The application of geometry to science resulted in the appearance of analytical geometry. The application of algebra on arithmetic resulted in the renewal of numbers theory. The expansion led to the application of algebra and arithmetic on some chapters of geometry (the works of Mahani, Kargi and others on Euclid’s Rules). The application of arithmetic and geometry on astronomy resulted in the birth of trigonometry, with its two branches during the Arab era.

As a theoretical science, algebra has combined between two methods, the geometrical proof method and the arithmetical logarithmical method. Its integration with other sciences has influenced scientific thought in the Arab period, exactly as the science of geometry has influenced Greek thought.

The second important characteristic of Arab scientific thinking is using experimentation as a standard for proof making and the generation of scientific laws. With the exception of Archimedes, one can assume that Greek science did not apply experiment. The application of experimentation as standard proof and for the deduction of scientific laws has reached its climax in the works of Ibn al-Haytham (the science of images). His followers carried on with the same methodology using some technical lab objects to represent nature.

All such new features, whether methodology or the form and content of science, can’t be described as a developed Greek tradition. It is rather a completely new tradition whose sources were Greek tradition.

The universality of Arab science is due to the international sources it has, the multiplicity of its contributors, and the evolution of their beliefs. It is also universal due to its expansion. In the geographical region, science is international (from China to Spain). It is also international as far as language is concerned, since Arabic became an international language since the beginning of the 9th century AD.

Its translation into Latin has contributed to its formation in Europe. This was possible through two channels, i.e. translation and interaction with others. Systematic translation in Europe has taken place since the 12th century. It started with two schools: the school of Salerno in the East. In the West, there was the school of Toledo. Interaction took place by means of scientists who studied science in Arabic and developed it in Latin.

Acceptance of other cultures and a respect for science and the work of predecessors did not restrict criticism and objection to them. We have Ibn al-Haytham writing Suspicions on Ptolemy. Al-Razi (865-925) wrote Suspicions on Galenous and Al-Khayam on Euclid. Arabic science was therefore not a science of just commentary, but a science of criticism since its beginning.

Science spread into urban society and was not limited to Dar al-Khilafa and the courts of princes. It prevailed not only in Bayt al-Hikma (House of government), observatories, hospitals and schools, but also in government offices and mosques. In government offices it took the form of arithmetical and algebra. In the mosque it was astronomy, timing, and a science of theological prescription.

Social study of Arab science as Rashid suggests, "has to point out the role of society and Islamic city in that historical movement. At this point we can understand how different independent scientific currents could meet, and interact." This study also helped to present the role of Waqf (charity) in the continuation or survival of scientific institutions such as schools, observatories and hospitals, in spite of the changing moods of political authority along that extended period.

Arab science prospered as a result of conscious support from the ruling authority, by means of consistent translation. Here we can refer to the theory of George Saliba. He thinks that Orientalists wrongly identified the vehicles through which Arab science was developed.

In this respect there were two theories: the theory of interaction between civilizations and that of scientific centers, i.e., the transfer of science through the enlargement of some scientific centers in the East from the Hellenic period (Antioch, Nishapur, Harran and Alexandria). Translation coincided with the movement of scientific research. It is well-known now that the Orientalist theory, based on the assumption that Arab science went through three phases - translation and assimilation and scientific production, is wrong.

History of the Gulf Region in the Ottoman Archives

Lecture by Zakariya Qurshun
Presented in English
24 April 2006

In the 16th century, Ottomans dominated the Arab world and one of their key activities was the creation and maintenance of relevant archives. These archives could be considered a conservation of Arab history during that period.

For four centuries, Arab territories from Yemen to Tunis were provinces in the Ottoman Empire, so we mustn’t ignore the huge amount of documents written about such areas, part of which are the correspondence between the capital and such provinces. Copies of such correspondence are available at the archives of the Ottoman cabinet in Istanbul. Unfortunately Turkish historians were late in reaching regional documents and using them. Another problem appears here, namely the lack of any information about the condition of these documents.

Egyptian National Archives and Syrian National Archives are accessible via central archives, but nothing specific is known of the archives related to Al-Hijaz province, Ihsa governorate, and Al-Basra Gulf. When the Ottomans left the administration of these territories, their documents remained.

Modern political history in any of the Arab provinces that turned into capitals doesn’t go beyond the second half of the 19th century. This excludes many stages of Arab geography. Comparing modern Arab history of the 20th century to that of the Ottoman period as a whole shows how insufficient it is being detached from Ottoman documents. These documents, related to the period the 16th century till the 1st quarter of the 20th century, preserved in Istanbul, represent Arab geography more than any documents outside Istanbul.

The Arab world, especially in the Gulf, was involved with the Ottoman Empire from the first quarter of the 16th century. However, actual Ottoman control began in the age of Sultan Suleiman al-Qanuni in 1534 AD, when Baghdad came under the Ottoman administration.

The military campaign on Baghdad launched by al-Qanuni lasted for one year. It was motivated by two important factors, in addition to other political and economic issues. One was to put an end to the threat of Portuguese, who had the largest naval empires in the 15th and 16th century. The second was to protect the Sunni Islamic world from the Iranian threat, which was the most dangerous and had to be stopped.

These two reasons ensured a quick stability for Ottoman reign in the Arab countries, keeping in mind that Arabs suffered for a long time the absence of a central government and were fed up with internal wars between tribes and factions. This explains the smooth introduction of Ottoman rule and its perseverance.

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When Sultan Suleiman al-Qanuni was in Baghdad, delegations came from Basra and the nearby locations declaring their submission. This facilitated the integration of Basra in 1546 AD and Ihisa in 1550 AD under the Ottoman rule. With its establishment in Basra and Ihisa, the Gulf became a sphere for the activities of the Ottoman Empire. It is interesting that, at that time the Gulf was called the Persian Gulf by Iranians and Europeans, the Arabian Gulf by Arabs, and the Basra Gulf by the Ottomans.

Not only did this ensure independence for the region, but also gave the inhabitants an opportunity to move easily from one place to another. Arab tribes migrated to Iraq and other places in the Gulf, which they considered suitable for them, whether for economic reasons or just for seeking a safer refuge. It was not unusual to find a tribe from the borders of Anatolia, settled in the Gulf area.

In other words the Ottoman countries that enjoyed peace had a great influence in the formation of human geography in Iraq and the Gulf area. The Ottoman state did not interfere with the traditional structure of Arab tribes, which were integrated in the administrative system, and was able to make a well-established administration in the area for a long time.

Naturally, documents provide large information on the administrative centres such as Mosul, Baghdad, Basra and Hijaz. However, information about sedentary inhabitants was much larger than those related to Bedouins who inhabited large areas. In spite of all this there is much information in the Ottoman archives about influential Arab tribes which occupied large areas in Hijaz, e.g., Anza, Bani Harb, Bani Qahtan, Otyaya and Shammar tribes. We can also acquire much information about the branches of important tribes that lived in the Basra Gulf area such as Ban-i-Khaled, Al-Ajam, Al-Murra, Al-Duwairi, Al-Manasir, Ban-i-Haji, Matir, Khadhail and Bu Ali (Figure 1).

Starting from the 17th century the central Ottoman administration, established in the Basra Gulf in the 16th century, became ineffective, allowing local administrations to act independent. Many reasons led to that condition, most important of which was the reformation of balance among world powers.

The Ottoman Empire made considerable effort during this period to remain strong in the East, especially in the Basra Gulf, trying to make up for its diminishing influence in Ottoman Europe. Therefore efforts were intensified to assert its actual political presence in the area. The most important of which was the attempt to stop the influence of the British in the Basra Gulf region.

From the second half of the 19th century till the early years of the 20th century, the Basra Gulf was a battle field for an Ottoman-British conflict which remained secret sometimes and was open at other times. Unexpectedly, this conflict had its influence in the emergence of modern Gulf States.

In Ottoman documents we must review some incidents that disturbed security in the region in the 19th century and their impact on the stability of Kuwait and the al-Sabah family. Pre-19th century documents mention that Kuwait was an important harbour. We will look at Kuwait through the 19th century archives.

Undoubtedly the Ottoman administration realized the strategic importance of Kuwait and knew quite well that any power controlling the region will threaten Basra and consequently the rest of Iraq. Therefore the Sublime Porte (the Divan court of the Ottoman Empire) had correspondence with the Basra governor and ordered him to be aware of the events in the region.

Al-Basra governor came to know of British policy and their movements in the Gulf through Abdel Jalil al-Tabataba (Figure 2) who was one of the most famous merchants in the area. He reported all to Istanbul. The following information was cited in his letter to the Sublime Porte in Jumada al-Akhar 1263 AH/1847 AD: "There is nothing unusual about Kuwait and its neighbours. As for Nadj governor and his Bedouins, there is nothing significant about them. In Bahrain two British ships arrived few days ago with their commander who had a private meeting with its Sheikhs. The commander instructed Sheikh Ali to go to Tumb Island on the spot. The commander informed the two sheikhs that he will sail to Oman and instruct the sheikhs there to meet him at that Island, in order to inform them of the commands he is commissioned to convey." From that letter we understand that the British activities had not begun in Kuwait yet, and that the Sheikhs of Kuwait are still on their old policy.

In a later letter he mentioned that the British consulate in Bandr bu Shahir increased its interaction with the Sheikhs of Kuwait. Here we find the Sublime Porte warning Baghdad governorate, asking them to hinder the attempts of the British, even the possibility of sending forces was considered to stop foreign interference in Kuwait. From the correspondence we understand that Kuwait Sheikhs did not approve of such developments and they were pro-Ottoman Empire and against the British.

After these developments came the idea of integrating Kuwait in the administrative divisions as a province of the Ottoman state. The Sublime Porte instructed the Baghdad governor to persuade the Amir of Kuwait to change the country into an Ottoman Province. During that time there were positive dialogues between the Amir and the governors of Baghdad and Basra. This increased the number of commercial ships from Kuwait to Basra. Unlike other ships, these ships carried the Ottoman flag. The number of ships carrying cargo from Kuwait to Basra between 1860 and 1861 reached 138.

Something unusual took place as indicated in the archives. Abdullah al-Faisal, the governor of Najd, asked Mohammed Nameq, the vizier of Basra in 1866 AD, to join Kuwait to Najd. This again showed the importance of Kuwait. However, this didn’t exceed the reign of Nameq Pasha, as Abdullah bin Sabah, the Amir of Kuwait was worried that this could lead to impose taxation on Kuwait.
In 1869 Midhat Pasha was appointed a governor of Baghdad; his sole objective was to restore the Ottoman administration which was lost. He always believed that the security of the Gulf meant the security of all Arabia. Therefore, the first step he took after his appointment was to solve the Kuwait problem which was left undecided by Nameq Pasha. He pointed out in the report he sent to Istanbul as follows: "Kuwait is such a strategic importance that it has to be strongly related to Ottomans. The British have spread their control over Bahrain and now it is the turn of Isla' and Qatif. If they manage to do that they will occupy Kuwait."

Midhat Pasha was fully convinced that the protection of al-Qatif, Isla and Basra is related to goals with Kuwait. Therefore, the advent of Kuwait coming under the control of any foreign power might threaten Iraq and Arabia. He followed his predecessor’s policy and the first thing he did was to establish good relations with Abdullah bin Sabah, inviting him to Basra, committing himself to levy no taxes on Kuwait and not to interfere in its existing administration since the Ottoman Empire was taking all necessary measures to stop foreign interference.

Abdullah bin Sabah had two choices, either to agree with the British or to agree with the British, the Gulf Sheikhs did, or to unite with the Ottoman state representing the Caliphate, taking full responsibility for the consequences. He was loyal enough to take the second choice and was appointed as a commissioner (governor) in 1869 AD and the Ottoman flag flew high in Kuwait. Such efforts delayed the British presence until 1889.

With the support of Kuwait, Midhat Pasha was able to launch the military campaign on Isla' earlier than originally planned. He benefited from financial support from Abdullah bin Sabah and was allowed to use a military base for the campaign he was planning. The aim of that campaign was quite clear: prevent the occupation of Qatif and Isla'. The British were benefiting from the chaos among them, and this might have precipitated the anti-Ottoman disaster Midhat Pasha feared.

An important fact has to be highlighted, if Abdullah bin Sabah hadn’t supported that campaign, it wouldn’t have been successful. As a result, the British might have imposed their control over places like Bahrain at an earlier date. His attitude (Abdullah bin Sabah) was highly appreciated and was praised in documents. In return for that, he was given 150 tonnes of dates annually and he was commissioned to run the palm groves in Faw. In addition to that, Abdullah bin Sabah and his two brothers Mohamed and Mubarak were awarded decorations from the fifth grade (figure 3).

Midhat Pasha went to Kuwait by himself in late 1870 in order to thank Abdullah bin Sabah and to strengthen the relationship with him. Midhat Pasha was the first Ottoman governor to visit Kuwait. He explained his visit as follows: "The town (borough) of Kuwait houses around 5000 to 6000 families. Its land is elevated, without any water or gardens or plantation. However, its climate is tender and healthy. It is extremely beautiful with a large harbour, well-protected by the sea from the raids of Bedouins. From the land side, it is protected by a number of tribes and Bedouin clans loyal to Kuwait. That’s why its residents enjoy a sense of security. Its architecture and inhabitants are growing day by day. Most of the inhabitants follow the Shafi‘i school of theology, with few followers of Hanafi school of theology. There are no Jews, Christians, Wahabis or Shites among the population and everyone worked in trade or the marine professions. It has more than thousand boats; the smaller are used in pearl diving and miscellaneous tasks, being sent to nearby harbours like Basra and Bandar Bu Shahr. As for larger ships, they are used in trade, carrying cargos to India, Baluchistan, Zinjibar and Yemen. The Kuwait government (commission) follows Basra. It is under the guardianship of Sheikh Abdullah al-Sabah, who has a deputy for judicial matters and another deputy for keeping discipline. There are no taxes imposed by the state and there are no civil servants other than the commissioner (or governor) like security guards and the like."

Not only did Abdullah bin Sabah participate in the battle, but he also contributed in achieving stability after it was over. During the reign of Ra‘uf Pasha, most Ottoman forces withdrew from Isla‘, so Muhammed bin Saud attracted some clans to his side against the administration in Qatif and its neighbours in the autumn of 1878 AD. Abdullah bin Sabah sent one thousand soldiers and twenty ships to stop the rebellion and he managed to subdue the clans. After that, the area was under the custody of the region. That is why Sultan Abdel Hamid (figure 4) sent Abdullah bin Sabah a Khita‘ (a dress) and granted him the title of Pasha as a sign of gratitude.

Kuwait was the most important strategic site for supporting the Ottoman rule in the Gulf. That’s why it was frequently mentioned in Ottoman documents.

In the report on Basra and its neighbourhood it was suggested that a custom office should be established in Kuwait. The name of Abdullah bin Sabah was mentioned in the report, which angered the head of the Interior and he commented as follows: "Abdullah Pasha, whom our sultan granted the title of Amir al-Umara, is Abdullah Pasha al-Sabah. He was given this status because he fought against the Bedouins of al-Qatif and the surrounding areas who rose against the honoured Sultanate and for his repair of telegraph lines which were cut, restoring the flow of communication between Baghdad and Basra."

The minister commented on Basra deputy governor saying that he “sent Ottoman flag to Kuwait” saying: “This is not true; they (Kuwait) work in the service of the State (Ottoman) and raised the flag for more than 100 years. During the reign of Mohammed Nameq Pasha the post of Qabuji Pashi was given to the father of Abdullah bin Sabah.”

In the same document, he includes information about Kuwait: “Agriculture is impossible in Kuwait; even drinking water is not accessible, as it is brought from far away. Kuwaitis own the ships sailing to India and to all other destinations. They carry dates from Basra to other places. The cargo carried is not produced in Kuwait, that’s why it is not a good idea to establish a custom office since this will result in paying for employees. Kuwait nowadays is a store for goods and the coming of Kuwaitis to the Basra harbour brings prosperity, not only for Kuwait but also for Basra….”

He continued saying: "Kuwait belongs to Al-Sabah family; their heads are Abdullah Pasha al-Sabah, Sheikh Mohammed and the head of the Sabah region. Sheikh Mubarak al-Sabah was given the post of Al-Stable al-Almer, because of the efforts he made in service of the state. He was exempted from all kinds of taxes. If Iran launches any attack, Kuwait ships will be in service of the Ottoman fleet.” The above statement reflects the attitude of the Ottoman state towards Kuwait.

The good relationship continued in the same style during the reign of Sheikh Mohammed. After the death of Sheikh Abdullah, the letter of appointment was sent to Sheikh Mohammed naming him a commissioner as well as granting him the same share of dates as was given to Sheikh Abdullah. Some officials objected to that, however, the minister of finance ordered all commitments to be paid as in the past.

The unusual death Sheikh Mohammed gave the Ottoman-Kuwait relations a new dimension. The son of Sheikh Mubarak, the Sublime Porte through the Basra governor. They complained about Sheikh Mubarak and asked that he be removed from the post of the
Unusually some Ottoman officials endorsed the matter and asked to launch a military campaign on Kuwait. Youssef Ibrahim of Basra was quite convincing and was able to deceive the people of Zubair and Kuwait, persuading them to send telegrams and complaints against Sheikh Mubarak (figure 5). Sultan Abdul Hamid took interest in the matter. At that time Youssef Ibrahim activities were supported by Iran and the British.

Ibrahim did not find enough support from Istanbul, so he made some arrangements with Sheikh Jasem to launch an attack on Kuwait. Sultan Abdul Hamid immediately sent a special envoy to stop Sheikh Jasem from moving in the direction of Kuwait. The sultan was keen to put an end to the disagreement in the family, so he appointed Sheikh Mubarak to the post of Qa'im maqam (governor). He also stopped the attempts made by Basra officials to give the palm grooves in Khout al-Zeit to the heirs of Sheikh Mohammed without informing Istanbul.

Ottoman-Kuwait relations didn't suffer any crisis until the year 1899, but even then it was never completely cut off. Sultan Abdul Hamid II was the permanent mediator between Ibn al-Rashid and Sheikh Mubarak. When Ibn al-Rashid wanted to launch attack on Kuwait in 1901 – 1902, he was completely set back as it is illegitimate to shed Muslim blood. Sheikh Mubarak showed readiness to obey and conform to the policy of Sultan Abdul Hamid which aimed at the unity of Islamic world, and made some of his close friends like Sheikh Khazal, show their loyalty to the Ottoman state.

Sheikh Mubarak offered financial support in the project intended to establish al-Hijaz railways, generated by Sultan Abdul Hamid's policy to have an Islamic league. Therefore he was awarded the medal of Al-Hijaz railways by Sultan Abdul Hamid.

After the Italians had seized western Tripoli, the Ottoman state launched a campaign inviting the entire Muslim world to support the mujahidin (against Italians). This had promptly received the response of Sheikh Mubarak and Sheikh Khazal who sent considerable amount of money. At this time the Sultan Mohammed Rashed granted him the Majeedi decoration of the first grade (figure 6). This was received on 6 February 1911, in a great ceremony held in Kuwait. Sheikh Mubarak wore the decoration during the ceremony.

An agreement signed in 1913 between the British and the Ottomans was quite effective in helping the emergence of modern Kuwait. The British wanted to cut the relationship between Kuwait and the Ottoman state (figure 7), while the Ottomans insisted on the non-interference of the British in Kuwait. After long negotiations both recognised the independence of Kuwait. Here are the borders of Kuwait as discussed in the Ottoman Council before the agreement: "The borders of Kuwait begin from the valley of Al-Sabia, extending northerly to Al-Qasr, Safwan and Jabal Sanam. On the north east side, it is bordered by the regions under the administration of the Basra governorate which extend in a circle of 35 degrees till Baten Mountain; the borders extend through the mountains to the point of Murtu. Then from Murtu till Baten in a straight line till Jabal [Muneef on the coast of the Basra Gulf]. This later border extends from the seaside, from north to south between Jabal Khour of Al-Sabia and Jabal Murtu. With all these borders are the island of Machtin, Al-Fulya, Al-Faw and Al-Mard. All are under the command of Sheikh Mubarak of Al-Sabah, who also has property in Basra."

The question of Islam's attitude towards images is an interesting field to consider when investigating the idea of a "constructed" Orient as Edward Said formulated it in his book Orientalism (1978). By "images" we mean figurative representations of beings having the "breath of life" (ruh in Arabic), i.e. humans and animals. In the 19th century, Western Orientalism started to define Islam as being "iconophobic". This idea is still alive.

If specialized scholarship has nowadays another perception, prevailing Western (but also Eastern) opinion takes it for granted that Islamic cultures never produced figurative images representing living beings or, at least, that they were hostile towards them. Even an acute thinker like the British anthropologist Jack Goody affirms in the preface of the French translation of his Representations and Contradictions (2003) that Islam does not allow any kind of images, neither in the secular nor in the religious field. Interestingly enough, this idea is not only widespread among Orientalists and Western researchers, but has also been adopted by numerous Arab artists and intellectuals of the 20th century, as their writings show.

Therefore, the idea of Islamic iconophobia is not only a Western representation and I found it appropriate to discuss. My lecture will first go back to the earliest forms of artistic expression in Islamic history, then give an overview of the evolution of figurative art in classical times, in the Arab lands, Persia and the Ottoman Empire. To conclude, I will come back to the Orientalists and the question of image and try to analyze where the idea of "iconophobia" could come from.

In Prophet Muhammad's times, the Arabs did not have a solid tradition of figurative art. Like other places in the Near East, most were directed to non-sculpted stones (ansab), although recent archaeological findings showed that there has been a production of sculpted idols in Arabia itself. Sometimes, as was the case in Makkah, they were imported from the Fertile Crescent. Nevertheless, there was no specific iconographic tradition in the Peninsula at the eve of Islam, in contrast to most neighboring areas.

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The above is not all that is included in the Ottoman documents. Rather it is a brief trip among the Ottoman archives.
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The Journal Hadeeth ad-Dar of Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah (DAI) is intended to share the wealth and beauty of Islamic culture contained within the extensive and comprehensive al-Sabah Collection of Islamic art and the variety of scholarly and artistic activities associated with the collection.

The collection itself, ranging from early Islam to the 18th century, is organised according to both historical period and geographical region. The reference library and the publications of DAI are closely related to the collection.

DAI has sponsored archaeological excavations in Bahnas, Upper Egypt that date to the Fatimid period. We are also involved in the Raya excavation at al-Tur, in Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. At present, our annual lecture series has been revived and is a focal point for historians and other specialists in the field. It features talks by prominent international scholars on various topics of Islamic art, history, archaeology and architecture.

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