

**AWM4**  
**Australian Imperial Force unit war diaries,  
1914-18 War**

Formation Headquarters

**Item number:** 1/11/7

**Title:** Political and Economic Intelligence  
Summaries, General Headquarters,  
Egyptian Expeditionary Force

September 1918



AWM4-1/11/7





## **POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.**

15th September, 1918.

### **ENEMY TERRITORY.**

(Note.—Map references by co-ordinates are to the 1:40,000 series).

#### **POLITICAL.**

##### **A.—HOME POLITICS.**

###### **THE SYRIAN VALIS.**

The "Agence Milli" on August 26th announced that Tahsin Bey, ex-Vali of Damascus, had been appointed Inspector of the re-occupied territories in the Caucasus.

From Syrian newspapers recently received, it is quite clear that Azmi Bey, Vali of Beirut was dismissed, while Tahsin Bey, Vali of Damascus and Bedri Bey, Vali of Aleppo, were allowed to resign, in consequence of their refusal to submit to the Government's instructions regarding the collection of the tithe.

###### **APPOINTMENTS.**

According to a Constantinople telegram dated August 10th, Rifaat Pasha, the former Turkish Ambassador at Paris, has been appointed to succeed Hakki Pasha at Berlin.

[Note.—This disposes of the previous report that Jemal Pasha had been given this appointment].

###### **FIRE AT CONSTANTINOPLE.**

The "Agence Milli" on August 29th announced that a fresh conflagration had broken out in Constantinople, destroying 700 houses.

##### **B.—FOREIGN POLITICS.**

###### **AFGHANISTAN.**

It is reported, but not confirmed, that four prominent Turcoman notables from Russian Turkestan arrived at Kabul early in June with a Fetwa-i-Jehad-i-Akbar (Holy War edict), signed by Muslim theologians and secular leaders connected with the Moslem Union Congress which was held at Kaz (? Kazan). Another mission is said to have arrived some time before in Afghanistan from Bokhara, bearing a memorial of much the same nature. Considerable excitement is stated to have been caused among the people of Kabul and the Shura (assembly of chieftains). On the authority of astronomers, who made a similar prophecy in 1915, a belief is current that Afghanistan is about to enter the war. The Afghan authorities are reported to have taken steps to counteract the poisonous influences which the members of these missions are attempting to propagate.

###### **CIS-CAUCASIA.**

Differences appear to have arisen soon after the dissolution of the Trans-Caucasian Republic between the newly formed Georgian State and the Cis-Caucasian Republic. According to the "Lloyd Ottoman" of June 24th, the Georgians claimed sovereignty over the Abkhasians, a Moslem people akin to the Circassians who inhabit the North-West portion of the province of Kutais around Sukhum. The Georgians sent a force of 800 men commanded by 40 German officers, former prisoners of war, to occupy the country. The Cis-Caucasians thereupon appealed to Turkey for help.

The Russian Government wireless on August 14th announced the formation on July 7th of a new North Caucasian Republic, to include the provinces of Stavropol, Chernomorsk and the regions of Kuban and Terek. This Republic has its capital at Ekaterinodar and is said to form part of the Federation of the Russian Socialist Councils.

The "Agence Milli" reports a statement made by Haidar Bey, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Cis-Caucasian Republic, to the effect that the troops of this State had occupied Vladikavkas after twelve days' fighting and had cleared the town of Bolsheviks and Cossacks.

[Note.—The situation in Cis-Caucasia is so obscure that it is difficult to estimate the significance of this announcement. It however appears to indicate a recrudescence of Bolshevism aimed against the Moslem "mountaineers." It is not clear whether the Cossacks were siding with the Bolsheviks or formed a third party].

###### **BAKU.**

According to reports in the Foreign Press, the situation at Baku was becoming critical in the middle of July. The town was surrounded on the land side by Turkish troops assisted by Caucasian Mountaineers, and the water supply had been cut. There was no bread in the town, and the inhabitants were said to have been living for three months on such articles of diet as walnuts and caviare. Numerous deaths from famine and cholera were reported.

Towards the end of July the anti-Bolshevist party in Baku, consisting principally of Armenians and moderate Russians, apparently got the upper hand over their opponents, with whom they had been waging civil war ever since the spring, and decided to invite British assistance. The Bolshevik Council was deposed, and early in August British troops with armoured cars arrived from Enzeli, the Persian port on the southern shores of the Caspian, to help in the defence of the town.



## ARMENIANS IN THE CAUCASUS.

According to an announcement from the "Agence Milli" dated August 22nd, the Armenian Parliament has been opened at Erivan. Representatives of Turkey, Germany, Austria, Persia, and the Ukraine were present.

Another Constantinople telegram dated August 13th states, that as a result of the demands of the Armenian delegation in Constantinople, the Turkish Government has decided gradually to send Armenian refugees back to the Caucasus. At present only those from the districts of Batum and Alexandropol will be allowed to return.

## C.—ARAB MOVEMENT.

The following information has been supplied by a reliable agent concerning the Jebel Druz, the Hauran and tribes East of Jordan :—

### JEBEL DRUZ.

Village.	Sheikh.	Remarks.
Dibin ... ..	Fares Bey el Atrash ... ..	Reported to be pro-Turk.
Aere ... ..	Selim Pasha el Atrash ... ..	Both at Damascus under Government surveillance.
Suweida ... ..	Abdel Ghaffa Bey el Atrash ... ..	
Semme ... ..	Ali el Atrash.	

Informant states that the Kaimakam of Jebel Druz is Nashat Bey. He is chief of the Young Turk Committee in Damascus.

[Note.—Nashat Bey was given the Iron Cross in May].

The Turks are appointing contre-espionage agents at all the railway stations. They suspect that the country is swarming with British agents.

### BELKAA.

The position of Christians in the Belkaa is very precarious. They are receiving very bad treatment at the hands of the Government, and the Beduin are plundering them wholesale. The Druse of this district are pro-Sherif. Owing to the withdrawals from Es Salt the Beduin have lost confidence in the British and have inclined towards the Turks.

### TURKISH POLICY.

Jemal Pasha's (No. 2) present policy is to play off one tribe against the other. It has had some success. Recently the Hauran people fought the Khursan and the Sarhan tribes. Turkish propaganda contains such points as the following :—

- That the British encourage immorality in the towns and villages captured by them.
- That the Sherif is only a tool in the hands of the British.
- That the British insult the Moslem religion and destroy the Mosques.
- That the British have appointed a Jewish Governor in Palestine.
- That convicts in their blue clothes are paraded through the streets of Jerusalem.

This has caused the Beduin to believe that the British laws are very strict.

### THE DRUSE.

In addition to the decorations reported to have been conferred on the Atrash family in the bulletin of June 29th, "El Muktabas" of May 25th states that the Iron Cross 2nd class has been conferred on

Selim Pasha El Atrash,  
Nessim Bey El Atrash,  
Abdel Ghaffar Bey El Atrash,  
Hashim Bey (Mutessarif of the Hauran),  
Nashat Bey (Kaimakam of Jebel Druz).

The Osmanieh 3rd class was conferred on  
Abdel Karim Bey El Atrash.

Some Druse refugees who arrived at Jerusalem about August 10th state that only Selim Pasha El Atrash is under Turkish influence and is living in Damascus. His cousin cousin Mustafa El Atrash is living at Acre and is said to be taking neither side.

### KERAK.

A Christian native of Kerak who arrived at Hebron about August 20th, states that Sheikh Erfeifan is oppressing the Christians at Kerak. About half of these were still in Kerak at the beginning of August, the remainder had gone to the village of Hamud about 12 miles North-West of Kerak for safety. Of the non-Mejalli chiefs only Hussein Et Tarauni is pro-Turk, but his people are pro-Sherif.

### SHERIF ALI HAIDAR.

An Arab refugee who was in Damascus at the beginning of June states that Sherif Ali Haidar was at that time still in the Lebanon. The Arab population is always talking of and hoping for the coming of the Sherif.

### EGYPT.

The following is a résumé of a report on the effect on the Egyptian Nationalist movement in Switzerland of the financial control which was established in the middle of 1917, to prevent the use of funds remitted from Egypt to Switzerland for Nationalist purposes :—

The result of the first year's working of the scheme has been that the Nationalist movement, which at one time was very active in Switzerland, has practically ceased to exist.



The policy adopted was to make careful enquiries into each case, so as to ensure remittances not being used for undesirable purposes. Anyone proved to have worked actively against our interests has been treated without mercy, but as much generosity as possible has been shown to those who have begun to show signs of a sincere desire to come round and assist our cause, and to make use of these to combat the movement they originally supported. Whenever occasion arose, the attitude was adopted that Nationalist activities were quite beneath the notice of either the British or the Egyptian authorities.

The result has been that the two existing Nationalist papers "L'Egypte" and "Le Nil" went into liquidation, the Nationalist clubs at Lausanne and Geneva, and the "Sphinx" Society failed from lack of support, and pamphlets and press articles ceased to appear. Mohammed Farid, Dr. Taher, Sheikh Abdel Aziz Shawish and Abdel Malek Hamza, with other Nationalist leaders left for Germany, and a certain number followed the ex-Khedive and Yeghen Pasha to Turkey.

Quite a number of Egyptians who were actively assisting the Nationalist movement, or were "sitting on the fence," have come over to us, and have assisted quite spontaneously in breaking up the Nationalist organization. Two Egyptians who originally held Turkish passports, and had at one time been in the Turkish army, have quite recently announced their intention of giving donations amounting to something like £20,000 to the British Red Cross and similar charities, "in recognition of the work which England has done for Egypt, and of her treatment of the Egyptian people."

The recent decision to insist on all Egyptian students taking out British Protected Egyptian passports has had good results, but it is early as yet to gauge its full effect. A few of the remaining student agitators applied to the Turkish Legation for help, and were granted an allowance of 300 francs per month, on condition that they retained their Turkish nationality. This sum was paid in May, but does not seem to have been forthcoming in June and July.

With regard to the more recent suggestion to make the sending of remittances from Egypt to Egyptians in Switzerland conditional on their taking out British passports, attention is drawn to the fact that in many cases this would entail a certain amount of hardship on persons with property in Turkey, which would be liable to confiscation in the event of their openly siding with us.

As regards the transfer of Nationalist activities to Germany and Turkey, it is stated that the Nationalist leaders found little sympathy there for a movement whose object is "Egypt for the Egyptians." An article is quoted from "Die Verteidigung," criticizing an appeal issued by Mohamed Farid, and stating that "Egypt is a Turkish land and must without fail after the war come again under Turkish dominion. . . . It is not quite clear by what right Mohamed Farid speaks in the name of Egypt, as it is not known that the Turkish Government has authorized him and his Committee to proclaim themselves in her name, as the representatives of Egypt. The English will, please God, be forced to give back Egypt to the Turkish Government, but not to Mohamed Farid and his associates."

The Nationalist leaders in Germany and those who left for Turkey have now discovered that the cry of "Egypt for the Egyptians" is far from favourably received by Turkey, and their movement has degenerated into a purely anti-British campaign, financed and directed by the Germans. This has brought them into disfavour with the few adherents left in Switzerland, where the original Nationalist movement seems, for the present at least, to have been effectually suppressed.

#### TRIPOLI.

The "Agence Milli," on August 28th, reported that Sayed Ahmed El Senussi, of Tripoli, had arrived in Vienna.

The same agency on August 31st, announced that Sayed Ahmed El Senussi had arrived at Constantinople on that date.

#### YEMEN.

It is reported from Aden that the Turks have handed over to the Iman Yahia the whole of the Yemen as far as Dhala and Kataba (about 85 miles north of Aden). It is believed that by so doing, the Turks hope to make sure of their line of retreat, if they are obliged to evacuate Lahej and retreat northwards.

#### D.—MISCELLANEOUS.

##### ARMENIANS.

An Armenian who left Damascus on July 7th has written to the editor of the Armenian paper "Arev" denying the truth of statements contained in an article in that paper written by another Armenian refugee, to the effect that, during the famine at Damascus last winter and spring, not a single Armenian suffered; the writer of the letter declares that hundreds of Armenians died in Damascus of starvation. In March, all Armenians were gathered to be enlisted, though at first it had been decided to massacre them. The Government closed the orphanages and workhouses which it had itself founded.

The writer of the letter also states that the Armenian Catholicos, Ormanian, did not go to Constantinople on the invitation of the Government to take part in the conference on Caucasian affairs, as stated by the writer of the article. He had applied to go to Constantinople several months before, but it took seven months before permission was granted. He adds that the Armenian Archbishopric of Konia has been abolished, and absorbed by the Archbishopric of Smyrna.



A Greek prisoner of war, captured on August 20th, states that, although the condition of Armenians in Damascus has ameliorated, they are still undergoing great sufferings on account of the lack of food and work. Hundreds are not permitted to leave the town to look for work and there are consequently daily deaths from starvation.

There are still some two or three thousand Armenian families living in Damascus, but all the men who were fit and of military age have been conscripted.

#### GREEKS.

The "Lloyd Ottoman," of June 20th, states that after an inspection by Jemal Pasha and the Directors of the Naval School, it was decided to requisition the Greek Theological College on the Island of Halki in the Marmora, near Constantinople. The Greek Patriarch has protested to the Minister of Justice and Religions.

[Note.—This college contains a valuable library and in its grounds are the tombs of the Oecumenical Patriarchs. This measure is a fresh blow aimed at the authority and privileges of the Greek Patriarchate].

#### DESERTION.

An Arab Christian refugee, who travelled southwards from Damascus during June, states that he saw many deserters and heard many Turks express the desire to surrender to the British if possible. There are about 1,000 deserters at Suweida in Jebel Druz.

It is reported that when Arabs of Damascus serving in the Turkish Army desert, they go to Jebel Druz. The inhabitants of Jebel Druz and the Hauran are in possession of machine-guns, rifles and a large quantity of ammunition.

A Christian Arab who was deported to Yozgat, near Angora, by the Turks in 1916, has made his escape from that place and arrived in occupied territory a few days ago.

He states that there are numerous insurgent bands in the Angora Vilayet consisting chiefly of deserters, but also of Greek, Armenian and Kurd refugees. The Government appeared to be powerless against them. Informant often saw bands of armed deserters in Asia Minor and in Syria, in the course of his journey on foot from Yozgat.

An Arab refugee who was deported from Medina by the Turks in 1916 and left Konia at the end of February, 1918, states that there is a large disaffected population in Konia, among whom are many Arabs. Their leader is one of the principal merchants in the place. At the beginning of 1917 a mixed battalion of Turks and Arabs mutinied and took to the mountains. They were led by a certain Malal and were still at large when informant left.

#### PROPAGANDA.

The following is an appreciation of the effect of propaganda on enemy desertion on the Palestine Front:—

The monthly totals of deserters during the period were:—

May	...	...	...	...	140
June	...	...	...	...	88
July	...	...	...	...	168
August	...	...	...	...	212

The total for the week ending September 10th was 69, the highest figures for one week's deserters yet reached. The only available figures for last summer are:—

September	...	...	...	...	73
October	...	...	...	...	30

It may now be said that at least 80% of enemy prisoners of war interrogated have either seen or heard of our leaflets and are acquainted with the gist of their contents.

In May and June a somewhat deeply rooted belief, carefully fostered by Turkish officers, that the British kill or maim all prisoners of war, was encountered; but this belief has been almost completely eradicated. The enemy is indeed now endeavouring to spread a legend that the Indian troops give no quarter, but there is little evidence that this is hindering desertion to any great extent.

Whilst propaganda dilating on the good treatment of prisoners of war appeals to the more ignorant and brutish, and removes from all any hesitation to desert from fear of possible consequences, political propaganda provides the incentive to the better men by appealing to higher motives, to the Turkish soldier's pride and to his disgust at seeing his country domineered by foreigners.

By examining desertion figures in conjunction with the Turkish Order of Battle, it is found that the majority of deserters come from certain divisions and from certain well-defined areas. Thus the desertions from the enemy 7th, 19th, 24th, 26th and 48th Divisions far outweigh those from the remaining divisions as shewn below:—

Division.	Deserters.	Division.	Deserters.
7th	48	20th	9
19th	65	16th	6
26th	73	11th	12
24th	59	1st	10
48th	109	53rd	21
		Composite	31
	354		89

(The figures apply for the period from 2nd June 1918—10th September 1918).

Since the enemy 7th Division has been removed on account of growing desertion from the Jiljulieh area to the coast, however, desertion has almost stopped, as no patrols except of specially tried men are allowed in front of the wire. On the other hand, in the area between Zawieh and Furkhah where the configuration of the ground is most favourable, there is practically no desertion, because this front is held by the Turkish 16th Division, which has a popular commander who looks after his men. Again there is hardly any desertion along the front from Furkhah to Sinjil. From Turmus Aya down to the Jordan and round to the Dead Sea both the terrain and the internal conditions of the units



located there are favourable to desertion. Thus the divisions from Turmus Aya to the Dead Sea furnish more than double the number of deserters than the divisions from Turmus Aya to the Mediterranean:—

Divisions from Turmus Aya to Dead Sea.	Deserters.	Divisions from Turmus Aya to Mediterranean.	Deserters.
26th	73	11th	12
53rd	21	1st	10
24th	59	16th	6
48th	109	19th	65
Composite	31	20th	9
Cavalry	7	7th	48
Mule Mtd. Infantry	7		
	<hr/> 307		<hr/> 150

As regards Arab soldiers, there is little enough to keep them in the ranks of the enemy. Our alliance with the Hejaz, and their own inherent dislike of military discipline and of the Turk has already induced to desert almost all who could. Only a very few now remain in front line units and these under close watch; the remainder being employed on the lines of communication. All suitable leaflets are printed both in Turkish and Arabic, and a special appeal has been made to Arabs from this part of Palestine to come in and return to their homes.

Enemy counter-measures have been hardly successful. Apart from spreading stories about ill-treatment of prisoners of war, some Turkish Commanders have adopted the more drastic course of forbidding anyone to touch our leaflets (said to be 'on poisonous paper'), men found in possession of any being flogged or shot. Intending deserters are also shot in some units. The attitude of officers varies, however. A company commander, on finding a leaflet in front of his position, promptly read it to his men, some of whom thereupon deserted. There have been 16 officer deserters (including cadets) in the last 4 months. The Sergeant-Major as the literate man of the company is frequently called upon to expound our propaganda.

It is quite impossible to estimate even roughly the amount of desertion to the north which is certainly a great deal higher than desertion to the British lines. It must also be borne in mind that many disaffected officers and men, from fear of confiscation of their property or from pride, will never desert but nevertheless seize the first opportunity of an encounter to be surrounded and surrender. It is noted that successful operations also react favourably on desertion.

#### EVACUATIONS.

It is reported from Ram Allah that about the end of May Ahmed Fevzi Pasha wanted to evacuate Nablus. The notables of Nablus collected a large sum of money and offered it to Fevzi Pasha, who accepted it and allowed the inhabitants of Nablus to remain.

[Note.—Recent information confirms the statement that Nablus has not been evacuated. If anything, the population has been increased by the inflow of villagers from near the front line. See Summary, No. 13, page 3].

The following villages are reported to have been evacuated by an order issued on August 22nd:—

Kafr Haris (098.T.4.c.).	Deir Estia (098.R.32.a.).
Haris (098.T.8.b.).	Jemmain (098.W.28.d.).
Serta (098.S.15.a.).	

The following villages have also been evacuated:—

Rafidia (098.M.29.d.).	Balata (098.V.10.b.).
Askar (098.V.5.b.).	

#### AMERICAN MISSIONS IN TURKEY.

In a bulletin issued by the American Board of Foreign Missions at Boston, which has reached this country, the situation of American Missions in Turkey up to June is described. It is stated that in general the situation was easier than a year previously. Turkish officials were for the most part friendly, and were co-operating with the missionaries in relief work.

#### RUMOURS.

An officer prisoner of war, captured on August 14th, states that the Imams have been saying that it has been prophesied that the war would end after seven years. These are counted from the Balkan War, and the period will be up in the autumn of this year. Informant thinks this is the cause of the persistent rumours among the troops that peace will be concluded at Kurban Bairam.

### ECONOMIC.

#### A.—PALESTINE FRONT.

##### AJLUN.

It is reported that in the Jebel Ajlun the majority of the men have been called up for military service. Work in the fields is being done by women, and not more than a quarter of the usual area has been cultivated.

Few families have a year's supply of grain.

There are numerous olive groves and vineyards in the Jebel Ajlun. Otherwise the food outlook for next spring would be serious.

Corn from Jebel Ajlun and from the Beni Hassan tribe is stored in a big depôt at Irbid (6 miles N.N.W. of El Hosn).



The same informant estimates the livestock available for consumption in the Kaza at 30,000 goats and 2,000 sheep. There are also a large number of fowls. Most of the goats are found N.W. of Jerash.

For labour purposes there are about 30,000 oxen, 11,500 donkeys and 1,000 camels.

The following prices were charged in August :—

Wheat	...	...	...	12½	P.T. (silver) per rotl.
Barley (very little grown)	...	...	...	15	" " "
Durra	...	...	...	10	" " "
Meat	...	...	...	30	" " "
Cooking butter	...	...	...	110	" " "

#### ARMY SUPPLIES.

A Turkish N.C.O. deserter, apparently reliable, reports that the grain stores at Tul Keram were moved to Afuleh about August 24, as it was rumoured that an attack was expected.

An earlier report stated that there were only small stocks of food stored at Afuleh owing to lack of storage accommodation.

The divisional bakeries are still at Tul Keram. The flour used is brought from the rear. The only foodstuffs bought locally are marrows and tomatoes. There are no grain stores at Et Tireh.

An officer who deserted on August 12th states that Deraa and Amman are distributing centres. Their depôts, which are temporary, are supplied from the main permanent depôt at Damascus.

The main depôt for the 7th and 8th Armies, which supplies daily the distributing depôts at Tul Keram (*see above*) and Nablus is at Nazareth.

The main depôt for the 4th Army is at Es Salt, and generally contains a month's supplies.

The grain is stored in the Mosque and the neighbouring houses, and also in tents.

The main store for the 2nd Army Corps of the 4th Army is at Kutrani.

#### B.—EAST OF JORDAN.

##### KERAK.

It is reported that Jemal Pasha No. 2, with the help of Sheikh Erfeifan, who practically governs Kerak, is buying up all the wheat in that district at the rate of 25 mejidieh for 65 Jerusalem rotls. (less than 3d. a lb.).

Sheikh Erfeifan only consented to Government purchase at that rate on condition that he received one-third of the profit.

Jemal wishes the local mills to grind 30,000 kilos daily for the troops. There are six mills, three in the town of Kerak, one at Kasr Shehan (Shahun ? on Wadi El Jedira, 11 miles S.W. of Kerak), one at Mazar (El Mezraa ? three miles S. of the Ghor El Hadite, 11 miles W.N.W. of Kerak) and one at Imzibaier (El Zobayer ? eight miles due S. of Kerak).

The grain is being stored in large depôts at Adar (unidentified) and Lejjun, a few hours from Kerak. Lejjun is midway between Kerak and Kutrani, about 7 miles from Kutrani station.

##### KUTRANI.

There is another large grain store at Kutrani, and it is on these three stores that the Turkish troops on that section of the Hejaz Railway largely depend.

##### MADEBA.

It is also stated that about the 11th August, some Arab tribesmen entered the town of Madeba and stole about 2,000 head of cattle from the inhabitants.

At Madeba there is a large grain store in the house of Selim es Sunna.

#### C.—NORTHERN SYRIA.

##### DAMASCUS.

An Arab refugee, who escaped from Konia in February, 1918, states that he spent a week in Damascus (May 31st–June 7th) as the guest of an Arab merchant. This merchant suggested he should travel with one of Ibn Bessam's caravans to Kassim (midway between Koweit and Medina) explaining that Ibn Bessam lived in Damascus and had a fortnightly caravan service between Koweit and Damascus. The caravans consisted usually of 200 camels and the route followed was usually Tadmor, Jauf, Hazam el Mai, Kasr Haiyania, and so to Kassim, not entering Hail.

(*See Summary No. 8, page 5, for a previous reference to this caravan.*)

#### D.—GENERAL.

##### BLACK SEA.

A sure source reports that 8 ships of the Russian Commercial fleet in the Black Sea, taken by Germany, were handed over to Turkey and began their sailings on the Black Sea coast on the 1st July.

It is proposed to credit the value of the ships in part payment of the indemnities to be demanded from the Russians for the damage done during their occupation of the Eastern provinces of Asia Minor.

Attachment :—The Races of Turkey—Part II.

G.S.I.(G.),

G.H.Q.,

E.E.F.



**SECRET AND CONFIDENTIAL.**

**ATTACHMENT TO POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY,  
No. 14, 15th September, 1918.**

**THE RACES OF TURKEY.**

**PART II.**

**THE ARABS.**

The Arabs belong to the Semitic family of nations, from the two best known members of which—the Jews and the Arabs—the world has received the three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The home of the race is the Arabian Peninsula, which lies outside the scope of the present brief survey, as it has never formed an effective part of the Ottoman Empire, although a large portion of it had come under the nominal rule of the Turkish Sultans since the reign of Sultan Selim I. (A.D. 1512–1520). From the Peninsula they swarmed out in very early days, driven probably by the over population of a barren and unproductive country, to found the ancient Assyrian and Chaldean Monarchies in Mesopotamia, and later, under the stimulus of religious enthusiasm, to carry the banner of Islam first to Syria and Mesopotamia, and afterwards eastwards through Persia to Central Asia and India, and westward through Egypt and across Northern Africa as far as Spain. It is proposed only to deal with the settled or semi-nomad Arabic speaking populations of Syria and Mesopotamia, and the nomad Arabs of Jezireh and the Hamad, the great Northern desert lying between Syria and Mesopotamia, who have come more or less directly under Turkish political and military control. These populations represent the overflow northward of the Arab race, and of this only a small proportion, namely the nomad tribes of Jezireh and the Hamad have retained the primitive characteristics and mode of living of their ancestors, while the rest have been profoundly modified by their settlement on the land or in the towns, and by their contact with and assimilation of the conquered peoples of Syria and Mesopotamia. But as these were largely of Semitic origin, speaking languages akin to Arabic the process of absorption was an easy one, and the result has been a fairly homogeneous Arabic speaking people, in whom the Arab type and character strongly predominates.

Their numbers have been roughly estimated at five and a half millions, of whom it is probable that over three millions are to be found in Syria and Palestine, and somewhat less than two millions in Mesopotamia, the desert regions of the Hamad and Jezireh accounting for the balance, composed mainly of Bedouin of the Anazeh group of tribes, and of the northern Shammar.

Of the Syrian Arabs about three quarters are Moslems, but there is also an important Christian element, at least 700,000 in number, mostly Greek Orthodox and Catholics, the last-named including Greek Catholics (Melchites) and Maronites, who are in communion with the Church of Rome, but have kept a certain independence in some particulars. The Christians descend chiefly from such of the earlier inhabitants of Syria as remained unconverted to Islam at the time of the Arab conquest, but as they have universally adopted the Arabic language and have to some extent identified themselves with the Arab movement, they may now be regarded as an integral part of the Arab race. Their principal stronghold is in the Lebanon where the Maronites form a majority of the population. Since 1862 the Lebanon was governed by a Christian Mutesarrif and had a special autonomous Constitution guaranteed by Great Britain, France and Russia, but the privileges of the Lebanon were abolished in November 1916, and it is now on the same footing as other Turkish provinces.

The Moslems of Syria belong for the most part to the Sunni or Orthodox Sect, but there are several dissenting communities who are generally to be found in mountainous and inaccessible regions. The most important of these are the Ansariyah, nominally Moslem, but in reality still pagan, and about 200,000 in number, living mostly in the coastal range north of the Lebanon proper; the Metawala, Shiah heretics numbering about 200,000, mostly in the Lebanon; and the Druse, who, while outwardly adopting Moslem usages, have a religion of their own, in which Islamic and Christian ideas are superimposed on paganism, and who number about 150,000, in three almost equal groups, inhabiting the Lebanon, the Hauran and the anti-Lebanon respectively. All these communities are probably indigenous and non-Arab in their origin, but, like the Syrian Christians, they may now be regarded as having become Arab by the adoption of the common language, and by their common dislike of Turkish rule.

The Sunni majority include most of the townspeople, the fellahin of the plains and more accessible mountain districts, and a certain number of semi-nomad Bedouin in the belt of arable country lying on the edge of the Syrian Desert. Of these elements, the town populations are very numerous in proportion to the country people, owing to the existence in Syria and Palestine of great cities like Aleppo and Damascus, with a quarter of a million inhabitants each, and Beirut, which is almost as populous, besides Jerusalem, Hama, Homs, Jaffa, Gaza and many smaller towns. From early times the people of Syria have been in contact with Western civilization, and in more recent years greatly influenced by commercial penetration, by the constant flow of pilgrims and tourists, and by the spread of educational propaganda. These influences have not been lost upon a naturally intelligent



and receptive people, in whom a love of learning and of the arts and graces of life, and an active commercial spirit are strongly developed. In spite of the non-progressive character of Islam, the Moslems of Syria are in many respects far in advance of their Turkish rulers, while among the Christians, who have been better able to take advantage of the educational opportunities offered by the numerous mission schools, the rate of progress has been still more rapid. A body of more or less educated public opinion has thus grown up, which is strongly intolerant of Turkish misrule, and though the mass of the people have not shared in this intellectual awakening, there is no doubt that, as the chief sufferers, they sympathize with any political movement which promises to improve their material condition.

The situation in Mesopotamia is very different owing to its remoteness from Western influences, whether political, commercial, or educational, to the far smaller Christian element in the population, and the division of the Moslems between the almost equally balanced Sects of Sunni and Shiah. The Moslem Arabs are believed to number about 1,650,000 and the Arabic speaking Syrian Christians only 60,000. The Arabs form at least 95% of the population of Southern Arabistan and 85 to 90% of that of Irak, and they also hold the Lower Jezireh and the desert between the Euphrates and the Tigris south of the Jebel Sinjar. About one half of them are permanently settled, either as townspeople or as agriculturists; four-fifths of the remainder are semi-nomad, spending part of the year on their cultivated lands, and during the rest of the time moving with their flocks and herds to more or less distant pasture lands. Some of these possess permanently built houses or huts near their fields, and others live in temporary shelters of reeds or bushes, or in tents, and move away after finishing their agricultural operations. They are essentially men of the plains, and rarely penetrate into the mountain regions. All of them, whether sedentary, semi-nomad or nomad, have always been unwilling subjects of the Turk, whose hold upon the country has been entirely dependent on armed force, and upon a dexterous use of the profound divisions existing among the Arabs themselves, between Sunni and Shiah and between sedentary and semi-nomad or nomad populations. Of late years, however, the increasing intolerance of the Young Turk Government had drawn the discordant Arab elements somewhat more closely together, and the successful British invasion of Mesopotamia has now broken the Turkish bonds, and taught the inhabitants the advantages of an enlightened and settled administration, under which the Arab is free to develop politically, socially and intellectually, without fear of persecution. The chief cities are Bagdad with 225,000 inhabitants, and Basra and Mosul, each with a population of about 80,000.

The nomad inhabitants of the great Syrian Desert filling the space between Syria and Mesopotamia are Bedouin, belonging chiefly to the Anazeh groups of tribes. About the middle of the Seventeenth Century, a portion of the Shammar tribe migrated from Central Arabia to the Syrian Desert, pushing before them various smaller tribes into Mesopotamia. Following on their occupation of the tract west of the Euphrates, the Anazeh came up behind them from Arabia. After a protracted struggle, the Shammar were compelled to move on, and crossing the Euphrates gradually occupied the whole of Jezireh, again driving out other smaller tribes who had been their predecessors in that region, and who were forced either to cross the Tigris, or to settle down as cultivators on the banks of the two great rivers. The Shammar thus depend upon Mesopotamia for everything with which the desert cannot supply them, while the Anazeh, occupying the Hamad west of the Euphrates, look mainly to Syria, to the borderlands of which they are obliged to resort in search of water and pasture during the hot season. This economic dependence has brought them under the partial control of the Turkish authorities, and is the explanation of their long hesitation in breaking with the Turk, who still controls their only refuge from the summer heats, and declaring openly for the Arab movement with which they are undoubtedly in sympathy. These nomads have kept their tribal system and mode of life unchanged for countless generations, and are the only element in the region embraced by the present survey which presents a serious difficulty for the future administration of the country, owing to their raiding instincts and predatory habits, and to the prevalence among them of blood feuds and inter-tribal enmities.

Under the old régime, the Arabs suffered from no great racial disabilities. Arab and Turk could live side by side without much friction. Their common religion acted as a bond of union, and the Arabs served their Turkish masters well in the army and in the civil services, though they always cherished a certain contempt for the dullness of their conquerors. Their chief cause of complaint was the general inefficiency and corruptness of Turkish administration, which hindered the economic development of their country, and it was on this ground that they welcomed the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, believing that it would bring them better government. In this they were quickly disappointed, for not only was there very little administrative improvement, but the liberty and equality promised by the Constitution proved to be a mere mockery. The Young Turks were determined to reduce all the other races of the Empire to a Turkish dead level. Legislation was introduced, rendering the Turkish language obligatory in schools, Government offices and Law Courts, even in provinces where it was understood by nobody but a few Turkish officials, and it was made clear that no man could aspire to a civil or military career who did not conform to the Turkish standard, and speak and behave like a good Turk.

This attempt at the forcible conversion of a whole race could not but fail in view of the fundamental antagonism between Arab and Turk, for there is all the difference in the world between the quick-witted and imaginative Arab and the dull, materialistic Turk, who has never contributed anything to the intellectual life of the world. Even the bond of union created by their common religion ceased to possess its old efficacy when the Young Turk leaders openly proclaimed their atheistic or positivist tendencies, tampered with the Religious Law and the Koran, and included in their Pan-Turanian propaganda the cult of the "White Wolf" and of mythical Tatar heroes of the pagan period.



During the period immediately preceding the war, the Arabs opposed the "Turkifying" of their race by all the constitutional means in their power, and were no doubt considering the possibility of defending their rights by force of arms, though no overt rising took place, except on a small scale among the Druse Mountaineers of the Hauran, and the semi-nomad Bedouin of Kerak and Muntefik. But the Young Turks took the will for the deed, and when their hands were freed from the intervention of the Western Powers by their entry into the war and the mobilization of their army, they instituted a systematic persecution in Syria, executing all the Arab leaders on whom they could lay their hands, and reducing the inhabitants of the Lebanon by starvation.

The direct result of this inhuman policy was the revolt in the Hejaz, where the Sherif of Mecca declared war on the Young Turk Government and assumed the title of King of the Hejaz. This successful rebellion, coupled with the British victories and occupation of Palestine and Mesopotamia, has had a great moral effect on all the Arab peoples, stimulating their resistance to the Turk and giving them new hopes, which are shared by the lovers of liberty throughout the world, of final liberation from his tyranny.

G.S.P.I.,  
G.H.Q.,  
E.E.F.

---

F.S.C., R.E.—15-9-18.—330.