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Rupert Hay and Kurdistan

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Introduction to the Lexington Books Edition

Paul Rich

Happily, because the book is an important one, this is the third edition that I have edited of Rupert Hay's volume. The first Gulf War precipitated the first edition in 1991, published by Allborough Press of Cambridge and based on the original edition of 1921. That was followed by a version in 2001 that David Merchant helped me produce while we were at Stanford University's Hoover Institution one summer, and published by iUniverse and Barnes & Noble. Now, thanks to the initiative and support of Joseph Parry of Lexington Books and Rowman & Littlefield, it is possible to present this updated edition.

That Rupert Hay's insights can be made accessible not just to wealthy bibliophiles but to a much larger audience is testimony that at least some of the changes in academia being wrought by the computer revolution are positive. It is now feasible to reach back into the often obscure and expensive bibliography of the Middle East and provide sensibly priced printings of formerly scarce works, which is one of the aims (but not the only aim) of the Lexington series on the Middle East that I am editing.

When a book such as Hay's goes out of print, it is not just the possibility of its being used in a course or placed on a reading list that is diminished. A voice is silenced that might influence present day policy. Because Hay writes at length not only about the Kurds but about the long-oppressed Turkish population of what is generally viewed as the Kurdish part of Iraq, he is now being quoted by Turkish partisans. The reader has

a chance to draw his or her own conclusions. Increasingly there are ethnic Turks in parts of Iraq who fear the rise of Kurdish nationalism:

The majority of the Turkmen people live in Kerkuk, which is considered the capital of the Turkmeneli. Kerkuk region, rich in oil fields, versatile land, geographical location and strategic routes between Turkey, Iran and Iraq, . . . After the liberation of Iraq by the American forces, the Kurdish militia has been utilising a variety of methods as a means to eliminate the original inhabitants of the town. Turkmen have been undergoing decades of an assimilation campaign in Iraq in an often more brutal fashion than that carried out on Kurds. The Turkmen population is approximately three million and they constitute around 12% to 16% of the Iraqi population. Turkmen underwent heavy-handed treatment by successive Arab rulers (the worst of whom were the Ba'ath Party). Kerkuk is geographically the region that straddles the strategic trade routes between Anatolia, Iran and Iraq, and this has been the main reason for attempts by former ruling powers to settle the Arabs in this region. However, the Turkmen consider Kirkuk City to be the capital of their homeland Turkmeneli. The Turkmen's home is essentially in northern Iraq and it is called Turkmen land or Turkmeneli, stretching from the Syrian border to Iran. This area stretches from Telafer in the north to Mendeli in the south.¹

Perhaps in years to come nothing will ever go out of print and no voice will ever be stilled. I think that many of us do not mind if a colleague or student in the Middle East or Africa or Latin America who cannot afford an auction house price is now able to read books that formerly required a trip to a library in London or Washington. I have been unable to come up with a serious downside to the new publishing world for those of us who want to get our now out of print books back into print. Being able to update and comment anew, which was formerly a great luxury, enriches the dialogue. When a book has already run the gauntlet of the gatekeepers and is as valuable as this book is, it deserves a new lease on life. That can only be good for research and understanding.

Of course, it is not only Turks who find Rupert Hay's book² deserves renewed scrutiny. The Turkish suspicions that the Kurds will declare independence from Iraq and that such a move will fuel further unrest in predominantly Kurdish areas of Turkey itself are matched by the Kurdish suspicions that the Turks mean them no good. Possibly one interpretation of what Hay writes is that a loose federalism within Iraq is the solution when so many interests are at stake.

Rupert Hay wrote about the Kurds and the Turks as a very young man, and many years later after a brilliant career he briefly became the last principal officer of the Indian Empire in the Gulf. Britain ruled the Gulf, in a sense, from 1763 until 1971. In 1763 the British Residency established

at Bushire in Persia (Iran) by the British East India Company. A treaty was imposed on the "Trucial Gulf States" in 1820 abolishing the slave trade and from 1822 to 1873, the region was subordinate to the Governor of Bombay and the British East India Company. From 1873 until 1947, the Gulf was the fiefdom of the Indian Political Service, and Hay was the principal officer in the Gulf when that ended and the British Foreign Office and its officials took over until the end of British control in 1971. The training and the duties entailed in being an IPS officer in the Gulf are illustrated in an account by Robin Wilton:

I had been sent to Kuwait to learn my trade from the Political Agent there, G N (Noel) Jackson, and was soon put to studying the many procedural and legal manuals by which the Indian Political Service operated. I was also put under the tutelage of the Agency translator, with the instruction that he replace, as soon as possible, my effeminate Levantine Arabic with a more manly local accent . . . Before my education in Kuwait in the summer of 1949 had progressed very far a telegram arrived from the Political Resident in Bahrain, Sir Rupert Hay, instructing me to proceed at once to Qatar, where the Ruler Shaikh Abdullah bin Jasim Al Thani had abdicated, oil was beginning to flow, and both the Resident and the oil company felt it was high time that there should be a political officer living in Doha. The Treaty of 1916 had provided for such a presence but the Ruler had been unenthusiastic and the Government of India had not pressed the point. The minimal requirements of relations with Qatar had been adequately covered from the Political Agency in Bahrain. The beginning of oil exports in 1949, with the prospect of large and increasing revenues for the government of Qatar, altered perceptions in Whitehall and in early August 1949 I found myself on my way to become the first ever resident Political Officer in Qatar. I travelled via Bahrain, to receive my instructions from the Political Agent there, H. G. Jakins. He, too, was a recently appointed Foreign Service officer, an old Levant Consul of great experience, tetchily impatient of Indian office procedures and customs which were then still in use in the Gulf Posts ("They tie their files together with *white* tape!"). He had been shoved into Bahrain in the absence of Pelly, away sick. His instructions were brief and confined to essentials: he gave me an empty whisky box containing a Consular Flag; an Accounts Manual, Ledger and Journal; the Indian Civil and Penal Codes; a set of Consular Instructions and a small supply of Consular Fee Stamps; a Government Telegraph Code; and a bottle of Johnnie Walker. He told me that he would expect my accounts to be presented monthly until such time as he gave me permission to present them quarterly. He advised me to impress upon the new Ruler Shaikh Ali bin Abdullah at an early stage the established custom by which I should be entitled to import alcoholic beverages for my personal use. And he reminded me tersely of the need for economy in the use of stationery and office supplies in general.³

Hay goes down in history as the last Raj or uncrowned king of the Gulf.⁴ The Foreign Office had neither the patience nor the inclination to continue the customs of Viceregal India. He was in fact the last person to be carried ashore at Muscat in the throne-like chair borne by uniformed sailors that was used by the British agency there:

Until the 1950's formal arrivals and departures from the Consulate were always by sea and a whaler manned by four local sailors was kept for this purpose. When Ronald Wingate arrived in 1919 the whaler was rowed out to meet him off his ship by 4 scarlet clad Negroes (one to each oar). The whaler flew two flags; one a blue Jack with a lion jumping in the corner in a crown for the Political Agent as British Consul for the Foreign Office; and the other a Union Jack with a sort of starfish in the center representing the Star of India for the same person as Political Agent for the Government of India. After an 11 gun salute Wingate was carried ashore pick aback to the steps of the Consulate, there being no jetty. In the 1920's the whaler crew carved a special chair for carrying dignitaries ashore, similar to a cane-bottomed dining chair with arms, with two poles each about 5 foot long fixed to the sides. Unfortunately this chair has, like the silver mounted sticks, disappeared from the scene. Apart from the Consul the only person to be brought ashore by this means was the Political Resident in the Persian Gulf, the last one to use the chair being Sir Rupert Hay in 1951.⁵

It would be possible to go on at length about these nuances of rule by ritual and the ways in which ceremony substituted for troops. In my original introduction (which follows this new introduction), I mention the uniform suggestive of Gilbert and Sullivan, which the British officers in the Gulf wore. Gerald Butt recalls a delicious anecdote about Hay:

And on the subject of colonial officials, there was the story at the time of Rupert Hay, the senior diplomat in the region with the title, British Political Resident in the Gulf. Despite the oppressive heat and primitive conditions, he insisted on wearing full dress uniform, including helmet, when calling on the local rulers. One day as he was bouncing along the track out of Sharjah, his vehicle hit a large bump - and the spike of his helmet went through the soft-top roof, leaving him suspended by his chin-strap. His aide-de-camp came to his rescue.⁶

But there is another and more significant side to the British in the Gulf than their uniforms and medals. Just a couple years before he died, at the age of ninety-two, Sir John Cotton chided me over describing the British colonial administrators in too anecdotal terms. Sir John was the sixth generation of a family that began its service in India in the eighteenth century and the last president of the retired IPS officers association, so I took his admonishment seriously. Sir John, Sir Rupert and their ilk were resource-

ful, courageous, and exceptional men. Their mannerisms had a purpose because they were always on stage, constantly watched by hostile observers. They kept the peace. I do not believe their intelligence and leadership has been matched by the would-be foreign adventurers in Iraq and the modern Gulf. If Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton, one could also remark that the security of the Gulf was long maintained by friends of Tom Brown.

NOTES

1. Mofak Salman, "Kerkuk and the Turkmen," Middle East Information, www.unpo.org/article.php?id=2610, accessed 5 January 2008.

2. The original publishing history is somewhat complicated. The book was in the catalog of Sidgwick and Jackson, a firm which began in 1908 and whose assets were acquired by Macmillan, which of course has itself gone through various mergers and consolidations. It was reviewed as a Sidgwick imprint: *The Geographical Journal* 59, no. 1 (January 1922): 60–62. But it is also cited with William Clowes as the publishers: William R. Hay, *Two Years in Kurdistan 1918–1920* (London and Beccles: William Clowes and Sons Limited, 1921), Salman Mofak, "The origin and the settlement of the Turkmen in Iraq," <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/kerkuk/message/2568>, accessed 5 January 2008. The printer evidently was William Clowes, also in those days a publisher, and some copies appeared with Clowes listed as publishers. Clowes has gone through several owners and reorganizations and is now primarily a printer. The ledgers from the original Clowes firm have been deposited in the Reading University library.

3. Robin Wilton, "Robin Wilton's Esoterica": Weblog blogs.sun.com/racingsnake/date/20060105, accessed 5 January 2008.

4. Ivor Lucas was interviewed by Malcolm McBain for the British Diplomatic Oral History Program. Lucas was third secretary at Bahrain in 1952. He subsequently rose to become Ambassador to Oman and Syria: ". . . in December 1951 I was posted off to Bahrain under the wing of an august gentleman called the Political Resident of the Persian gulf, at that time an old Indian Political Service gentleman called Sir Rupert Hay. At that time the Foreign Office, although it had taken over responsibility for the Gulf States after the War, had not got anyone who really knew that part of the world very well. Rupert Hay was the last of the Indian Political Service Political Residents and the supervised the Political Agents in Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the Trucial States—now UAE—and the Consul General in Muscat, the Sultanate of Muscat and Oman as it was called at the time. Then after a few months he retired from the scene and was succeeded by the first Foreign Office Political Resident who was Bernard Burrows."

5. "The Compound," www.britishembassy.gov.uk/, accessed 7 January 2008.

6. Gerald Butt, "The highway has replaced a former track," *BBC News*, news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/from_our_own_correspondent/713250, accessed 7 January 2008.

