NEGOTIATING THE FUTURE OF A BEDOUIN POLITY IN MANDATORY SYRIA: POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF THE SBAʿA-ʿABADA DURING THE 1930s

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Abstract

This article examines a revolt among the Sbaʿa-ʿAbada Bedouin, a sub-group of the ʿAnaza tribal confederation, in Mandatory Syria. The case offers a rare glimpse into the political dynamics of a Bedouin group under French Mandatory rule. The analysis shows that the political circumstances enabled lower ranking tribal representatives to enter into direct negotiations with other Bedouin leaders and state agencies. These negotiations demonstrate that tribal categories such as the ʿAnaza confederation provided a flexible reference system for the steppe population, which was used by tribal and state bodies alike.
Keywords: Bedouin history, Syria, Iraq, Mandate period, tribe.

Introduction

The Sbaʿa were one of the largest and most powerful camel-herding Bedouin tribes in the Syrian steppe in the early twentieth century[2] and numbered about ten to twelve thousand (*Tribus nomades* 1943: 77, 89). They drew additional strength from being part of the large ʿAnaza confederation and this helped the Sbaʿa to forge political and military alliances with neighbouring ʿAnaza tribes, especially the Fadʿān (Blunt 1968: 78; Meier and Büssow, ''Anaza'), and consequently enhanced their importance in the eyes of government officials. The Sbaʿa's unrivalled mobility in the steppe territory gave them a great measure of autonomy, which was, however, restricted by several factors: Their grazing lands were fragmented by the boundaries of four states established in succession after the demise of Ottoman rule in 1918: Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.[3] In addition, they began to suffer the consequences of broader economic and technological changes that made camel breeding less profitable than in the past. As among other Syrian Bedouin groups, these changes gave rise to social unrest, which threatened the authority of established leaders and representatives, or *shaykh*s. This context affected all Syrian Bedouin groups, but had particularly significant political consequences among the Sbaʿa, whose political structure was less robust than that of most neighbouring Bedouin tribes. One reason for this was that the Sbaʿa did not have a united leadership but were in practice a confederation of two autonomous sub-tribes, the Qumuṣa (also: Buṭaynāt) and the ʿAbada.

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This was the background of the political upheaval in the 1930s that especially shattered the larger of the Sbaʿa's two sub-tribes, the ʿAbada. The shaykh of the ʿAbada, Barjas Ibn Hudayb, became the focus of contention, as he struggled to balance the demands made upon him by his fellow tribespeople and the French administration. In 1930, several leaders and representatives (*mukhtārs*)[4] of tribal subunits within the ʿAbada, which the French administrators called 'fractions' (*fractions*) and to which I will refer as 'clans' in what follows,[5] channelled the pervasive feelings of resentment against Shaykh Barjas into political action. Together with more than half of the ʿAbada's members, they migrated to neighbouring Iraq and threatened to remain there. Their move to Iraq gained particular political salience because, during the years 1931–33, the British and French Mandate governments negotiated a final settlement of the Syrian-Iraqi border (e.g. FO 371/16082ff. in *Records of Syria*, vol. 5, pp. 141ff.; CADN/BEY/C.P./552, 24 Nov. 1930; Velud 1991: 6–8; idem 1995: 48). British officials explicitly called the negotiations a 'bargaining' process, and both administrations tried to win over nomadic groups to their side in order to bolster their claims to certain territories in the frontier zone (FO 371/15360, 11 Feb. 1931, ibid., vol. 5, p. 3).

The affair triggered a whole series of political negotiations that involved several other Bedouin leaders as well as decision makers within the French and British Mandate administrations. It came to an end in 1936, when the most powerful parties involved reached a compromise, bringing about Shaykh Barjas' downfall.

This article analyses this episode with a threefold aim. First, it attempts to describe aspects of the political life of a Bedouin group beyond the level of the tribal shaykh, which is usually the only one historians are able to examine because of the limitations of their source material. Second, the article attempts to shed more light on the closing phase of what in the Syrian steppe is known as the 'age of the shaykhs' (Ar. *zaman al-shuyūkh*), an epoch in which a relatively small set of Bedouin tribal shaykhs wielded a large measure of political and military power and which is generally assumed to have ended around the middle of the twentieth century (Lange 2006: 953; Shryock 1997: 65; and see the contribution by Schoel in this volume). The article addresses this aim by structuring the narrative around the interests and strategies of Bedouin actors, whereas most historical scholarship so far has focused on the perspective of states and state agencies (cf. Alon 2007; Douwes 2000; Kostiner 1990; Thomas 2003). Third, the article attempts to fill a gap in the social and political history of the Arab East by providing additional insight into the significance and function of the ʿAnaza confederation, which so far has remained underexposed in the historical literature.

This article analyses the actions of Bedouin actors in two distinct but related political fields (cf. Büssow et al., 'Introduction' in this volume; Gledhill 2000: 137). The first of these arenas was defined by the political interaction within the framework of the Sbaʿa-ʿAbada, while the second was constituted by political interaction between the ʿAbada and external actors. As will be

shown below, competition in one arena sometimes spilled over into the other. The following questions will be dealt with in particular: What determined the agency of individual actors such as the tribal shaykh, the *mukhtār*s and ordinary tribespeople? What were the sources of authority, the means of coercion and the strategies for conflict resolution used by these actors? And what does the course of events tell us about the structure and function of the ʿAbada sub-tribe and of the ʿAnaza tribal confederation?

The article is primarily based on documents from the French Diplomatic Archives in Nantes (CADN), which are supplemented by Ottoman and British archival material and various sources in European languages and in Arabic. Clearly, writing Bedouin history on the basis of government documents has its limitations, particularly as these documents were written with the interests of government administrators in mind and as they only very rarely contain information about the perceptions and interests of Bedouin actors. Thus, one needs to be aware of the fact that many aspects of the case may look different in light of other evidence, especially from oral history.[6]

The first section of the article provides background information about the Sbaʿa tribe and the ʿAbada sub-tribe. The following sections present a narrative of the career of Barjas Ibn Hudayb, the shaykh of the Sbaʿa-ʿAbada, and of the events during the critical years of 1930–37, when Shaykh Barjas became the main target of disaffection among his fellow tribespeople. The final section summarises the results and questions what they might tell us about the Sbaʿa-ʿAbada tribe and the ʿAnaza tribal confederation.

Background: The Sbaʿa and the ʿAbada, c. 1900–1930

This section attempts to set the scene by describing the Sbaʿa and the resources at their disposal in geographic, economic, genealogical, legal and political terms, in the first part of the twentieth century. In geographic terms, the Sbaʿa did not exert continuous control over the same territories. Their way of life was characterised by seasonal migrations between their summer quarters near Homs and Hama and their winter pastures in the central, eastern and southern parts of the Syrian steppe. In one annual migratory cycle Sbaʿa camel herders often covered more than one thousand kilometres (see Figure 1; *Tribus nomades* 1943: 96–97). What they needed in order to maintain their wide-ranging migrations was mainly reliable access to water points and grazing areas, which was regulated by customary rights.[7] With the establishment of the French and British Mandate administrations of Syria and Iraq after the First World War, some of the Sbaʿa's habitual grazing grounds along the lower Euphrates, as well as some of their important markets, fell within Iraqi territory (CADN/BEY/C.P./986, 12 Feb. 1926).

In economic terms, the Sbaʿa during the 1930s stood out as one of the last camel-breeding groups of Syria who still followed a fully nomadic lifestyle.

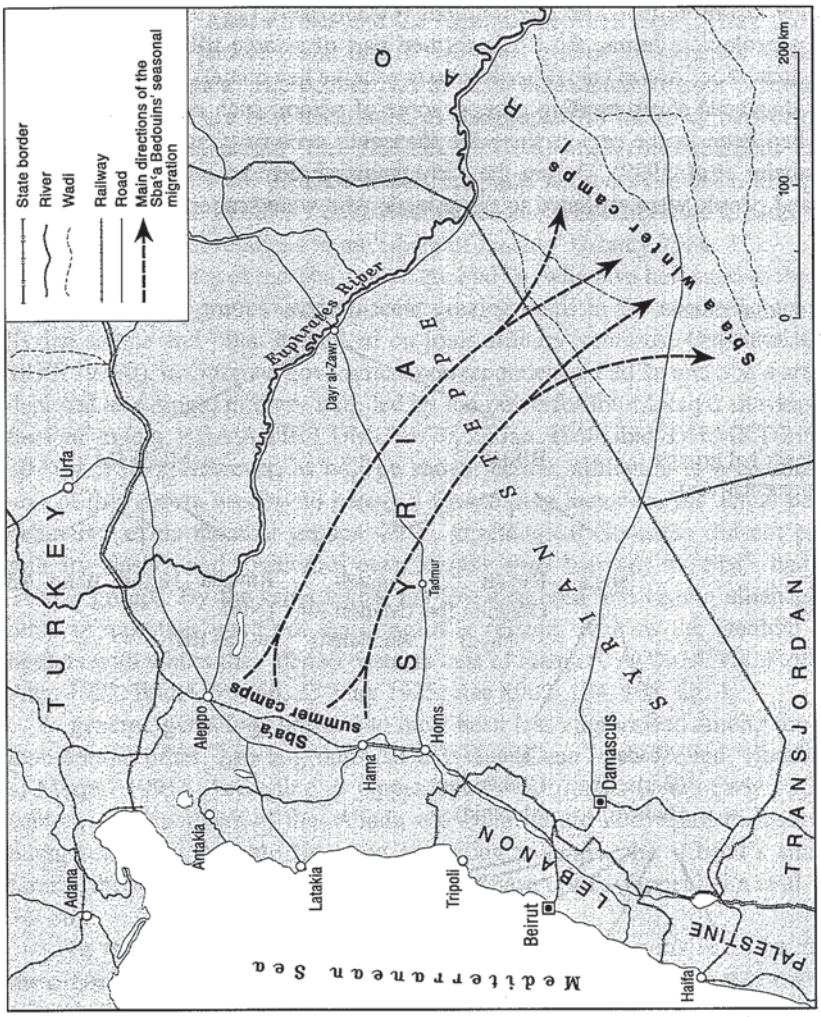

Figure 1. *Summer and winter grazing grounds of the Sba'a during the 1920s*

Source: (adapted from) CADN/BEY/C.P./991, July 1930

On the one hand, this secured for them a measure of autonomy through their continued ability to carry weapons and to withdraw into the steppe and desert areas. On the other, their almost total reliance on camel breeding made them vulnerable to changes in the local economy and transport infrastructure, which caused a decline in demand for their products, as well as to a severe drought that affected the Syrian steppe during the years 1930–35, during which it is possible that they lost more than half their animals (CADN/BEY/C.P./991, 1933).

In genealogical terms, the Sba'a formed part of a large tribal confederation, the 'Anaza. The 'Anaza camel herders were relative newcomers to Syria who had partly displaced sheep-herding groups, some of whom, such as the Mawālī and Faḍl, had been in the region since the thirteenth century (Chatty 1986: 10–14; Oppenheim et al. 1939). During the early twentieth century, about two hundred thousand people were affiliated to the 'Anaza, who were scattered over extensive

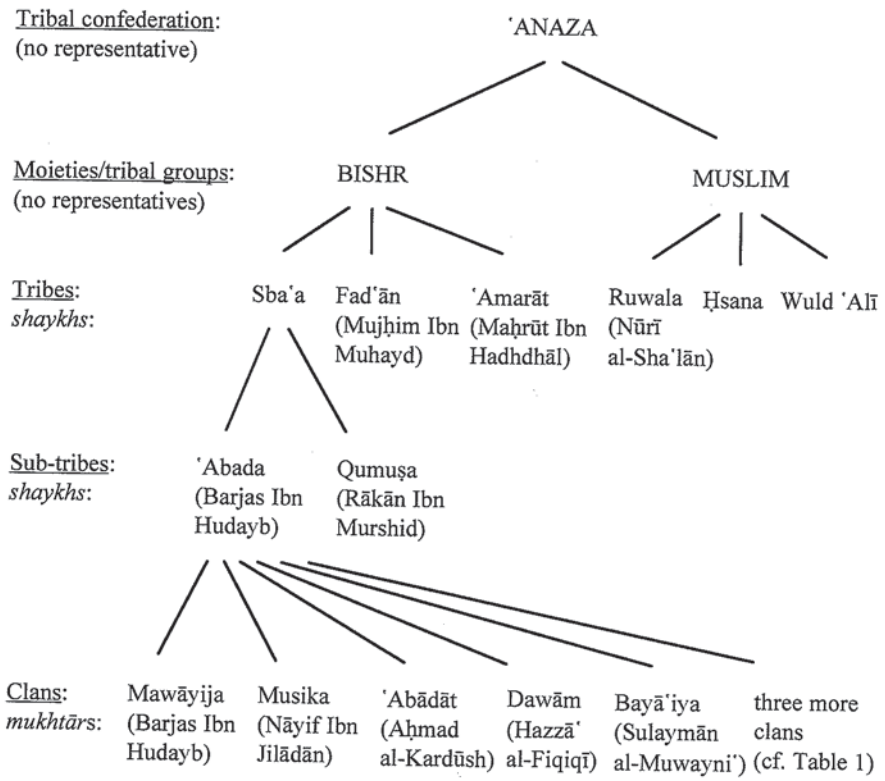

Figure 2. *An organisational chart of the Syrian 'Anaza groups with the shaykhs mentioned in the text.*

Sources: Oppenheim et al., 1939: 113; Tribus nomades, 1943: 29

areas in Syria, Iraq, Jordan and the Arabian Peninsula and who had no central leadership (Lorimer 1908: 582–84; Meier and Büssow, ''Anaza'). Accordingly, French administrators in Syria, who at first had assumed the ʿAnaza to be a single 'tribe', soon resorted to calling them 'a great family' of tribes in acknowledgement of the confederation's loose character (CADN/BEY/C.P./552, 10 Nov. 1923; *Tribus nomades* 1943: 89). A genealogical schema defined the place of the Sbaʿa among the ʿAnaza tribes and the relations between them. Thus, the Sbaʿa formed a leading part of Bishr, one of two tribal groups[8] or moieties[9] within the ʿAnaza confederation. The counterpart of Bishr was called Muslim[10] (see Figure 2). Such schemas are best understood as the product of interplay between tribal 'genealogical imagination' (see Shryock 1997: 6) and power relations on two levels, namely between different tribal groupings and between tribal groups and state governments. In other words, Bedouin characteristically tried to reduce their social and political relations to an 'idiom of kinship' (Chatty 1986: 12).

The closest allies of the Sbaʿa were the Fadʿān, who also belonged to the Bishr moiety. The two groups used adjacent grazing lands in the northern part of the Syrian steppe and often embarked on joint military ventures (Oppenheim et al. 1939: 79–80). In Ottoman government correspondence, Fadʿān and Sbaʿa are often depicted as a single military unit, led by the powerful Ibn Muhayd shaykhs from the Fadʿān (e.g. BOA/A.MKT.UM/391/70, 22 Jan. 1860; ibid./DH.MKT/2195/26, 30 Apr. 1899). However, as will be shown below, affiliation to a certain tribal unit of the ʿAnaza was by no means a determining factor for the actual political behaviour of its member groups. Thus, genealogical closeness did not prevent military clashes and sometimes even lengthy wars between the Sbaʿa and other ʿAnaza groups. By the same token, the Sbaʿa entered into lasting alliances with other groups that were not genealogically related, such as the Ḥadīdīn sheep herders with whom they shared pastures east of Hama (CADN/BEY/C.P./986, 28 Aug. 1922; ibid./C.P./566, 23 May 1925; Rae 2002: 104, 105, fig. 1).

In general, genealogy appears to have been less emphasised among the Sbaʿa than among other ʿAnaza groups, such as the Ḥsana (also spelled 'Ḥasana', cf. al-Muqbil 1991). According to Oppenheim's informants in the early twentieth century, the members of the ʿAbada and Qumuṣa did not regard themselves as being related by kinship ties, and according to some, the ʿAbada's shaykhly family, the Hudayb, were originally not of ʿAnaza origin (Oppenheim et al. 1939: 84–86).

Like the ʿAnaza, the Sbaʿa were divided into two parts, i.e. the above-mentioned sub-tribes of the ʿAbada and the Qumuṣa. The shaykhs of both sub-tribes hailed from aristocratic lineages that had held the office for more than three generations (Oppenheim et al. 1939: 85–86). The shaykhs of the ʿAbada had come from the Hudayb lineage since at least the middle of the nineteenth century, while the shaykhs of the Qumuṣa came from the Murshid lineage, which had a similarly long history of political representatives. (From at least 1852 onwards, the Hudayb and the Murshid are regularly mentioned as the shaykhs of the two

Table 1. *Officially recognised political groups of the Sbaʿa-ʿAbada with their representatives and the estimated numbers of households belonging to them around 1940, according to a French administrative handbook*

Clan (Fr. fraction)	Clan representative (shaykh; Fr. chef de tribu)	Sub-clan (Fr. sous-fraction)	Sub-clan representative (mukhtār; Fr. chef de sous-fraction)	Estimated number of households
al-Mawāyija	**Barjas Ibn Hudayb** (1906–36)	al-Sāʾil	Barjas Ibn Hudayb (1906–36)	80
		al-Masānida	Jaddūḥ al-Amrāḥ	40
		al-Kuwayrān	Bashāwī Ibn Mukhlaḥ	35
		al-Sanābīr	Muḥammad al-Sanbūr	30
		al-ʿUjaylāt	Shāshim Ibn Ghuwaynam	25
		al-ʿAzzāmāt	Sārid Ibn Nawāsir	20
		al-Rakārija	Sulaybī al-Shantarī	15
		Albū Mazdūq	ʿAwad al-Farḥūd	65
		al-Majāhima	Adīb al-Wakka	45
		al-Anṣifa	Mahw Jazzāʿ	30
		al-Mazārīʿ	Munawwir Ibn Mulaybān	25
		al-Balāʿīn	Khalaf al-Qishtī	25
		al-ʿUmūr al-Farrā	Ṣābir al-Sulaym	25
			Total	**460**
al-Musika	**Nāyif Ibn Jilādān**	al-Majhal	Nāyif Ibn Jilādān	140
		al-Masīb	ʿAkkāsh Ibn Qulayfa	100
		al-Wīṭān	Ghassāb Ibn Suʿūd	40
		al-Nawābigha	ʿAlī al-Asham	20
			Total	**300**
al-ʿAbādāt	**Aḥmad al-Kardūsh**	al-Sāyid	Aḥmad al-Kardūsh	120
		al-Janādila	Shakkār al-Masʿad	90
		al-Jamāmīs	Ḥamdī al-Jammās	60
			Total	**270**
al-Dawām	**Hazzāʿ al-Fiqiqī**	al-Jarābīʿ	Hazzāʿ al-Fiqiqī	100
		al-Manī	Rabaq Dusaym	90
		al-Dawaʿīn	Matrūk al-Sharrāḥ	60
			Total	**250**

Clan (Fr. fraction)	Clan representative (shaykh; Fr. chef de tribu)	Sub-clan (Fr. sous-fraction)	Sub-clan representative (mukhtār; Fr. chef de sous-fraction)	Estimated number of households
al-Bayāʿiya	**Sulaymān al-Muwaynīʿ**	Muwaynīʿ	Sulaymān al-Muwaynīʿ	30
		al-Ruwayshida	Huzaym Ibn Zuqaym	85
		al-Shāya	Ibn ʿAwda	85
		al-Farayʿāt	Shannām al-Hinama	30
		al-Saʿīd	–	20
			Total	250
al-ʿArafa	**Ḍāhir Ibn Fāʿūr**	Ḍana' Salmān	Ḍāhir Ibn Fāʿūr	100
		Ḍana' Ḥawwās	Suʿūd al-Sabābir	200
			Total	**200**
al-Wathara	Ḥajar Ibn Daʿbal			240
al-Rimāḥ	Ibn Wā'il			120
Estimated number of all ʿAbada households				**2,090**[13]

Source: Tribus nomades 1943: 92; the orthography follows Zakariyyā 1997: 498–99

sub-tribes; e.g. NAD/SMS/Hama/53-267-a, 20 July 1852).[11] Below these two units, there were clans and sub-clans. These units, probably defined as patrilineal descent groups, were represented by *mukhtār*s and varied in size between 20 and 140 households (Table 1) or 120–840 individuals, assuming an average household size of six persons.[12]

In legal and political terms, the Sbaʿa belonged to a privileged category of the steppe population. During the nineteenth century, the Sbaʿa and other ʿAnaza tribes were among the intermediate authorities to which the Ottoman government gave official recognition in order to extend its influence into peripheral areas that could not be controlled by state officials alone (Hourani 1990). In this way they served as providers of transport animals and as police forces for the communication lines and settlements in the steppe. In exchange, the Sbaʿa were allowed to retain a high level of autonomy, their shaykhs received subsidies and other support from the Ottoman government, and in addition, the shaykhs and *mukhtār*s exacted protection payments or tribute (*khuwwa*) from villagers, weaker nomadic groups and people crossing the steppe (Chatty 1986: 4; Musil 1928: 100; Stewart, 'Khuwwa'). Attempts during the last decades of Ottoman rule to eradicate the *khuwwa* and intertribal raids (*ghazw*) were only partially successful.

Much like the Ottoman government, the French Mandate administration was unable to control the Syrian steppe on its own, so it retained many features

of the Ottoman system, while introducing some important changes. In 1920, 'Bedouin Control' (Fr. *Contrôle bédouin*), a special police and intelligence unit, was founded, through which the Mandate administration was able to control the Bedouin more closely than any previous political regime (Thomas 2003: 547). In addition, the French administration introduced a previously unknown degree of systematisation by creating various status groups and playing them off against each other. Thus, it used the local concepts of *ʿarab* and *badw* to create a rigid distinction between two different categories of Bedouin, each of which had a different legal status. 'Semi-sedentary' Bedouin (*ʿarab* in local terms) were regular citizens. In contrast, 'fully nomadic' Bedouin (*badw*) were under special administration by the *Contrôle bédouin* and were given a special legal status which entitled them to carry weapons and to apply customary law to settle internal disputes (Lange 2005: 109). The Sbaʿa were ranked among the latter group. The two leading Sbaʿa representatives, Barjas Ibn Hudayb (from the ʿAbada) and Rākān Ibn Murshid (from the Qumuṣa), like the other important Syrian shaykhs, received subsidies from the French High Commissioner in Beirut and were granted additional privileges, such as free medical care and an Arab tutor for their children.

Shaykh Barjas Ibn Hudayb and Tribal Politics in Mandatory Syria

From the middle of the nineteenth century, the Sbaʿa-ʿAbada are mentioned in official correspondence as partners of the Ottoman government (e.g. BOA/İ. DH/148/7690, doc. 3, 10 May 1847). During the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II (1876–1909), the Hudayb, the shaykhs of the Sbaʿa-ʿAbada, entered into an ever closer relationship with the government offices in Istanbul and the provincial capitals. Shaykh Farḥān Ibn Maʿjūn Ibn Hudayb (d. 1906) received subsidies from the Sultan at least from 1892 (BOA/DH.MKT/2009/42, 11 Oct. 1892). In 1899, the governor of Aleppo even proposed to grant him one of the highest Ottoman administrative titles, *paşa*, and to make him a district governor (kaymakam) (ibid./22207/86, 1 June 1899), although this plan was never realised. Shaykh Farḥān also purchased several villages in the region of Hama (CADN/ BEY/C.P./991, 24 June 1933). Obviously the leaders and representatives of the other sub-tribe did not want to be left behind, and we also find favourable references to Shaykh Buṭayn Ibn Murshid of the Qumuṣa indicating appreciation for his cooperation in an initiative to settle members of his group around Hama (BOA/DH.TMIK.S/50/26, 12 Jan. 1904).

Although some friction continued between the Sbaʿa and the representatives of the Ottoman government (Blunt 1968: 183–84), there was an overall tendency to peaceful co-existence, mediated by increasingly powerful shaykhs. One of the most important indications of this is that the Sbaʿa regularly paid taxes, among

them a 'grazing tax' (*otlak rüsumu*) and a 'loss due' (*telefat bedeli*) to compensate for damage done to agricultural property during the period of their summer stay in the agricultural zone (BOA/DH.MKT 467/17, 2 Apr. 1902). The First World War, however, inaugurated a period of unrest that lasted into the 1920s. Ottoman plans to settle Sbaʿa groups on lands near Urfa failed (DH.EUM, 4. Şb 2/64, 22/Ş/1333), the Sbaʿa largely escaped government control and some engaged in plundering villages and government institutions (BOA/DH.ŞFR/64/32, 15 May 1916).

After the war, relations with the French Mandate administration were initially tense. In particular, French attempts to levy a camel tax failed, because the Sbaʿa managed to evade the tax collectors by withdrawing into the steppe. In 1922, the ʿAbada were the only Bedouin group that managed not to pay any taxes at all (CADN/BEY/C.P./986, report on the seasonal migration of 1922).

Barjas Ibn Hudayb, the shaykh of the ʿAbada during these turbulent times, had come to office in 1906. Shaykh Barjas had studied at the Tribal School (*ʿAşiret Mektebi*) in Istanbul (Rogan 1996) and had made a career in the Ottoman armed forces, from which he retired with the rank of captain (*Tribus nomades* 1943: 93). According to the Czech ethnographer Alois Musil, who met him in 1926, his education had alienated Barjas from Bedouin life, which diminished his authority among his fellow tribesmen. He was also alleged to have lost his father's fortune and was short of money (Musil 1928: 54; Oppenheim et al. 1939: 86).

French observers noted as early as 1922 that Shaykh Barjas apparently lacked the authority to organise his group's tax payments (CADN/BEY/C.P./986, report on the seasonal migration of 1922), and the same report also refers to the rise of a rival to the shaykh: Aḥmad al-Kardūsh, the *mukhtār* of the ʿAbādāt clan.

At the same time, the Sbaʿa, under Shaykh Barjas' leadership, displayed remarkable tactical skills during his negotiations with the French administrators. They employed two means in particular. First they made use of the administrative confusion that reigned in the early Mandate period when the Syrian Mandate territory was split up into several petty states. Thus, in 1922, most of the Sbaʿa who were supposed to be taxed in the State of Damascus moved to the adjacent State of Aleppo where, because of a weaker military presence, taxation was handled more leniently (CADN/BEY/C.P./9, 86, 1922). To the surprise of the French, three quarters of the entire group were suddenly to be found in Aleppo, which thwarted all plans for taxation during that year. In this way, the Sbaʿa had successfully turned the French divide-and-rule policy against its originators. Second, Shaykh Barjas and his counterpart of the Sbaʿa-Qumuṣa claimed that, under Ottoman rule, state security forces had helped them to collect the taxes and they refused to do anything unless the French administration provided them with the same sort of assistance (CADN/BEY/C.P./986, *estivage*, Hama, 1922; CADN/BEY/C.P./986, 28 Aug. 1922). During the following year, the Sbaʿa paid the camel tax, which was facilitated by the fact that the French administration had fulfilled the demands of the Sbaʿa shaykhs by providing camel troopers to assist in tax collection.

With regard to the ʿAbada, this settlement of tensions in the tribe's external relations, in turn, had repercussions on internal relations, and centrifugal tendencies, which had always been inherent in the tribal organisation, grew in strength. Now that Barjas, as the tribal shaykh, no longer promised to save his fellow tribe members from taxation, they had less incentive to co-ordinate their actions with him. In addition, the *mukhtār*s perceived the French troops to be a tool of oppression in Barjas' hands, as he used them to levy an extra tax known as the 'shaykh tax' or *shaykha* (CADN/BEY/C.P./552, a/s. *exactions chez les nomades*, c. 1930).

The French observers at first noted only one symptom of what was to become an increasing tendency towards fission within the tribe. In contrast to 1922, when most Sbaʿa had moved in a more or less homogeneous bloc, during the winter grazing season of 1923 the tribe split into two or more clusters of camps. While Shaykh Barjas and his own clan, the Mawāyija, camped in the Ḥamād region south of Jabal Tanaf, just north of the Syrian-Transjordanian border, the larger part of the ʿAbada gathered much further south, around Jabal ʿAnāza in Transjordanian territory, and were apparently out of touch with the shaykh. These groups were led by the above-mentioned Aḥmad al-Kardūsh and two other prominent *mukhtār*s, Hazzāʿ al-Fiqiqī and Fāḍil al-Muwayniʿ (CADN/BEY/C.P./986, 16 Jan. 1924).

In an attempt to regain the initiative, Barjas wrote a letter to the Mandate government in which he formulated conditions for further cooperation. In this letter, he first mentioned the administrative practice of the Ottoman Empire, which he described as superior to that of the French. He called for three things: more consistency in administrative dealings between the Mandate government and the tribes; that the subsidies paid to tribal shaykhs should all be equal; and finally, that the French High Commissioner in Beirut should himself deal personally with tribal affairs. At the end of his letter, he signalled that, if his demands were not fulfilled, the ʿAbada might leave Syria altogether – this time for Iraq. A French general aptly summarised the gist of Barjas' letter as 'Pay us, or we leave!' ('*Payez-nous ou nous partons*,' CADN/BEY/C.P./986, 22 Apr. 1924).

It soon turned out that this was not an empty threat, as in British-controlled Iraq King Faisal tried to win over powerful tribes to support the monarchy by exempting them from taxes and handing out subsidies to their leaders. This made visits to Iraq attractive to the Syrian Bedouin, and increasing numbers of them spent the winter season in the Gaʿara region,[14] on Iraqi territory (CADN/BEY/C.P./986, 11 May 1924).

The second half of the 1920s brought another turn in the external and internal political relations of the ʿAbada. During 1925–27, the French administration faced a number of insurgencies, which started as a Druze rebellion in the Hawran region and spread throughout the country. Over the same period, armed conflicts between Bedouin groups broke out around Hama, which led to the formation of two

alliances that were pitted against each other. One was led by the powerful Mawālī and included the ʿUqaydāt and the Fawāʿira, and the other consisted of Sbaʿa, Fadʿān and Ḥadīdīn. Since the Mawālī and their allies at least sometimes sided with the anti-French insurgents, the Sbaʿa did not do the same and suddenly appeared to the French administrators to be desirable partners (CADN/BEY/C.P./566, 23 May 1925). This episode led to a lasting rapprochement between Barjas and the French government, and Barjas, like other pro-French Bedouin shaykhs, was now given more lavish subsidies (CADN/BEY/C.P./552, 17 May 1926).

There were also other reasons to secure the shaykhs' sympathies. The Anglo-Iraqi administration had increased its efforts to win over Bedouin from the Syrian territory to their side. So-called 'Syrian tribes' were offered land on Iraqi territory, and, while the French administration exerted pressure on them to settle down, Iraq granted them the right to maintain their nomadic way of life. French administrators feared that this was an attempt to create an Anglo-Iraqi outpost in Syria that might not only facilitate British interventions but might eventually fall under the control of the Saudi-Wahhabi forces, which had just conquered large parts of the Arabian Peninsula and might become a future partner of the British government (CADN/BEY/C.P./552, 3 April 1925; ibid./986, 12 Feb. 1926; ibid./990, *Propagande anglaise*, c. 1927).

The first step undertaken by the French administration towards regaining control over the situation was to sponsor a series of peace conferences to end the intertribal feuds in the Syrian steppe. The 'Peace of Palmyra', which was signed by all major tribal shaykhs on 25 May 1930, indeed brought about the desired goal. The positive atmosphere among the Bedouin elite was encouraged by favourable economic conditions. Despite the worldwide economic crisis, the pastoralists' products, such as animals, wool, meat and clarified butter, were in high demand, so that French observers came to see the Bedouin as a stabilising factor in generally unstable conditions (CADN/BEY/C.P./552, 6 Jan. 1931).

The Crisis of the 1930s: Actors, Interests and Strategies

The diplomatic negotiations of the late 1920s brought Barjas Ibn Hudayb into ever closer contact with the French administrators. From the point of view of the French administration, this cooperation was a success: no major intertribal feuds were reported in 1930, and all taxes were paid (CADN/BEY/C.P./552, 6 Jan. 1931). Barjas Ibn Hudayb, however, saw the very fundaments of his authority being eroded from below as he became more and more resented by members of his own group. They accused him of using French government troops to exact unlawful dues from them by extortion. Indeed, French sources report that the camel troopers assisting Shaykh Barjas had imprisoned and beaten some *mukhtār*s who refused to pay the controversial 'shaykh tax' (CADN/BEY/C.P./552, a/s. *exactions chez les nomades*, c. 1930).

The ʿAbada in Iraq

The crisis came to a head when about two thirds of the ʿAbada, led by the well-known dissident *mukhtārs* Aḥmad al-Kardūsh and Sulaymān al-Muwayniʿ, left Syria for Iraq early in 1930, threatening to remain there if Barjas was not replaced (CADN/BEY/C.P./552, 6 Jan. 1931). Placing the *mukhtārs*' behaviour in the context of wider developments in Syria, beyond the internal dynamics of the ʿAbada, two factors might help to explain this unusual move. The first was economic distress. The year 1931 was the first of the four disastrous years of drought mentioned above, and, after a certain delay, the Bedouin had also become affected by the worldwide economic downturn. This induced them to look for grazing grounds, water points and markets beyond the usual locations (CADN/BEY/C.P./552, report on tribes, 1932). A second factor was the development of what French administrators described as 'revolutionary sentiment'. This was most pronounced among some groups of the Nuʿaym and ʿUqaydāt, who reportedly 'tried to shake off the yoke of their tribal chiefs in order to gain independence for their clans (*sous-fractions*)' (CADN/BEY/C.P./552, 6 Jan. 1931). The 'revolutionary' mood, especially, but not exclusively, among the 'sheep herder' or *Shawāya* tribes of Syria, was to persist and to play a role in the ideological struggles during the period leading up to Syrian independence (Ababsa 2007; Lange 2005). In the 1930s, however, it first became absorbed into the rivalries between the newly founded states in the region.

The Anglo-Iraqi Government

The repeated invitations of the Iraqi government to tribes from French-controlled territory from the mid-1920s on must have encouraged many among the Sbaʿa to consider political alternatives to administration by the *Contrôle bédouin* and Shaykh Barjas. Indeed, the Anglo-Iraqi government welcomed the Sbaʿa on its territory, hoping to be able to draw all Sbaʿa to its side. In 1930, the Anglo-Iraqi government directly called on the Sbaʿa to leave Syria, promising that, if they made a pledge of loyalty to Iraq, the Sbaʿa would be helped in a conflict with the Ruwala, which the French administration in Syria apparently could not solve to their satisfaction. In 1933, King Faisal of Iraq personally invited Shaykh Barjas to visit him in Baghdad and tried to persuade him to move to Iraq with his tribe. The meeting apparently ended without concrete results. A few weeks earlier the king had spoken to Barjas' counterpart, Rākān Ibn Murshid from the Qumuṣa, to the same effect. It was speculated that King Faisal was trying to achieve a unification of all Sbaʿa and their subsequent relocation to Iraq under Rākān's leadership (CADN/BEY/C.P., 29 March 1933). Success in this matter could have served the Iraqi government as a convenient argument in the border negotiations; in spring 1933 they were reaching their closing phase, and they were eventually finalised in the French-Iraqi Treaty of 3 July 1933 (Velud 1995: 48). According to the analysis of French administrators, the Iraqi government was also thinking of using tribal conflicts to obtain better conditions for the planned

construction of an oil pipeline through Syrian territory, and British documents confirm that this assessment was accurate (CADN/BEY/C.P./552, 18 Jan. 1936; FO 371/15361, 22 Aug. 1931, in *Records of Syria*, vol. 5, p. 14). Inside Iraq, as other French administrators noted, the Arab Sunni elite, which dominated the Iraqi government, welcomed the plan to win over (Sunni) Bedouin tribes from Syria to the Iraqi crown as an important reinforcement of their position inside the country (CADN/BEY/C.P./990, 1 April 1933; see Fuccaro 1997).

The Franco-Syrian Government

The French Mandate government in Syria, for its part, feared that these developments might damage the whole edifice of the French-sponsored political order in the Syrian steppe. At first, it was suggested that a cautious line should be taken in dealing with the affair: the French might still need the Sba'a when the final boundaries with Iraq were to be negotiated and a temporary loss of tax revenue was preferable to 'driving them into the arms of the British' (CADN/BEY/C.P./552, 24 Nov. 1930). After the talks between Shaykh Rākān and King Faisal, however, the French administration started to exert pressure on Rākān, threatening to stop the subsidies paid to him and confiscate his extensive landholdings in the Syrian village of Bughaydīd, where he had recently made major investments in irrigated agriculture (e.g. CADN/BEY/C.P./553, 17 Feb. 1930). In response to this threat, Rākān decided that he had more to lose in Syria than he could possibly gain in Iraq, and accordingly renewed his pledge of loyalty to the French Mandate government in May 1933, shortly before the Iraqi–Syrian border was to be finalised (CADN/BEY/995, 30 May 1933, report by Lt Sauvagnac). This ended all speculation about the whole Sba'a tribe moving to Iraq.

Seen from the perspective of the French administrators, this was a step forward, but they still had a difficult enough problem with the 'Abada. When, in 1930, two thirds of the 'Abada had evaded taxation by remaining in Iraq (see Figure 3), some French administrators were inclined to consider a new model of governance based on the *mukhtār*s, realising that Shaykh Barjas was no longer able to collect the taxes from all 'Abada (CADN/BEY/C.P./553, 5 May 1930; ibid./991, July 1930). By the mid-1930s, however, they had also become disillusioned with the *mukhtār*s, whom they found to be as unreliable as Shaykh Barjas himself. In these circumstances, dealing with many clan representatives instead of one tribal shaykh would have made the administration of the 'Abada even more difficult and costly, so there was a consensus that a shaykh was indispensable. The question remained, however, of how the dissident groups could be brought back under a united administrative framework.

Shaykh Barjas

Shaykh Barjas reacted somewhat helplessly to these developments, which were an even more dangerous challenge to his own authority than they were to that

of the Mandate administration. On the one hand, he desperately tried to stay in touch both with his fellow tribesmen – half in Syria, half in Iraq – and with the French administration. On the other, *Contrôle bédouin* officers reported that he had neglected to visit the herders in the steppe as he spent more and more time on his estates in Tall Ḥalāwa, northeast of Hama (CADN/BEY/C.P./552, 24 Nov. 1930). In reaction to Shaykh Barjas' loss of influence, his annual subsidy was cut to 512 Syrian Lira, half of what he had been paid at the height of his success in 1930 (CADN/BEY/C.P./553, 10 Feb. 1930; ibid., Décret no. 3810, 1935).

International Negotiations, 1935–37

During 1935, the affair became complicated further, but a solution finally emerged. At first, it seemed that the ʿAbada would indeed become an Iraqi tribe. In April, some ʿAbada groups clashed with ʿUqaydāt shepherds around Dayr al-Zawr and retreated to Iraq. Fear of retaliation from the ʿUqaydāt provided them with another reason to remain there (CADN/BEY/C.P./R.P. 1876, no.13, Dayr al-Zawr, 2 Apr. 1935). Now even Shaykh Barjas moved his camp to Iraq, since remaining in Syria would obviously have rendered his claim to represent the ʿAbada entirely nugatory (ibid., no.13, Aleppo, 9 Apr. 1935). By June, it was reported that close to 80 per cent of the ʿAbada were in Iraq (ibid., no. 22, Aleppo, 11 June 1935). They had suspended their regular migratory cycles and were dispersed over a distance of more than five hundred kilometres between Palmyra and the middle Euphrates (Figure 3 shows the situation during the summer of 1930).

During the same month, in a surprise move, Shaykh ʿĀjil al-Yāwir of the Iraqi Shammar concluded an agreement that declared the Sbaʿa in Iraq to be members of the Shammar encampments.[15] This agreement allowed them to camp in the vicinity of the Shammar, together with some Fadʿān groups who had also fled to the country. According to the agreement, the newcomers were under the protection of Shaykh ʿĀjil, who ruled that they should use grazing grounds close to those of the ʿAmarāt. The Iraqi government endorsed this decision and so it seemed that the Sbaʿa would remain permanently in the country. After concluding the agreement, ʿĀjil immediately proceeded to collect taxes from the new groups under his patronage (ibid., no. 16, Aleppo, 30 Apr. 1935).

According to French information, Shaykh ʿĀjil's move had been instigated by Mujḥim Ibn Muhayd, the shaykh of the Fadʿān[16] in northern Syria. It is plausible that Mujḥim was concerned by the developments because part of the Fadʿān tribe had also moved to Iraq and Mujḥim must have been interested in the return of all dissident Bedouin. The new taxes would make Iraq less attractive for both Sbaʿa and Fadʿān (*Tribus nomades* 1943: 93).

Mujḥim's interests overlapped with those of Maḥrūt Ibn Hadhdhāl, the shaykh of the ʿAmarāt (see Figure 2) and the supreme representative of the ʿAnaza in Iraq,

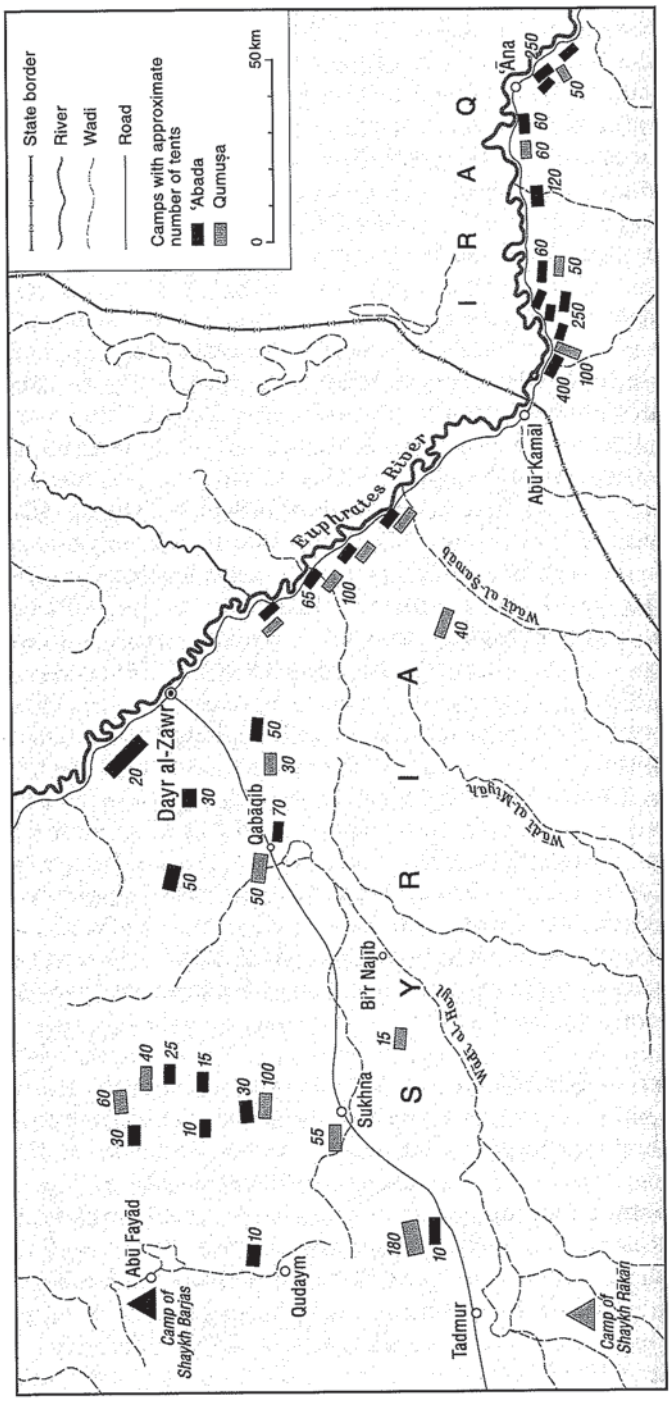

Figure 3. *Sba'a camps in Syria and Iraq, July 1930. Adapted from a sketch map based on first-hand observations by Contrôle bédouin officers*

Source: CADN/BEY/C.P. 991, 26 Aug. 1930

who did not want to tolerate a ʿAnaza group being represented by a Shammar leader. Shaykh Maḥrūt immediately announced his opposition to the agreement between the Shammar and the ʿAbada in Iraq. For the Iraqi government, there was now the threatening prospect of a conflict between Shammar and ʿAmarāt. However, in the summer of 1935, ʿĀjil al-Yāwir agreed to new negotiations which were to be presided over by Nūrī al-Shaʿlān, the shaykh of the Ruwala, and talks were held in Damascus in July 1935 (CADN/BEY/C.P./R.P. 1876, 17 July 1935). At this point, conflict in the internal politics of the ʿAbada had spilled over into the arena of regional diplomacy.

This renegotiation of the case was in the interest of many of the parties involved. As far as the Anglo-Iraqi government was concerned, it is doubtful whether it would have accorded so much weight to the opposition of the ʿAmarāt if the circumstances had been different. However, after Shaykh Rākān's refusal to leave Syria and become the leader under Iraqi patronage of the whole Sbaʿa tribe, a wholesale relocation of the tribe to Iraq had ceased to be a realistic option. With that, the presence of the Sbaʿa in Iraq had lost much of its strategic value for the Iraqi government. Without being an Iraqi tribe, they could hardly serve as a bargaining chip in the negotiations with the Syro-French administration. Thus it was not worth taking the risk of strife between Shammar and ʿAmarāt – all the more so as the government had just begun a campaign to recruit thousands of tribesmen as auxiliary forces in the Iraqi army (CADN/BEY/C.P./R.P. 1876, no. 34, Dayr al-Zawr, 10 Sept. 1935, p. 11; on the background see Tarbush 1983: 79–94). An additional factor may have been that the lineage of Nūrī al-Shaʿlān, the shaykh of the Ruwala, meanwhile, had entered into a close alliance with the Āl Saʿūd, the royal house of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. A peaceful agreement brokered by Nūrī would assure the support of the increasingly powerful Saʿudis.[17] Last but not least, the need for a renewal of the internal order of the Sbaʿa was brought home again to political leaders by a violent clash between members of Shaykh Barjas' ʿAbada and Shaykh Rākān's Qumuṣa near Dayr al-Zawr. French officials feared that the entire Sbaʿa tribe might disintegrate (ibid., no. 22, Aleppo, 11 June 1935). This was the situation in which Nūrī, after some days of negotiations, pronounced the following arbitral verdict:

- First, protection agreements such as that concluded between the Shammar and the Sbaʿa refugees were no longer binding, as only the government was in charge of military security in the steppe and the old order of military protection among Bedouin groups had ceased to exist.
- Second, Nūrī stated, Bedouin groups should always remain loyal to 'their tribe', even when they ventured beyond national borders. Therefore, Shaykh Maḥrūt's claim to represent the Sbaʿa in his capacity as the leader of the ʿAnaza in Iraq overruled the agreement with the Shammar.

This verdict was met with stiff protest from ʿĀjil al-Yāwir, who felt that he had been cheated of the fruits of his diplomatic efforts and he tried to renegotiate the matter over the succeeding months (CADN/BEY/C.P./R.P., 1876, no. 35, Dayr al-Zawr, 17 Sept. 1935). However, it became clear that Nūrī's decision was backed by the most powerful actors in the region and would not be reversed. The French Mandate government was certainly happy with anything that promised to stabilise the tribal order in its domain, the Iraqi government was relieved to have fended off potential trouble among the tribes on its own side of the border, and the Ruwala and ʿAmarāt strengthened their powerful alliance under Saudi patronage.[18] In September, ʿĀjil gave up and advised the last remaining ʿAbada still camped in Iraq to leave the country (ibid., no. 37, Dayr al-Zawr, 1 Oct. 1935).

In this way, the affair was solved through international diplomacy that included tribal as well as government actors. The dissident *mukhtār*s of the ʿAbada, the principal actors in the first part of the crisis, had been sidelined. They apparently still favoured an alliance with the Shammar, but ʿĀjil al-Yāwir signalled that he could do no more for them (*Tribus nomades* 1943: 93).

Another outcome of the negotiations in Damascus was that Shaykh Barjas' authority was completely destroyed. After it had become clear that there was no future for the ʿAbada in Iraq, the leaders of the dissident clans met in Dayr al-Zawr and proclaimed their desire to return to Syria. They set only one condition, namely that Shaykh Barjas be deposed. The French administration hesitated for a long time, fearing that deposing a shaykh might set a dangerous precedent that would encourage opposition in other tribes (CADN/BEY/C.P./556, 3 Oct. 1935). After the matter had been left open for weeks, Rākān Ibn Murshid, in a conversation with a French official, underlined the seriousness of the situation by telling him that, if Barjas remained in office, the oppositional *mukhtār*s would have to go empty-handed to the ordinary Bedouin in their groups, who would be utterly frustrated. Rākān was quoted as saying that 'if Barjas were not replaced at the head of the tribe, the *mukhtār*s Nāyif Ibn Jilādān and Sulaymān al-Muwayniʿ would be assassinated'. At the same time, he was said to have urged the French administration to install a supreme Sbaʿa shaykh again, since all 'ʿAnaza chiefs' felt 'their authority in danger' as the revolt might serve as a precedent to disaffected members of their own groups (ibid., no. 38, Palmyra, 12 Dec. 1935).

Finally, in December 1935, the French government stripped Barjas of the title of shaykh and placed the ʿAbada under the leadership of five *mukhtār*s (CADN/BEY/C.P./556, Décision no. 347, 11 Dec. 1935; *Tribus nomades* 1943: 93). The aged and dishonoured Barjas died in August 1936, less than a year after his deposition (ibid., 9 Aug. 1937). Barjas' son was still too young to assume the responsibilities of a shaykh, so the hour of Barjas' brother Ṣāliḥ Ibn Hudayb had come, and he was installed as the new shaykh of the ʿAbada in 1937 (*Tribus nomades* 1943: 93). Ṣāliḥ managed to remain in power well into the era of the Syrian Republic, but his authority was no less contested than that of his older brother. Thus, for the ʿAbada, the age of powerful tribal shaykhs was over.

For Aḥmad al-Kardūsh, Nāyif al-Jilādān, Sulaymān al-Muwayni' and the other dissidents, the revolt had ended with relative success: their power increased after 1935, to the detriment of the French-sponsored shaykh.

Some Concluding Remarks

Problems of documentation notwithstanding, the political crisis of the Sba'a-'Abada has proven well suited for illustrating different levels of political dynamics within a Syrian Bedouin community during the closing phase of the 'age of shaykhs'.

Tribes and States and Other Political Bodies

The events during the crisis of the 1930s took place in two interrelated political fields. The first was the arena of the internal tribal politics of the 'Abada where the actors were the shaykhs of an aristocratic lineage, the Hudayb, as well as several clan and sub-clan representatives and ordinary Bedouin. In addition, shaykhs and *mukhtār*s were also involved on a wider political stage where they interacted with representatives of the French Mandate administration and neighbouring states. The main resources at stake in both political fields, the intertribal and the extratribal, were, as far as we can tell on the basis of our documents, security and taxation, as well as control over territory and natural and human resources.

What does the affair reveal about government policies in the region? In a situation where there was a general scarcity of funds, the colonial administrations in Syria and Iraq, much like their predecessors, the Ottomans, treated tribes as groups with rights and responsibilities who would guarantee some measure of order in a peripheral territory and would help in the outsourcing of some administrative functions such as public security and taxation. The tribe appears in this situation as the nexus of the interests of at least five parties: Syrian state representatives, Bedouin elites, ordinary Bedouin, and state and Bedouin representatives of other countries. The events of the 1930s show that tribes in Syria were used 'from the top down', i.e. by the state to guarantee control of the steppe population, as well as 'from the bottom up', i.e. by Bedouin to manipulate state agencies to reach their own goals.

The case of the *mukhtār*s' revolt has also revealed several strategies employed by the Bedouin. The *mukhtār*s and their followers used the classical see-saw strategy between different power centres around the steppe, in this case the Franco-Syrian administration, the Anglo-Iraqi administration, the Iraqi king and the leading Bedouin shaykhs. The Bedouin shaykhs, on the other hand, followed a strategy to systematically use all the privileges granted within the framework of the various governments' corporatist policies, such as land grants, subsidies and assistance by police forces during tax collection. Even intertribal conflict could

be exploited in this way, as it gave tribal shaykhs such as Nūrī al-Sha'lān the opportunity to prove their indispensability as mediators.

The Agency of Ordinary Bedouin and Lower-ranking Tribal Representatives

Ordinary Bedouin do not figure much in the sources, but their agency nevertheless becomes visible at specific moments during the conflict. In particular, it appears that there was a deep-seated enmity against Shaykh Barjas Ibn Hudayb and his taxation practices, which could not be ignored by the French administrators and the 'Abada *mukhtār*s. The weapon most commonly employed by ordinary Bedouin against state and tribal authorities was evasion – a strategy that weakened tribal shaykhs by forcing them to hurry from one camp to another to collect taxes and stay in touch with their fellow tribespeople. The Sba'a camps had certainly stretched over great distances in earlier times as well, but at least temporarily they had united in large camps for security reasons. Now they no longer needed to do this. Thus the loss of the tribe's military function appears to have profoundly reduced the extent to which the Sba'a coordinated their movement in the steppe. This changed their patterns of mobility and the character of their political organisation more than two decades before the introduction of motorised transport in the 1960s, which so far has mostly been emphasised as the major factor of change in the Bedouin's way of life (Chatty 1986: chap. 5),

During the 1920s, the whole Sba'a tribe still came together temporarily – for example, when they moved collectively from the State of Damascus to the State of Aleppo to evade payment of tax. In 1926, however, *Contrôle bédouin* officers were spoke of the rebellious 'Abada clans as a 'floating mass' that was almost impossible to survey (CADN/BEY/C.P. 986, 12 Feb. 1926). In other words, the reduced need for military and political cooperation resulted in the stronger relative importance of smaller units below the level of the 'Abada and Qumuṣa sub-tribes.

We do not know how ordinary members of the 'Abada themselves perceived their migration to Iraq and back. Perhaps they found better ecological conditions during the time of the drought. They also may have hoped to find better living conditions in Iraq, with lighter taxation and perhaps new job opportunities in the army. It seems almost certain, however, that they did not gain much from this manoeuvre. When, in late 1935, even the fulfilment of their last remaining demand was in the balance, namely the deposition of Shaykh Barjas, they threatened violence. This threat was certainly the last resort, to be used only after all other methods had failed, and it seems to have been so convincing that it finally sealed the shaykh's fate.

The overall picture of the Sba'a that emerges from this episode is one of a community that was highly differentiated and in constant flux.[19] French documentation shows that, in spatial terms, small camping units continuously grouped and regrouped according to short-term economic necessities and political agreements. Beyond this general observation, however, we lack

information that is crucial for describing the structure and function of these small groups. To what extent were the groups acknowledged by the Mandate authorities identical with the groups that mattered in the daily life of the Bedouin (see Stewart, forthcoming)? Did the clans constitute communities with a shared identity? Did they enjoy territorial rights? And, more specifically, to what extent did they overlap with camping groups? So far, we can only give general answers to these questions. Anthropological studies have shown that it is usually at the level of households and extended kin or 'minimal lineage' groups (in Arabic mostly: *bayt*) where decisions are made as to when and where to move (Chatty 1986: 45, 54–55, 95). Chatty observed in the 1970s that 'depending upon the season of the year and, more specifically, the quality of the surrounding pasture land', between three and fifteen *bayt*s formed a camping unit. According to her observation, these units were 'exclusively kin-based' (Chatty 1986: 95). Thus we have at least strong indications that all groups beyond the family household were flexible and negotiated entities.

In any event, the career of some of the Sbaʿa-ʿAbada's *mukhtār*s shows that readiness to take risks, superior information and tactical skills provided individual representatives of clans with considerable agency. At the same time, they did not call the overarching units of the ʿAbada and the Sbaʿa into question. While tribes and sub-tribes had lost their earlier functions as military organisations granting protection, embarking on raids (*ghazw*) and collecting tribute (*khuwwa*), they continued to serve these enterprising individuals and their lineages as a wide-ranging social network that enabled them to embark on collective political action.

The ʿAnaza

Finally, what do the findings of this case study indicate regarding the significance and function of the ʿAnaza confederation? Clearly, the political behaviour of ʿAnaza groups often cannot be inferred from tribal subdivisions. The events of 1935 provide at least three examples that stand in contradiction to the genealogically based model of the ʿAnaza's internal organisation (see Figure 2). On the one hand, fighting occurred between members of the Sbaʿa; on the other, Nūrī al-Shaʿlān and Maḥrūt Ibn Hadhdhāl cooperated across the divide between the moieties of the ʿAnaza, Bishr and Muslim. Furthermore, the agreement between the ʿAbada dissidents and ʿĀjil al-Yāwir even bridged the rift between ʿAnaza and Shammar, who were widely assumed to be 'hereditary enemies' (Oppenheim et al. 1939: 70). Thus, while the genealogical model of the tribal order implies what could be termed a two-party system, our case study of political practice has revealed a multi-party system in which no coalition could be ruled out.

However, the ʿAnaza genealogy provided a reference system for the steppe population and their rulers, which was both simple and flexible enough to accommodate situational variations and remain stable for long periods of time. This becomes most visible in the political crisis of the ʿAbada. Here, the ʿAnaza appear to have been only a latent factor during the first part of the affair, but one that

was suddenly activated in 1935 as an argument by Maḥrūt Ibn Hadhdhāl and Nūrī al-Shaʿlān in their bid to re-establish order among the rebellious tribespeople. State governments followed this logic. In this case, the ʿAnaza confederation was neither the expression of a stateless society nor an instrument of state administration. Rather, it served as a basis for a broad coalition of interests in the Syrian steppe, which encompassed decision makers in tribal and state bodies alike.

Notes

1. This article has been written in the framework of the Collaborative Research Centre 'Difference and Integration' (SFB 586), hosted by the Universities of Halle-Wittenberg and Leipzig and financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG). I would like to thank Dawn Chatty, Astrid Meier, Frank Stewart and the colleagues of the SFB study group on 'power and domination' (Herrschaft) for their helpful remarks on earlier versions of this chapter.

   Throughout the article, Arabic words are generally rendered according to standard Arabic orthography. However, colloquial forms of Bedouin names are used in cases in which these are more widely used than the standard forms (e.g. *Sbaʿa*, which is also rendered as *al-Asbiʿa* and *ʿĀjil*, a colloquial form of *ʿĀqil*). Unless marked otherwise, italicised words in brackets are transliterations of Arabic terms.
2. 'Bedouin', in the Arab East, corresponds mainly to two Arabic ethnonyms: *badw* and *ʿarab* (see Leder 2004: 91–94). One influential definition of these terms during the early twentieth century was that *badw* referred predominantly to camel breeders who were based in the steppe and undertook long-distance seasonal migrations. *ʿArab*, in contrast, was a term with a wider meaning, which included those pastoralists, predominantly sheep breeders, who remained close to the cultivated lands and undertook only small-scale migrations. Being member of a camel herding group with a wide range of movement was perceived as a sign of 'nobility' (Chatty 1986: xxii, 12–13). In the following, *Bedouin* will be employed as designating both nomadic and settled Arab population groups that were affiliated to some tribal group with a basis in the Syrian steppe. The English term *tribe* has numerous equivalents in Arabic, the usage of which varies widely according to context (see the contribution by Kreuer in this volume). Therefore, the terms used in this contribution, e.g. *confederation* or *clan* (see Figure 2 and Table 1), are not indigenous but analytical terms. They have been chosen to distinguish the different levels of tribal organisation as they are presented in our sources as clearly as possible. However, one needs to bear in mind that the present study is mainly based on government documents and that contemporary members of the Sbaʿa-ʿAbada might have had conceptions different from those indicated by these terms and by the hierarchies depicted in Figure 2 and Table 1.
3. Syria was made a French Mandate, and Iraq and Jordan were made British Mandates through the League of Nations around 1920. The Saudi State was founded in 1902 and was named Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932.

4, Almost every category of tribal units and tribal representatives can be referred to by several synonymous terms. *Mukhtār* was primarily an administrative term introduced by the Ottoman government. Local tribespeople probably referred to these office-holders simply as *shaykh*s. The term *mukhtār* will be used throughout the article in order to distinguish this level of leadership from that of the tribal shaykh.
5. Here I follow the terminology used by Frank Stewart in his recent attempt to systematise the terminology developed in Emanuel Marx's pioneering work on the Negev Bedouin. With regard to 'clans', it needs to be noted that Marx and Stewart can confidently write that the 'clans' of the Negev Bedouin in the 1960s had an identity of patrilineal descent groups (Marx 1967: 65). I make the same assumption for what the French called *fractions* and *sous-fractions* of the Sbaʿa, but in the absence of any source that deals with this matter, I cannot substantiate it. However, it is not only the functional analogy to the Negev 'clans' that points in this direction, but also the fact that most '*sous-fractions*' of the ʿAbada as well as the Negev 'clans' bear names that consist of the plural form of the name of an ancestor. See Marx (1967); Stewart (forthcoming).
6. This study is part of an ongoing research project on the Syrian ʿAnaza tribes in the framework of the Collaborative Research Centre 'Difference and Integration' (SFB 586), which combines anthropological fieldwork and archival studies.
7. Information on customary rights to resources in the Syrian steppe is scarce. Anecdotal evidence is given in a French report on a conflict between Ruwala and Sbaʿa herders over the right to use wells at Isriyya in the Syrian steppe (CADN/BEY/C.P./R.P. 1876, Aleppo, 30 April 1935). On Sbaʿa territories in western Syria from the 1950s to the 1980s see Rae 2002.
8. In the sense of 'groups of tribes' (see Stewart, forthcoming).
9. In social anthropology, 'moiety' refers to one of two units in which a social group or society is divided on the basis of unilineal descent.
10. These tribal groups were presumably named after ancestral individuals, i.e. the name 'Muslim' does not refer to their religion.
11. I would like to thank Astrid Meier for providing me with this reference. On the ʿAbada see also BOA/İ.DH 149/7754, 3 Jul. 1847; on the Murshid, see ibid./A.MKT.UM 428/48, vesika 3, 8 Ra. 1277/ 24 Sept. 1860 and on the Ibn Hudayb, ibid./DH.MKT, 2009/42, 19 Ra. 1310/11 Oct. 1892.
12. Contemporary administrative documents commonly assume that between five and seven persons lived in one household (e.g. *Tribus nomades* 1943, 77, 89, 92; Table 1, above). See also the contribution by Kreuer in this volume, which reports slightly larger households with an average of seven persons for pastoral communities in present-day Morocco. Tribal clans and sub-clans generally seem to have been stable units. At least some of them are documented from the late nineteenth century onwards (Blunt 1968: 85).
13. Other estimates of the total number of ʿAbada households are: 3,500 in 1908 (Musil 1928: 55); 1,000 around 1915 (Bidwell 1917: 107); and 2,500 around 1930 (Müller 1931: 116).
14. According to French maps of the Mandate period, Gaʿara (or Kaʿara) was a name for pastures south of Abū Kamāl on the Euphrates (e.g. map 3 in Müller 1931: 353).

15. The French documents use the term *voisin*, which was most likely a translation of the Bedouin term *ṭinīb* meaning 'a member of the same encampment'. See Stewart 1990: 273–4.
16. More precisely, Mujḥim Ibn Muhayd was the shaykh of a moiety of his tribe, the Fad'ān Wuld. Its counterpart, the Fad'ān Khurṣa were led by the Ibn Qa'shīsh lineage (Oppenheim et al. 1939: 81).
17. In the years 1935–36 the British government even considered merging Iraq into a large Arab empire under the leadership of the Āl Sa'ūd, which further increased Nūrī's importance as a political broker between Iraq and the Saudi State (e.g. CADN/BEY/C.P./R.P. 1876, no. 35, Dayr, 17 Sept. 1935).
18. In the early twenty-first century, both groups are still closely allied with the Saudi ruling house (al-'Anzī 2008).
19. For more details on the social structure of a pastoralist community, see the contribution by Kreuer in this volume.

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DH.EUM	Dahiliye Nezareti Emniyet-i 'Umumiye Müdüriyeti Kalemi
DH.MKT	Dahiliye Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi
DH.ŞFR	Dahiliye Nezareti Şifre Kalemi
DH.TMIK.S	Dahiliye Nezareti Teşri'-i Mu'amelat ve İslahat Komisyonu
İ.DH	İrade-yi Dahiliye

CADN (*Centre d'Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes)*
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