Besides, Iran was sending two-three *müctehids* to each of the *atebat* towns of Karbala, Najaf and Kadhimiyya. Iran and Iranian merchants without getting any permission at all were building huge inns with loopholed resembling castles in every two-three-hour distances. These places were considered Iranian rather than Ottoman soil. Over all, for Necip Paşa, the province was under the threat of "a moral invasion of Iranians".²⁰

According to Namık Paşa, the population of Karbala was about 15.000 to 20.000. However, during the visitations that number was increasing to 60.000 to 70.000, so much so that "you would not go to where you want to, instead you would go wherever the crowds would get you to".²¹

Although, I do not have any data about the number of visitors during the previous centuries, yet we would claim that the number should have increased in the 19th century, because of the weakness of the Ottoman authorities in the province. There was an article concerning visitors in the Amasya Agreement of 1555.²² But, it seems disappeared during the *Kasr-ı Şirin* Agreement in 1630. However, it emerged again during the discussions between Ottomans and Afghan invaders in 1727.²³ Soon after, the issue of visitors was again one of the articles of two agreements between the Ottomans and Nadir Shah in 1736 and 1746.²⁴ The article about visitors appeared again in both Erzurum Agreements in

²⁰ BOA, Mesâil-i Mühimme, No.1831-1840, (Kerbela Meselesine Dair).

²¹ BOA, Mesâil-i Mühimme, No.1831-1840, (Kerbela Meselesine Dair).

²² Remzi Kılıç, XVI. Ve XVII. Yüzyılda Osmanlı – İran Siyasi Antlaşmaları, (İstanbul, 2001), 76.

²³ The article 3 mentions the issue of visitors in the agreement of 1140 / 1727, Mahmud Mesud Paşa, *Muâhedât Mecmuası*, (İstanbul, 1298), II, 312.

²⁴ Mahmud Mesud Paşa, *Muâhedât*, II, 318-9 (for the agreement of 1149/1736) and II, 320 (for the agreement of 1159/1746). Âli Djafar Pour, *Nadir Şah Devrinde Osmanlı – İran Mütasebetleri*, (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, İ.Ü. Edebiyat Fakültesi, Aralık, 1977), 156-7.

1823 and 1847 (articles 2²⁵ and 7²⁶).

Nakash estimates the number of visitors coming from Iran in the 19th century around 100.000.²⁷ Lorimer gives the number of visitors coming from Iran as 23.900 in 1889 basing himself on the official registries in Baghdad. This number had increased to 57.567 in 1890.²⁸

The point in here is that, obviously thousands of visitors were creating a huge economic activity which must have provided a dynamism and advantage for shi'i population in the province. The capacity of this economy can easily be judged even by a rough-calculation. For example, the total expenditure of 100.000 visitors per year was about 4.250.000 *tumen* (about 1.070.000 sterlin).²⁹ Although, this economic activity helped the entire economy of the province, yet, we may well presume that the shi'i population must be first and most among those who benefited from this. Moreover, one should bear in mind that the growth of the shi'i centers and population owe too much to this economic activities.

In the same way as the visitors, corps traffic was also creating its own economic activities of which capacity was considerable.³⁰ In the custom registries of Khanıkın, the total number of corpses transferred from Iran in 1849-50 was 3.176.³¹ According to Lorimer, the number of the corpses buried in *atebats* was 9.620 and 14.354 in 1889 and 1890.³²

Of course, a variety of taxes used to be paid for this corps traffic.³³ In addition

²⁵ For the agreement of 1823, *Vakanüvis Esad Efendi Tarihi (Bahir Efendi'nin Zeyl ve İlaveleriyle) 1237-1241/1821-6*, ed. Prof.Dr.Ziya Yılmaz, (İstanbul, Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı, 2000), 241-5; *Gurûde-i İsnâd-ı Siyâst-yi İrân ve Osmânî, Devre-i Qajariyya*, (Defter-i Mütâlaât-ı Siyâsî ve Beyne'l Milel-i Vezâret-i Umûr-i Hâriciyye-i Cumhûri-yi İslâmî, Tahran, 1329), 294-8. Yahya Kalanteri, *Fethi Ali Şah Zamanında Osmanlı – İran Mîtnasebetleri 1797-1834*, (Unpublished Ph.D.Thesis, İ.Ü. Edebiyat Fakültesi, 1976), 166.

²⁶ Article seven in the agreement of 1847, See, Dilek Kaya, *19. Yüzyılda Osmanlı İdaresinde Kerbelâ Sancağı*, (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Marmara Üniversitesi, İstanbul, 2004), 185.

²⁷ Nakash, *The Shiis of Iraq*, 164.

²⁸ C. C. Lorimer, *Dalil al-Halij*, 14 vols. (Matabiu Ali b. Ali, Katar, no date), (*al-Kısm al-Tarihi*) VI, 3378.

²⁹ Nakash, *The Shiis*, 166.

³⁰ İsmail Safa Üstün, "Bağdat Eyaletindeki Atebat'a Şii Cenaze Nakli ve Karantina (XIX.Yüzyıl-XX.Yüzyıl Başları)" *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, (İstanbul 2007), 31 (2006/2), 101-118.

³¹ Mohammad Reza Nâsirî, *Nasîreddin Şah Zamanında Osmanlı-İran Mîtnasebetleri (1848-1896)*, (Institute For The Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo, 1991), 156.

³² Lorimer, *Dalil*, IV:3383.

³³ Lorimer, *Dalil*, IV:3383.

to payments taken in Kirmanshah and Khanikin for each corps, the Ottoman authorities were levying such taxes as burial tax on each corps to be buried in *atebats*.

In 1889, money given to the Ottoman authorities for burial was 6.009 *lira* / 4.807 sterling. In 1890 this amount increased to 11.154 *lira* / 9.234 sterling. Lorimer says that the money taken by the Ottoman consulate at Kirmanshah was not included to this amount.³⁴

The Ottoman archive papers also give some idea on this issue. The money for burial received by trust of Imam Husayn and Imam Abbas at Karbala in April in 1885 was 8.084 *kuruş*. The trust of Imam Ali at Najaf received 14.606 *kuruş* for burial.³⁵ In total, it makes 22.690 *kuruş*. So, if we accept that these two trusts received an average amount of 20.000 *kuruş* per month, then it makes 240.000 *kuruş* annual income from burials.

All these figures were really considerable amount of money for the province. It would be appropriate here to mention the intention of the authorities, in order to have an idea about the current value of these amounts above. Upon the suggestion of the governor of Baghdad in 1893, burial tax was going to subsidize to build a sunni *medrese* which was estimated to cost about 100.000 *kuruş*.³⁶ The governor also suggested the appointment of a *müfti* with 1.500 *kuruş* of salary who was a scholar and has the administrative ability, at Samarra in order to stop the spread of shi'a in the province. Interestingly, burial tax was planned to subsidize the salary of *müfti*.³⁷

However, burial taxes were causing complaints.³⁸ Therefore, authorities frequently used to get petitions desiring the abolishment of burial tax. For example, shi'is settled in the province petitioned in parliament in Istanbul as to abolishment of "health tax" for the burials in 1913.³⁹

In fact, in 1911, it appears that Bâb-ı âlî had already thought of abolishing the burial tax, in response to, probably because of these kinds of pressures. However, authorities in Baghdad had rejected this. For authorities, the aim in

³⁴ Lorimer, *Datil*, IV:3385.

³⁵ 6 Eylül 1303 / selh Zilhicce, 1304, BOA, Evkaf Nezareti (EV.d), -1/-1 / 26113.

³⁶ 09 / Cemâziyelâhir / 1310, BOA, Yıldız Mütenevvi Marûzât Evrâkı (Y.MTV), 73 / 71.

³⁷ 23 / Cemâziyelâhir / 1310, BOA, İ.HUS, 7 / 1310/C-69.

³⁸ Some were exempt from these kinds of taxes. For example, by the date 26 Cemâziyeluha 1329 / 15 May 1327, there was no taxes for corps of officials of the tombs at Karbala, Najaf and Kazımiyya, 29 / Cemâziyelevvel / 1329, BOA, Meclis-i Vükela Mazbataları (MV), 152 / 75.

³⁹ 03 / Safer / 1328, BOA, Muhâberât-ı Umûmiyye İdaresi Belgeleri (DH.MUİ), 60 / 60.

levying burial tax was not to increase the revenue, but to restrict the corps transfer for risking public health.⁴⁰ So, for this reason, burial tax shouldn't be abolished. Besides, the income from burial tax was subsidizing the expenditure of the hospital for homeless in Karbala and Najaf. This was another reason for authorities to be against the abolishment of the burial tax.⁴¹

Even more interesting than this, as a result of abolishing the burial tax, the income of trusts in the whole province was considerably decreasing.⁴² Burial tax, which was already causing complaints and even diplomatic pressures, was becoming a real problem during war times and mutiny, and therefore it wouldn't be possible to collect this tax. For example, the governor of Baghdad suggested the abolishment of burial tax, for 20 *kuruş* increase in the burial tax was one of the reasons of Najaf incidents.⁴³ So, it was thought that it would help to suppress the mutiny in Najaf. As a result, from 1914 burial tax was abolished by the decision of "meclis-i umumi-yi vilayet" (grant parliament of the province). But, this led to 300.000 *kuruş* deficit in the budget. The coming year, this deficit was going to grow up to 1.000.000 *kuruş*. This, in turn, was going to lead to a cut in the budget of shoos. Therefore, the governor demanded a support from the central budget. However, Sublime Porte has only suggested save.⁴⁴

Of course, apart from these official payments, people used to spend a considerable amount of money during their journey which was obviously effecting the economy of the province.⁴⁵ As it is very well displayed by Nakash, corps traffic was an important source of income for a variety of class in the province. For example, in addition to shroud seller, grave diggers and workers, corps washers, corps carriers and tomb officials whose all income was from corps traffic, there were many professionals such as hostel runners who were serving such kinds of

⁴⁰ 12 / Şevval / 1331, BOA, Dâhiliye Nezâreti Evrâkı, İdare Kısmı (DH.İD), 54/-2 / 66.

⁴¹ By 1322, it was decided that a hospital for homeless visitors would be built through the will of sultan at Karbala of which expenses were to be covered by means of additional ten *kuruş* of burial tax. As a result an excellent hospital was built. But, authorities were hesitant as to the decision of abolishment of burial tax for trusts levied on Iranians settled in Najaf and Karbala, and asked Istanbul if burial tax for expenditure of the hospital was also abolished. If it was so, they were against the abolishment, for this would bring the end of the hospital which costed too much money and work. Otherwise, it had to be supported by the budget. 12 / Şevval / 1331, BOA, DH.İD, 54/-2, 66.

⁴² 09 / Muharrem / 1323, BOA, Sedâret Mektubî Mühimme Kalemi Belgeleri (A.MKT.MHM), 557, 13.

⁴³ 27 / Cemâziyelevvel / 1335, BOA, Umûr-i Mahalliye-i Vilâyât Belgeleri, (DH.UMVM), 19 / 22.

⁴⁴ 27 / Cemâziyelevvel / 1335, BOA, DH.UMVM, 19 / 22.

⁴⁵ Lorimer, *Dalil*, IV:3382.

needs as accomodation, eating of people bringing corpses.⁴⁶

Also, corps traffic was an important source of income for *ulema* and thousands of *medrese* students. They were paid to recite *Qur'an* for buried corps. Additionally, they used to get donations sent by the relatives of these corpses abroad (Iran, India, etc.). This economic support by corps traffic in the province, was well expressed by a poet somebody called Sayyid Ahmad al-Saft al-Najafi;

"*fa sâdrâtu baladatî mashâyikhun
wa wâridâtu baladatî janâ'izun*".⁴⁷
(The yields of my homeland are scholars,
And incomes of my homeland are funerals)

In addition to demographic change and economic pressures, a variety of propaganda activities was also intensifying the worries of the authorities about the spread of shi'a. For example, repairment demands of tombs by Iranian Shahs and merchants were regarded propaganda that the authorities were not be able to stand up against.

For example, in 1889 Iranian merchants wished to repair the tombs of Imams (Ali al-Hadî d.868; Hasen al-Askarî d.874) in Samarra. Sublime Port consulted the matter with Namık Paşa whom I think was the same Namık Paşa as the one who inspected the Karbala incident of 1842 and who also became the governor of the province twice (first in 1852-3, and secondly in 1862-3).⁴⁸ Namık Paşa (d.1894-5) stated that there were many monuments, repairments and decorations done by Iranian merchants in Najaf, Karbala and Kadhimiyya, and therefore he did not worry about the repairment of the mosque by Iranians, so long as no harm done to the original construction. By this comment, Namık Paşa who had a deep knowledge of the province, acknowledged that these kinds of demands were not a recent phenomenon at all. However, Namık Paşa warned authorities to be carefull on ways and means of repairing that would lead to gradual conversion of sunni people of Samarra into shi'a as a result of considering this treatment as a favour for shi'is.⁴⁹

Along with Iranian merchants, in 1891 the Iranian Shah by directly applying

⁴⁶ Nakash, *The Shi'is*, 191.

⁴⁷ *Mawsu'at al-Najaf al-Ashraf*, ed. Jafar Dujayli, 6 vols. (Dar al-adwa, Beirut, 1993), I:507.

⁴⁸ For details about his life and carier, Mehmed Süreyya, *Sicill-i Osmanî*, IV:539. Ahmet Nuri Sinaplı, *Devlete Millete Beş Padişah Devrinde Hizmetlerde Bulunan Şeyhu'l-Vüzera Namık Paşa*, (İstanbul 1987).

⁴⁹ 03 / Cemâziyelevvel /1306, BOA, Mâbeyn Başkitâbeti (Y.PRK.BŞK),14 / 88.

to Sublime Port wished to build and repair the tombs of *Imameyn-i askereyn*.⁵⁰ The tomb in Samarra of which dome was previously built by Iranian Shah was damaged, therefore needed repair. Shah wanted to give financial support in repairment of this dome. The issue was discussed in a cabinet meeting and was decided to let the shah to repair the tomb with no harm done to the original. The case was submitted to the will of Sultan.⁵¹

It appears that during this process the governor also consulted the matter with Sublime Porte. The governor sent a report to Sublime Porte concerning the repairment of the tomb in Samarra. According to his survey repairment needed 109.698 *kuruş*.

In this report, it was mentioned that these kinds of repairment traditionally were done by Iranians. However, during repairment they were placing special signs and writings exalting the names of Shahs. So, this would create a bad effect upon people. Therefore, this repairment should be done by the Ottoman government.⁵²

In addition to Shahs and merchants, *müctehids* had always strong ties with *atebats* for centuries. This was also worrying the authorities. For example, in the words of authorities, Hasan Shirazî made Samarra a base for himself to spread shi'a.

As seen in the correspondences with Bâb-ı âli, Samarra was a sunni town by 1893. But, "since our masters, Imam Ali el-Hadî and Imam Hasan el-Askerî, were burried here, there were many Iranian pilgrims there". Moreover, Mirza Hasan Shirazî (1815-1895),⁵³ along with 500 *ahunds* was living there.⁵⁴

According to the governor, the most influential *müctehid* of Iran, Mirza Hasan Shirazî had lived in Najaf for thirty years. After completing his mission there, he moved to Samarra and settled there 20 years ago. The governor claims that Shirazî was receiving 10.000 *lira* every year, apart from the money coming form Iran. So, Shirazî was able to pay the salaries and stipends of *ahunds* and students in Najaf, Karbala, Kadhimiyya and Samarra. He was also spending this

⁵⁰ 16 / Zilhicce / 1309, BOA, Sedâret Resmî Maruzat Evrakı (Y.A.RES), 59 / 29.

⁵¹ 16 / Zilhicce / 1309, BOA, Y.A.RES, 59 / 29.

⁵² 16 / Zilhicce / 1309, BOA, Y.A.RES, 59 / 29.

⁵³ Mirza Hasan Shirazî, a distinguished student of Murtaza Ansari, was the sole *merce'* of the whole shi'i world. It was Hasan Shirazî who issued the famous *fetwa* which led to the tobacco crisis in 1891 in Iran. Most of the prominent *müctehids* in early twentieth century were his students.

⁵⁴ 23 / Cemâziyelâhir / 1310, BOA, İ.HUS, 7 / 1310/C-69.

money for the spread of shi'a and the expenditure of *ahunds* whom he sent among the surrounding tribes to "spoil" their creed and thoughts. Shirazî had more than 500 *ahunds* and students in his *medrese* in Samarra. There was no sunni *medrese* and *müderris* to stand up against the activities of Shirazî who was busy with lecturing in his *medreses*. By taking advantage of this, Shirazî was working on to get the sympathy of such surrounding big sunni tribes as *el-Ğanda*, *el-Sayh*, *el-Abid*, *el-Şemmar*.⁵⁵

It appears that these activities disturbed not only authorities, but also local people. For example, upon a quarrel, took place between a local butcher and one of the students of Shirazî, a fight among the people broke out and the incident went out of control. Iranian visitors, consul and local sunni population were also involved in this incident. Moreover, Russian and especially English consuls were openly intervening the incident, arguing that there were their own citizens among the students of Shirazî. Authorities were worried about British domination of Hasan Shirazî, for "this would make things even worst in Iraq", as they put it.⁵⁶ But, upon the refusal of the intervention of British consul by Hasan Shirazî after the incident,⁵⁷ Ottoman authorities must have a relief.

Apart from British and Russians, this issue was also having effect on relations with Iran. Mehmed Arif Bey from the embassy in Tahran, informed Bâb-ı âlî that rumours concerning the Samarra incident were exaggeratedly circulated among the people there. According to these overstated reports, Hasan Shirazî was insulted and shi'is were threatened. Upon these rumours, Mehmed Arif Bey heard that reactionary mobs were going to attack the embassy. So, the embassy informed *sedaret* about the situation. Even, a leading *müctehid*, Aga Sayyid Abdullah was invited to embassy and given quarantees.⁵⁸

However, Samarra incident was growing. There were disturbances led by some *ulema*, and shops were closed in protest in Najaf where the incident was heard. It is interesting to see at this point, that the governor of Baghdad through the consul in Tahran, wanted help from the Iranian government as to warning and punishing *ulema* of Najaf. Ahmed Emin Bey rightly stated that the Iranian government had no effect what so ever upon *ulema* in Tahran, let alone that of Najaf, and that people were in fact under the influence of *ulema*. Ahmed Emin also reported that things were getting worst. Because, he informed that upon the

⁵⁵ 09 / Cemâziyelâhir / 1310, BOA, Y..MTV, 73 / 71.

⁵⁶ 23 / Cemâziyelâhir / 1310, BOA, İ.HUS, 7 / 1310/C-69.

⁵⁷ Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars*, 169.

⁵⁸ 25 / Şevval / 1311, BOA, Elçilik ve Şehbenderlik Tahriratu (Y.PRK.EŞA), 19 / 57.

spread of rumours of Samarra incidents in Tahran, *ulema* boycotted their class and court. The embassy was worried that sunnis were to get attacked as a result of tolerance of the Iranian government. Therefore, staff were going out very cautiously. Iranians were ignoring all the warnings of the embassy.

In a different report, Ahmed Emin Bey wrote that things were totally getting out of control. An assassination attempt was carried out against the chancellor in Tabriz. The consulate staff were arrested, jailed and their homes were plundered, their families were beaten. In another incident, acting consul, Envar Efendi, was harrassed. Also, the Ottoman citizens were forbidden to go to the embassy. Besides, monthly official meetings of diplomats were not held. Ahmed Emin Bey suggested retaliation. Otherwise, they will not be able to perform their duty any more.⁵⁹

This incident must had been even get worst. Because, authorities had to withdraw the whole legal procedure concerning the incident. It was feared that some leading *ulema* like Mirza Hasan Shirazî would be called on to the court. Obviously, this would create a bad effect upon people. So, Bâb-ı âlî decided to withdraw the whole case.

The Financial Difficulties in Tackling The Shi'i Propaganda

There appears to be a variety of the precautions taken against the spread of shi'a in the province by the authorities throughout the 19th century. Restriction attempts upon the status of visitors settled in the province were among them. Necip Paşa advised in 1843 Istanbul that duration of visitation must be specified and visitors must be given an official paper and the status of those who settled in the province must be clarified.⁶⁰ Necip Paşa was also complaining that many settled Iranian visitors illegally acquiring estates and properties in Karbala.⁶¹ To handle all these measures which were discussed between Ottomans and Iranians during 19th century,⁶² are, in fact, beyond the scope of this article.

An extra endeavour in the sphere of education was also among the precautions taken against the spread of shi'a in the province.⁶³ But, this appeared to

⁵⁹ 16 / Zilkade / 1311, BOA, Hariciye Nezâreti Marûzâtı (Y.PRK.HR), 19 / 20.

⁶⁰ BOA, Mesâil-i Mühimme, No.1831-1840, (Kerbelâ Meselesine Dair).

⁶¹ BOA, Mesâil-i Mühimme, No.1831-1840, (Kerbelâ Meselesine Dair).

⁶² For more on this, *Nasrî, Nasreddin Şah Zamanında Osmanlı-İran Münasebetleri*, 91-121.

⁶³ Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Osmanlı İrakı'nda Şii-Sünni İlişkileri: II. Abdülhamid Dönemi, 1890-1908," in *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Din ve Vicdan Hürriyeti* (Istanbul: ISAV, 2000), 139-147. Selim Deringil, "The struggle Against Shiism in Hamidian Iraq, A Study in Ottoman Counter-Propaganda", in *Die Welt des Islams*, XXX (1990), 45-62.

end up with a failure. It could be said that financial difficulties were among the reasons for this failure of this educational activity of the authorities. The financial burden of the educational activities can be seen in the correspondence of the province with Bâb-ı âlî.

1- According to the governor, by taking advantage of absence of a sunni *medrese* and *müdderris* at Samarra, shi'is had been working on converting such tribes as *el-Sayh, el-Abid, el-Şemmar* and *al-Ğanda* who were stuck to sunni islam.

As an effective precaution, the governor suggested in 1893 that a sunni *medrese* of a hundred student which would cost about 100.000 *kuruş* (1.000 *lira*), should be built.

At this *medrese*, Shaykh Muhammad Said Efendi who was a *müdderris* elsewhere, should be appointed head *müdderris* and *müfti* with salary of 1.500 *kuruş*. Along with him, a second *müdderris* with 500 *kuruş* of salary should be appointed. Of course, 60 *kuruş* for each of 50 students, 50 *kuruş* for a porter, and 200 *kuruş* for monthly expenses should be allotted. This makes all together 63.000 *kuruş* / 630 *lira*, annually.

The governor also suggested that the amount needed for the construction of the *medrese* would be extracted from the annual revenues of burial.⁶⁴

In reply to the governor, Bâb-ı âlî confirmed the appointment of a *müfti* to Samarra. Yet, Bâb-ı âlî was silent as to building of a *medrese*, and appointment of its staff, probably because of financial difficulties.⁶⁵

2- In his yet another correspondence with Bâb-ı âlî in 1894, the governor, this time, mentioned the need of a primary school (*ibtidaiye*) and a higher primary school, (*rüşdiye*) and a mosque. Since there was no such kind of school and teacher in Samarra, people had to send their children to shi'i schools. By 8-10 thousand *kuruş* of the local revenue of municipality and donations of sunnis, constructions of these were started. With a mass participation of people, the first foundation stone was laid down by the governor himself after reciting prayer and praising the Ottoman Sultan.

As to the monthly salaries of the staff of these schools, 500 *kuruş* for the teacher of *rüşdiye*, 300 *kuruş* for the teacher of *ibtidaiye*, 50 *kuruş* for *rüşdiye* porter, 30 *kuruş* for *ibtidaiye* porter, were needed along with 600 *kuruş* of annual expenditure of the schools, which made all together 11.160 *kuruş* annually.

⁶⁴ 09 / Cemâziyelâhir / 1310, BOA, Y.MTV, 73 / 71.

⁶⁵ 23 / Cemâziyelâhir / 1310, BOA, İ.HUS, 7 / 1310/C-69.

As for the monthly salaries of the staff in the mosque, 50 *kuruş* for *imam* and 35 *kuruş* for *müezzîn* and 15 *kuruş* for different expenditure, which made 1.200 *kuruş* in total, would be enough.⁶⁶

But, it appears that the ministry of education ignored this project of the governor, for the ministry thought that *ibtidaiye* would be supported by the locals and *rüşdiye* would be handled in some another reform program.

3- Similar suggestions were also put forward by *müderris* Said efendi in 1896. For him, there were only two things that would be done against the spread of shi'a; first, the repairment of a sunni mosque, and secondly, founding a *medrese* of 50-60 rooms.

For this, there was a need of 1.200 *lira*. It was though that about a hundred students with a proper monthly stipends, would be trained there. After eight months of training, these students would be sent among tribes during the remaining four months to preach them.⁶⁷

4- In fact in 1895, Said Efendi of Baghdad had come to Istanbul and had given a report to Bâb-ı âlî about Samarra in which he claimed the town became the headquarter of *müctehids* who were regarded a spirutual sovereign. For him, Samarra was the centre of all seditions in Iraq. The seditious seeds, implanted six months ago by Hasan Shirazî between more than 100.000 household sunnis and shi'is, even grew. He personally went there to supress the uprising and even had some effect upon *müctehids*. During his long stay there, he acquired experiances and discovered some secrets, as he put it.

He complained that *müctehids* in Najaf' and Karbala were receiving a huge amount of money from all shi'i world. So, they were able to train, finance and send their students among surrounding wild and ignorant tribes.

By exploiting their ignorance on religion, they were propagating their own belief to convert these people into shi'i. Meanwhile, they were encouraging them to rebel against the state, and therefore causing financial looses.

He claims that throughout 40 years, no one left not to convert into shi'i among settled and tribal people of Najaf, Karbala and Kadhimiyya. Now, for the last few years, they were aiming at converting 100.000 sunni population of Samarra into shi'a. If this persists, whole Iraq would became shi'a, which in turn would cause a huge problem for the state. In fact, the spread of sedution eased a

⁶⁶ 13 / Şaban / 1311, BOA, Y.MTV, 90 / 76.

⁶⁷ 20 / Safer /1313, BOA, Meşîhat Dâiresi Marûzâtı (Y.PRK.MŞ), 6 / 18.

little bit after the recent death of Hasan Shirazî. But, Said Efendi was certain that another more eligable *müctehid* than Hasan Shirazî will be chosen, in accordance with the rules of their sect.

By taking advantage of this "brake", Said Efendi made a suggestion in 1895 saying that mobile preachers should be send among tribal people to preach and teach them islam. This would prevent possible dangers. Even converted people would be converted back to sunni islam again in this way. By doing so, state property, Said Efendi argues, will grow even two-three times more than at this moment.⁶⁸

5- After 15 years, there appeared to be yet another financial difficulty in implementing precautions to be taken against the spread of shi'a in the province, as far as understood from discussions during a cabinet meeting, held in 1913. Previously, five chosen *müderris* of Istanbul were sent with 5.000 *kuruş* salary each to preach in mobile. But, they had been unsuccessful and the project had produced no result. But, this time, nine local *müderris* were appointed with 500 *kuruş* salary, in addition to head teacher with salary of 1.500 *kuruş*, in order to speech in mobile in Basra upon the request of the governor. Yet, there was no desired result again. So, the cabinet decided to cancel these allocations and divert these funds to the needs of other *medreses*.⁶⁹

However, along with these mobile *müderris*, the salaries of the settled *müder-ris* of Samarra *medrese* were also cut, and their salaries were not placed in the budget. Two *müder-ris* of Samarra, Abbas and Abdulvahhab, had wired Istanbul their complains about this.⁷⁰ In contrast to this, stipends of 100 students, 5.000 *kuruş* in total, were not canceled. So, they were worried that these students would be scattered around.

Meanwhile, the governor was also against this decision of Bâb-ı âlî. Because, mobile *müderris* was important to teach sunni principles to ignorant tribal people. For the governor, it was not proper to cancel mobile *müderris* system which proved it self for years.⁷¹

The governor argues that increase in quantity of sunni *ulema* in the province against shi'i *ulema* and their correction of faith was indispensable. And students

⁶⁸ 20/ Zilkade /1312, BOA, Arzuhal ve Jurnaller (Y.PRK.AZJ), 31 / 8.

⁶⁹ 05/ Safer /1328, BOA, DH.MUİ, 14/-2, / 33.

⁷⁰ 05/ Safer /1328, BOA, DH.MUİ, 14/-2, / 33.

⁷¹ 05/ Safer /1328, BOA, DH.MUİ, 14/-2, / 33.

of these *medreses* above must not be scattered.⁷²

Conclusions

Examining the precautions taken by the Ottomans against the spread of shi'a in the province of Baghdad in the 19th century is, as I said, beyond a paper. In this article, I've just wanted to point that this struggle appears to be a kind of mission impossible for the authorities. The spread of shi'a throughout the 19th century in the province simply could not be prevented. In fact, the authorities themselves in the province admitted this. A close examination on the matter may reveal many reasons for the failure of the Ottomans. In this article, I've only tried to point at the difficulty of the Ottoman authorities *vis-a-vis* economic capacity and ability of shi'i community in the province.

The main reason for the spread of shi'a was undoubtedly a strong inclination of shi'is to *atebat*. By means of economic activities as a result of pilgrims to *atebats*, shi'is were able to root deep into the province. This was alone providing shi'is an upper hand in and around *atebat*.

I think it would not be wrong to say that *ulema's* financial power played a very crucial role in succeeding to spread their creed. As mentioned above, *vali* informs us that Hasan Shirazî was receiving 10.000 *lira* in addition to those coming from Iran. As Meir pointed out, the leading *müctehid*, Murtaza Ansari's⁷³ (1799-1864) annual income was about 9000 sterling.⁷⁴ We can surely add the *Oudth* bequest to these amounts. Therefore, we can argue that shi'i *ulema* in Baghdad were receiving about at least 20.000 *lira* annually in the 19th century. This amount was about 20 percent of whole income of the trusts (*evkaf*) in the province in 1880's. In contrast, the the Otoman authorities in the province, as mentioned above, were having difficulties in affording to build even a *medrese* costing 1.000 *lira* and its annual budget of 630 *lira*. They also seemed to be at pain to finance the annual budget of 111.6 *lira* of *ibtidaiye* and *rüşdiye* schools.

The centralized nature of shi'a hierarchy with a top *müctehid* at its peak, was surely a further advantage for shi'a. This was a point which authorities were well aware of, and which caused the worries of the authorities. *Ulema* with a top *müctehid* were able to spend this huge amount of money freely, whereas the Ottoman officials were hopelessly struggling against the bureaucracy in spending

⁷² 05/Safer /1328, BOA, DH.MUİ, 14/-2, / 33.

⁷³ Murtaza Ansari was the sole *merce'* of the shi'i world, and is the author of the important works "al-Makasib" and "al-Faraid al-Usul", the basic books of contemporary shi'i *madradas*.

⁷⁴ Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars*, 36.

their even limited financial capacity.

So, it can be argued that in face of these advantages above of shi'is, the Ottomans couldn't have that much chance to stop shi'a to spread in the province. I think this was apparent during the Samarra incident after which Bâb-ı âlî had to keep a low profile, admitting that local authority was responsible for the incident. Besides, local authorities had tried to get satisfaction of Mirza Hasan Shirazî with the investigation of the incident.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Meir Litvak, *Shi'i Scholars*, 168.