The era culminating in World War I saw a transition from multinational empires to nation-states. Large empires such as the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman searched for ways to cope with the decline of their political control, while peoples in these empires shifted their political loyalties to nation-states. The Ottoman Empire offers a favorable canvas for studying new nationalisms that resulted in many successful and unsuccessful attempts to form nation-states. As an example of successful attempts, Arab nationalism has received the attention that it deserves in the field of Middle Eastern studies. Students have engaged in many complex debates on different aspects of Arab nationalism, enjoying a wealth of hard data. Studies on Kurdish nationalism, however, are still in their infancy. Only a very few scholars have addressed the issue in a scholarly manner. We still have an inadequate understanding of the nature of early Kurdish nationalism and its consequences for the Middle East in general and Turkish studies in particular. Partly because of the subject’s political sensitivity, many scholars shy away from it. However, a consideration of Kurdish nationalism as an example of unsuccessful attempts to form a nation-state can contribute greatly to the study of nationalism in the Middle East.

The aim of this study is to explore the nature of Kurdish nationalism in its formative period. It offers five principal conclusions. Kurdish nationalism emerged as a response to the collapsing Ottoman Empire during and after World War I. Therefore, it was not a cause but, on the contrary, the result of the empire’s disintegration. The political and military activities of Kurdish notables in the pre-World War I period were not nationalistic; they reflected the desire of powerful Kurdish lineages to consolidate, expand, or recover their regional influence. Kurdish leaders, exclusively of landed-notable origin, were mostly members of Ottoman high bureaucracy and as such an integral part of the Ottoman state. Their well-being depended heavily on the existence of the state. It was only after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire seemed unavoidable that they actively promoted nationalism. In its infancy, Kurdish nationalism was heavily affected by pre-existing ties and rivalries. These ties were shaped by the Kurds’ own primordial ties and religious affiliations. Struggles among the most powerful Kurdish notables continued in the form of opposing factions in Kurdish nationalist politics in

Hakan Özoğlu is a Lecturer in Turkish, University of Chicago, 5828 S. University Avenue, Chicago, Ill. 60637, USA; e-mail: aozo@midway.uchicago.edu.

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the era immediately following World War I. The goals and tactics of these factions were also influenced by their leaders’ religious commitment—or lack of such commitment. Their understanding of and commitment to the idea of nationalism varied considerably. In the era under review, Kurdish nationalism emerged simultaneously as a secessionist and an autonomist movement. Finally, the study shows that despite historic and contemporary enmities, the leaders of the opposing factions were united by one distinct emotion: their suspicion for, and even hostility toward, Kemalist–Turkish nationalism. In sum, this study shows that early Kurdish nationalist politics was highly factionalized and analyzes the ways in which Kurdish nationalist leaders responded to the collapsing Ottoman state and the emerging Kemalist regime.

In present scholarship, several significant issues about Arab nationalism are being debated, but two of them are directly related to this study: the role and motivations of notables and the period of origin. As a preface, the definition of the term “notables” (ayan) should be examined. The term “ayan” was widely used in the Ottoman Empire to refer to local notables who exercised authority over local populations and possessed some sort of political power in their relationship to the state. Particularly during the Russo-Ottoman War of 1768–74, when the Ottoman state requested their service to raise funds and recruits for the army, the ayan received official recognition from the sultan and began functioning as semi-official advisers in Ottoman local governments. With the declaration of the first constitution in 1876, a new institution, the Ottoman Parliament, was introduced. The Ottoman Parliament consisted of two houses: the lower house (Meclis-i Mebusan) whose members were elected, and the upper house (Meclis-i Ayan) whose members were appointed. Through these houses, local notables found a new way to participate in Ottoman politics. The role of the ayan in the political realm of the Ottoman Empire did not become a center of academic attention until Albert Hourani’s article “Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables,” in which Hourani analyzed the ayan from a functionalist point of view.

To understand the function of Kurdish notables in the Middle Eastern context, a brief examination of Hourani’s paradigm is helpful, for it provides the field with a working definition with which comparisons can be made. According to Hourani, notables were urban intermediaries between the government and the people. Three main subcategories of ayan, Hourani suggested, were: the ulema, representing the religious functionaries; local military leaders; and secular traditional notables whose power depended mainly on primordial relations with the local population. Although Hourani’s paradigm has some merit for the Ottoman Empire as a whole, it specifically refers to the Arab provinces. In the Kurdish context, for example, Hourani’s categories of the ayan require a slight modification. In the Kurdish provinces of the Ottoman Empire, one can readily omit the category of local military leaders, for it did not exist separately. Although some military forces were appointed from the center and led by the governor (vali) of a given province, religious leaders and the “secular” traditional notables were the leaders of local forces. Therefore, one cannot speak of a separate class of local military leaders in the Kurdish areas, as in Arab lands. Furthermore, local military forces consisted mainly of the Kurdish tribesmen who seemingly outnumbered the military force of the governor of the province. In military operations, the governor enjoyed the service of these tribal forces at his disposal.

Another modification of Hourani’s model pertains to the term “ulema,” which in-
cludes but is not limited to the Sufis. Madrasa-educated religious functionaries are in fact the centerpiece of Hourani’s categorization of the religious class. In the Kurdish provinces, the ulema were almost entirely Sufis. Contrary to the suggestion by Hourani, in some cases the distinction between the traditional notables and the Sufis was not very clear. Finally, one can argue that Kurdish notables who functioned as intermediaries between the state and the people did not always come from an urban background. Although most of the Kurdish notables engaged in nationalist activities in the urban centers, they are hardly qualified to be considered entirely “urban notables,” for their origins and power bases were rural. With these points in mind, in this study I shall use the term “notables” in a way similar to that in Hourani in a modified form, attributing to notables a minimum quality of exercising political authority in and collecting respect from their communities due to their genealogical and religious backgrounds. Although not always “local” or “urban” power, Kurdish notables certainly functioned at various degrees as “intermediaries” between the state and the people.

Regarding the function of notables in Middle Eastern nationalisms, it is important to determine the role of Arab notables, for it enables us to understand the motivations behind Arab nationalism. After the 18th century the notable families of the Ottoman Empire became very active politically in determining the future of their regions. In the case of Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, several studies exist to illustrate the political power of notables. Following the footsteps of Hourani, Philip Khoury uses Hourani’s paradigm of notables in the context of Damascus and discusses the role of notable families in the emergence of nationalism. Khoury claims that great notable families in Damascus, such as the 'Azm, played a significant role in the emergence and development of nationalist movements in that city. While acknowledging the contributions of Islamic modernists and Christian secularists to the growth of Arabism, Khoury claims that it was the notables—particularly, the absentee landowning class—who attended Ottoman professional schools and served the state as civil servants or in the army and who translated the idea of Arabism into a political movement with nationalist dimensions before World War I. Not surprisingly, Khoury sees the “loss of privileged position in the Ottoman state” as the main motivation for the emergence of notables as nationalist leaders.

A well-known example that demonstrates the role of notables in the emergence of Arab nationalism comes from the Hijaz. The famous Arab revolt of 1916 that ended Ottoman sovereignty in most of the Arab land was led by Sharif Husayn, the sharif of Mecca, and his two sons Faysal and Abdallah. The leaders of the revolt enjoyed the prestige belonging to the Hashemite dynasty, which claimed direct lineage to the Prophet Muhammad. This revolt soon spread outside the Hijaz and was regarded as one of the cornerstones of Arab nationalism. Most historians agree that Arab nationalism was born in the Fertile Crescent among the urban notables that had lost their privileges due to the centralization policies of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). Certainly, the first organized movement arose in the Hijaz and was led by an urban notable family, the Hashemites. Ernest Dawn demonstrated convincingly that Husayn was motivated by his disagreement with the CUP elite that aimed at removing the sharif of Mecca from power. With British instigation, Sharif Husayn and his sons were looking for ways to consolidate their local power and eliminate the CUP’s threat to their traditional authority over Arab society. In conclusion, one can state that na-
nationalism provided Arab notables with an ideology to intensify their dissatisfaction with central government. With their personal charisma and the ability to mobilize large groups, notables assumed leadership in the emergence of Arab nationalism. As will be seen in this study, this is not unique to Arab nationalism.

Just as scholars debate the importance of the notables in the emergence of nationalism, they debate the time frame of the origin of Arab nationalism. In recent scholarship there seems to be a consensus that Arab nationalism was a more recent phenomenon than previously thought. Rashid Khalidi, an authority of Arab nationalism, observes that “the term ‘Arabism,’ implying proto-nationalism rather than full-fledged nationalism with concomitant desire for separation of the Arabs from the Ottoman Empire, is now accepted as more appropriate to describe the pre-war movement.” Dawn pushes the time frame toward the end of World War I, claiming that most Arabs remained Ottomanist until 1918 and that separatist anti-Ottoman movements remained insignificant until this time. William Cleveland expresses similar views, stating that “the majority of the Arab elite sought survival within the framework of a strengthened Ottoman state, not in separation from it.” Defining nationalism as a majority movement aimed at separation from the Ottoman state, students of Arab nationalism seem to agree that Arabism turned into Arab nationalism—or, in other words, proto-nationalism became nationalism—toward the end of World War I, after which the Ottoman Empire ceased to exist. Therefore, one can claim that Arab nationalism emerged as the most viable, if not the only, political means for local notables to govern their regions, and it emerged just before the Ottoman state disintegrated.

Clearly, the definition of the term “nationalism” is central in determining the origin of nationalist movements. Therefore, the definition that this study uses must be made clear. There exists no consensus among the scholars in defining nationalism. However, without at least a working definition of the term, any argument regarding nationalism remains pointless. In this study, “nationalism” is used inclusively and refers to a political movement of a community that distinguishes itself as a separate cultural and political group. Its main objective is political self-determination through either secession or autonomy. A political movement becomes nationalist when it makes political demands for secession or autonomy in a region that is regarded as the historical homeland and where the majority of the population belongs to the same community. Not all autonomous movements, however, are nationalist. Nationalist movements that demand autonomy are concerned more with the self-rule of a community than a territory. The definition is important to determine the origin of nationalism in the Middle East generally, and specifically in the Kurdish case.

KURDISH NOTABLES

Like that of the Arabs, Kurdish nationalism emerged as a political movement after the collapse of the Ottoman state, and Kurdish notables played an important role in promoting the idea and assuming the leadership. To illustrate Kurdish nationalist leadership, I have selected Kürtlistan Teali Cemiyeti, or the Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan (SAK). Although the Kurds organized themselves into several “cultural clubs” early in the 20th century, their organizations became political and began making nationalist demands only in 1918 with the formation of the SAK, which was
established on 17 December 1918. I chose this organization to represent the Kurdish nationalist leadership not only because it was the best organized and most inclusive Kurdish organization. More important, its activities can clearly be defined as nationalistic, for its leaders openly asked for independence, or at least autonomy. No official membership list of the SAK exists, but primary sources provide us the names of founders and active members of the society. The data are not perfect, but they are sufficient to demonstrate the nature of the early Kurdish nationalist leadership.

Two years after the foundation of the SAK, a split occurred in the organization, causing an ideological polarization among the members. This split is significant because it demonstrated the importance of primordial ties in determining one's loyalty or adherence to the secessionist or autonomist brand of nationalism. The two groups were led by Sayyid Abdulkadir of Şemdinan and Emin Ali Bedirhan (see later), and they identified themselves as autonomists and secessionists, respectively. As this study will argue, pre-existing feuds between these families contributed greatly to this ideological split. The followers of these factions cohered based on their kinship ties or their Sufi connections. These two families, recognized in the primary sources as the most influential Kurdish leaders, had earlier provided leaders of revolts in Kurdistan that are seen as nationalistic by some scholars. Hence, in the sections on the Şemdinan and Bedirhani families, I shall first discuss whether the 19th-century Kurdish movements led by these families were nationalist in nature and then move on to discuss kinship and religious ties among the members of the SAK.

THE NAKŞİBENDI ŞEMDİNAN FAMILY OF NEHRİ

The Şemdinan family (Figure 1) emerged as political and military leaders of the Kurds in the second half of the 19th century and controlled a vast region (Figure 2) in southeastern Anatolia and northwestern Iran. The rise of this family, headed by Sayyid Ubeydullah in the 1870s and 1880s, marks an important era in Kurdish history—the era in which political power changed hands from tribal leaders to the Naqshbandi Şemidins. Until this time, the Sufi shaykhs generally functioned under a tribal leader as spiritual advisers. Although they had long enjoyed personal charisma and trans-tribal influence, the Naqshbandi shaykhs became political and military leaders only with the rise of the Şemdinan family.

As a respected Naqshbandi family, the Şemdinans became great landowners and accumulated a vast amount of land around the Hakkari region in the 1880s. British archival documents indicate that Sayyid Ubeydullah (d. 1883), internationally the best known member of the family due to his revolt in 1880 (see later), was purchasing land from the Qajar and the Ottoman states. Confirming the land-owning status of the Şemdinans, a letter dated 15 July 1880 by British Consul General Abbott in Iran read, “I learn that [Sayyid Ubeydullah] is purchasing villages both in Turkey and Persia, which will greatly increase his influence [in the region].” Unfortunately, we do not know precisely how much land the Şemdinans owned, but we do know that their holdings were large enough to attract the attention of the British officers stationed in the region.

What sort of income did the Şemdinans have to become great landowners? Considering that the Şemdinans were one of the greatest Naqshbandi families in Kurdistan,
it is conceivable that this family accumulated income from the donations of their followers. Although visible to the European powers in the second half of the 1880s, this family had enjoyed high prestige, particularly in the Hakkari region, due to its religious genealogy prior to the 19th century. Connected to the silsila (spiritual genealogy) of the Khalidiyya branch of the Naqshbandi order, the family traces its origin back to Adb al-Qadir Gilani, a 12th-century Baghdadi mystic and the founder of the Qadiri order. The family line of the Şemdinans reaches to the Prophet through his daughter Fatima. With such a pedigree, the Şemdinans were spiritual leaders of local communities and advisers to Kurdish emirs, and seemingly this spiritual leadership generated sufficient income to become a great landowning family.

As indicated earlier, Şemdinanlı Ubeydullah emerged not only as a distinguished religious figure but also as a prominent and able political and military leader. There seem to be several reasons for the rise of Sayyid Ubeydullah. The most important reason is concerned with a power vacuum that was created after the destruction of

**FIGURE 1.** The Şemdinan family, based on a handwritten family tree provided by Hazir Geylan. Names in bold indicate membership in the SAK.
FIGURE 2. Based on information provided by Hızır Geylan and Melik Firat. See also Bruinessen, Agra, 178, and Jwaideh, “Kurdish National Movement,” 226–33.
Kurdish tribal leadership. Desperate for income to compete with the European powers, Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808–39) initiated a centralizing policy to collect taxes directly from the areas controlled by local rulers. In Kurdistan, the Kurdish leadership consisted mainly of tribal chiefs who ruled over vast areas by paying only lip service to Istanbul. The most notable of these tribal confederacies were the Botan, Baban, and Hakkari, all of which competed with one another. After a series of military expeditions, the Ottoman state crushed the authority of these powerful tribes in the first half of the 19th century. The last semi-independent emirate—the Botan, headed by the Bedirhan family—was removed from power in 1847. From this time to the Russo-Ottoman war of 1877–78, we do not have any record of a powerful Kurdish leadership in the region. In the aftermath of this brutal war, which paralyzed the region, we see the rise of Shaykh Ubeydullah of Şemdinan filling the political and military power vacuum and assuming the Kurdish leadership not only in most of Ottoman Kurdistan but also in Iran.

We have a wealth of primary sources indicating the power of Sayyid Ubeydullah in 1880, when he led an uprising against the Qajar Persia and the Ottoman Empire. Concerned with the well-being of the Christian (mainly Armenian and Nestorian) population, Britain was monitoring the uprising very carefully. British correspondence confirms that Ubeydullah was the paramount chief of the Kurds in 1880, and his political control extended beyond Hakkari into a vast region that was once controlled by the Botan, Bahdinan, Hakkari, and Ardalan confederacies.

It seems that the main reason for the revolt was the promise made to Armenians after the Treaty of Berlin, signed on 13 July 1878 by the Ottoman Empire. Article 61 of the treaty stipulated that the Sublime Porte would undertake necessary steps to protect Armenians against the Circassians and the Kurds. To show his dissatisfaction with the treaty, in July 1880 Ubeydullah warned Tosun Paşa, the Mutasarrıf (governor of a subdivision) of Başkale:

What is this I hear, that the Armenians are going to have an independent state in Van, and that the Nestorians are going to hoist the British flag and declare themselves British subjects. I will never permit it, even if I have to arm the women.

Hence, Wadie Jwaideh, the author of a comprehensive study on the Ubeydullah movement, is correct when he states that “fear of the Armenian ascendancy in Kurdistan appears to have been one of the most powerful reasons behind [Ubeydullah’s] attempt to unite the Kurds’ and led them for an uprising.” It should be added here, however, that Ubeydullah also publicly presented his movement as an attempt to restore peace and order in the region and sought support of the Nestorian Christians against the Persian and Ottoman states. Ubeydullah complained that these two states had done nothing to stop the aggression of rival Kurdish tribes—namely, the Shekak of Persia and the Herki of the Ottoman Empire. To achieve this aim, for a short time, local Christians provided him with a military support.

Hoping to enforce law and order in the area where he had ambitions to rule and where the Armenians were receiving British and French support for self-rule, Ubeydullah invaded the northwestern territories of the Qajar state in September 1880, expanding his sphere of control in the Persian territories. However, Ubeydullah’s militia, consisting mainly of Kurdish tribesmen, was easily defeated by the Qajars. Upon his
return to the Ottoman territories in early 1881, Ubeydullah surrendered to the Ottoman authorities, who exiled him to Istanbul and then to the Hijaz, where he died in 1883.

The Ubeydullah revolt is important not only because it demonstrates the emergence of new political leadership in Kurdistan but, more important, because some students of Kurdish nationalism identify this revolt as the origin of the Kurdish nationalist struggle, for the shaykh demanded a Kurdish state (either independent or autonomous) governed by himself. British documents seem to attest that, from time to time, Ubeydullah entertained the idea of separation from the Ottoman and Persian empires. In a letter dated October 1881 to Earl Granville, Ronald Thomson, a British officer in Tehran, states:

The Sheik... states that he and all the Kurdish Chiefs are not agreed as to necessity of establishing a united Kurdistan [emphasis added] in order that they may be in a position to manage their own affairs without the interference of either Turkish or Persian authorities.... There seems to be no doubt from... the proclamations and correspondence which [Ubeydullah] has lately sent to various Kurdish Chiefs along the lines of the Persian border that his design is to detach the entire Kurdish population from their allegiance to Turkey and Persia and to establish under his own authority a separate autonomous Principality.

However, the most convincing evidence of Ubeydullah’s “nationalist” aim comes from a letter that he himself wrote. In a letter to an American missionary named Cochran, Sayyid Ubeydullah states:

The Kurdish nation, consisting of more than 500,000 families, is a people apart. Their religion is different [from that of others], and their laws and customs distinct.... We are also a nation apart. We want our affairs to be in our hands, so that in the punishment of our own offenders we may be strong and independent, and have privileges like other nations.... This is our object [for the revolt].... Otherwise the whole of Kurdistan will take the matter into their own hands, as they are unable to put up with these continual evil deeds and the oppression which they suffer at the hands of the [Persian and Ottoman] governments.

Researchers such as Arsak Safrastian and Wadie Jwaideh seem to be convinced that Sayyid Ubeydullah sought independence and hence was a nationalist. Relying on this letter to demonstrate the secessionist fervor of Ubeydullah, Jwaideh states that Ubeydullah’s statements “certainly leave no doubt as to his strong nationalist sentiment.” However, primary sources contain confusing, if not contradictory, evidence about the nature of Ubeydullah’s secessionist aim. A good example to show this confusion can be found in a British letter dated October 1880 written by Major Henry Trotter, the British consul general in Erzurum:

I believe the Sheikh to be more or less personally loyal to the Sultan; and he would be ready to submit to his authority and pay him tribute as long as he could get rid of the Ottoman officials, and be looked at de lege as well as de facto the ruling Chief of Kurdistan.

As demonstrated in this excerpt, primary sources do not consistently testify that Sayyid Ubeydullah’s movement had well-defined political goals. Ubeydullah entertained the idea of an independent state, yet he was ready to settle for the recognition of his authority in Kurdistan within the Ottoman state. He wanted to be the ruler of a principality similar to those of the earlier Kurdish emirates but greater in its territory to match his influence in the region. Ubeydullah’s aim to rule an autonomous Kurdish
principality similar to that of Bedirhan is evident in an earlier British report (11 July 1880) to Henry Trotter from Emilus Clayton, vice-consul of Van:

The Sheikh [Ubeydullah] was going to send his son to Constantinople with the following proposal. He will point out the large sum paid to the Sultan by Beder Khan Bey, when semi-independent, and will offer to pay a still larger sum if his authority over Kurdistan is recognized, and his rule is not interfered with. 33

Although Sayyid Ubeydullah wanted to be the ruler of greater Kurdistan, it seems very unlikely that the participants in his revolt, who at one point included some Nestorian Christians, were motivated by nationalist designs. This revolt can simply be seen as Sayyid Ubeydullah’s demand for greater control in the region. However, it undoubtedly provided the Kurdish nationalist movements in the 20th century with a symbol for a struggle against a dominant state and led scholars mistakenly to identify him as a nationalist.

The Ubeydullah revolt of 1880 was more like a trans-tribal revolt than a national one. With his religious appeal as a Naqshbandi shaykh, Sayyid Ubeydullah’s authority transcended the tribal boundaries. Sayyid Ubeydullah, either directly or through his khalfas (deputies), spread his influence through a vast area where the Kurds were divided by their tribal loyalties but united by their respect for Sayyid Ubeydullah. Therefore, when Sayyid Ubeydullah preached an uprising in 1880, he enjoyed remarkable support from the members of local tribes and was able to exercise political authority over a large territory that included formerly powerful Kurdish emirates (see Figure 2).

Sayyid Abdulkadir (1851–1925)

In later years, the Şemdinan family contributed greatly to the Kurdish nationalist movement. For example, Sayyid Ubeydullah’s son Abdulkadir34 became the president of the SAK and represented the autonomist camp against the secessionist Bedirhanis. Abdulkadir was born in the district of Şemdinan in Hakkari in 1851.35 He was educated in the Naqshbandi tradition in his hometown, under his father’s supervision. Interestingly, no entry exists about him in the Ottoman Sicill-i Ahval records, even though Abdulkadir later served the Ottoman state at the highest levels. However, from his education in the Naqshbandi order, it is likely that he spoke Turkish, Arabic, and Persian in addition to Kurdish. A letter written in French and signed by Abdulkadir to British authorities exists, so he may even have known a European language, though perhaps it was a translation.

Abdulkadir represented the autonomist faction of Kurdish leadership; hence, his position and activities in the SAK need close examination. After the suppression of Ubeydullah’s revolt by the Ottoman state, Abdulkadir was sent into exile with his father to Medina in 1881. In 1905, Abdulkadir moved to Beirut. After the Young Turk revolution of 1908, Enver Paşa asked for Abdulkadir’s service in convincing the Kurdish tribes to accept the authority of the CUP regime. Meeting with Enver Paşa, Abdulkadir agreed to send telegrams to the Kurdish tribes, persuading them to recognize the CUP. It was in this period that Abdulkadir became a member of the CUP and was allowed to come to Istanbul.36
Upon his arrival in Istanbul, Sayyid Abdulkadir became one of the founders of the Kürd(istan) Teavun ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Kurdish Society for Mutual Cooperation and Progress) established on 2 October 1908. Influenced by the liberal atmosphere in the Ottoman Empire following the Young Turk revolution, Abdulkadir and such other Kurdish notable families as the Babans and the Bedirhans formed this urban-based cultural society. As paternalistic as it was, however, the society did not intend to reach the rural areas or the common Kurds in Istanbul. It functioned for the most part as a cultural club for the Kurdish nobility of Istanbul.37

Hızır Geylan, a grandson of Abdulkadir, states that Abdulkadir served in the revived Hamidiye Light Cavalry as a second lieutenant.38 Hence, the process in which Abdulkadir was integrated into the Ottoman state began. In the following years, Abdulkadir emerged as an Ottoman bureaucrat and was appointed to the Ayan Council (Meclis-i Ayan) by the Ferit Paşa cabinet of 1919 and became the chair of the Şura-i Devlet, a subcommittee in the Ottoman Senate—a very prestigious position indeed in the Ottoman bureaucracy.39 During and after the formation of the SAK, Abdulkadir kept his position in the Ottoman system and was involved in Ottoman politics.40 This participation is noteworthy because it exemplifies undisputedly the close link between Kurdish leaders and the Ottoman state.

Abdulkadir derived his authority among the Kurds of Istanbul partly from his position in the Ottoman state and partly from his religious pedigree. Early in the 20th century, the Kurdish population of Istanbul, estimated at around 10,000, did not consist solely of the notables and their children as students; many were laborers. Due to his religious appeal, Abdulkadir was particularly popular among the lower-class Kurdish workers in Istanbul. These workers were mainly porters who came to Istanbul to replace the Armenian porter population.41 Secondary sources suggest that Abdulkadir commanded authority over these migrant laborers in Istanbul.42 This support of an uprooted Kurdish population in Istanbul also contributed to Abdulkadir’s strength there when it was challenged by the Bedirhani family.

In 1918, Abdulkadir assumed the presidency of the SAK despite Emin Ali Bedirhan’s covert opposition (see the next section) and actively sought an autonomous Kurdish state in which he could be the ruler. Like his father, Sayyid Ubeydullah, Abdulkadir entertained the idea of establishing an autonomous Kurdish state with the backing of Britain. During the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, which resulted in the Treaty of Sevres, he tried to influence international opinion about the Kurdish question.43 In his memoirs, Kadri Cemil states that Abdulkadir and his friends visited the representatives of the American, French, and British governments in Istanbul in support of the Kurdish cause. Because American policy particularly favored an independent Armenia at the expense of Kurdistan, the SAK did not find a sympathetic hearing. Only the British promised Abdulkadir recognition of Kurdish national rights.44 The British view of Sayyid Abdulkadir can be followed in a 1920 memorandum by Mr. Ryan, the British High Commissioner in Istanbul. The commissioner indicated that Abdulkadir had asked for British support to install him as the Kurdish ruler and maintained:

Abdul Kadir Effendi was offering . . . the collaboration of Kurds who claimed to be very distinct from the Turks . . . . [However,] the religious motive weighs a great deal with him, and I
think it is for that reason that he now favors autonomy under the Turkish flag, as he is probably faithful at heart to the Caliphate, though disloyal to the Sultanate.\textsuperscript{45}

The excerpt is important, for it reveals Abdulkadir’s autonomist tendencies but shows that he was restrained by his religious concerns. In a report to Earl Curzon, the acting high commissioner in Constantinople and Ryan’s successor, Richard Webb clarifies Abdulkadir’s position:

In private conversations [Abdulkadir claimed that] what Kurdistan needs is administrative separation under British auspices, and that, if this were assured, independence from Turkey would not be essential. If the British government met his wishes and gave him a leading position in the kind of Kurdistan he advocates, he would be prepared at any moment they wish to declare independence. Meanwhile, he does not wish to compromise himself unduly and he is undoubtedly actuated a great deal by veneration for the Caliphate.\textsuperscript{46}

It is clear from the report that Abdulkadir respected the office of the Caliphate, and thus he did not favor secession. To receive British support, however, Abdulkadir was cautious not to rule out complete independence entirely but wished to be set up as the ruler of Kurdistan by Britain.

During this time a split occurred in the SAK between the secessionists and autonomists. Sayyid Abdulkadir, pressured by the other members of the Ottoman Senate, gave an interview to the newspaper \textit{Ikdam} on 27 February 1920. In the interview, he denied accusations that he wanted to secede from the Ottoman Empire and establish an independent Kurdistan, but he stated that “today Kurds are residing in five or six provinces (vilayet); [we want] the [Turkish] government to give autonomy to these provinces. Let us elect our own administrators, but Turks can take part in this autonomous administration.”\textsuperscript{47}

Such a bold statement against independence triggered the Bedirhani faction to take a position against the autonomists as they identified themselves as secessionists. Emin Ali Bedirhan dismissed Abdulkadir from the presidency and expelled him from the SAK; in response, however, Abdulkadir dissolved the SAK and called for re-election.\textsuperscript{48} A British report indicates the victory of Abdulkadir:

The elections for a new committee of the Club [the SAK] ended in a complete victory for Seid Abdul-Kadir, as was to be expected from the fact that he has the support of the bulk of the Kurds of the working class in Constantinople.\textsuperscript{49}

Soon after Abdulkadir’s victory, Emin Ali Bedirhan and the secessionist group split from the SAK. This split very much hindered the political activities of the SAK. In the following five years (1920–25), Abdulkadir watched closely the emergence of the new Turkey and at one point offered his help to the British to destroy the Kemalist movement. This was also the period in which both factions began to oppose Kemalists. In a memorandum, British High Commissioner Ryan states, “Abdul Kadir’s doctrine some months ago was that the Kurds could be used to destroy the Kemalists and to bar Bolshevik progress.”\textsuperscript{50} Abdulkadir was not happy with the emergence of Kemalist power against the Istanbul government. This excerpt is extremely significant in that it reveals the hostile attitude of Abdulkadir toward the Kemalists, for they threatened the possibility of a Kurdish state and Abdulkadir’s leadership. Compared with the Istanbul government, the Kemalists in Anatolia were intolerant of Kurdish auton-
ogy and were bitterly hostile toward Kurdish secession. Aware of the slim chance of a Kurdish state under a Kemalist regime, Abdulkadir apparently offered his help to Britain to destroy the Kemalist movement in Anatolia. Correspondingly, the Kemalists were not happy with the religious authority Abdulkadir represented and were undoubtedly aware of Abdulkadir’s hostile feelings toward them. The right time for revenge arrived in 1925, when the new Republican government suppressed a Kurdish revolt in Kurdistan. This revolt, known as the Shaykh Said Revolt, created the first major internal challenge to the new Turkey. Said, a Naqshbandi shaykh, revolted against the Kemalist regime in the Bingöl region, requesting the restoration of the shari’a (Islamic law), and to this end he established contact with Abdulkadir in Istanbul. The Ankara government took the revolt very seriously from the beginning on 8 February 1925 and deployed its military forces in the region. Although Shaykh Said’s militia was successful in capturing several towns near Diyarbakır, the government forces were able to recapture the towns and Shaykh Said himself on 15 April 1925. After the suppression of the Shaykh Said Revolt in the following months, Shaykh Said was tried and hanged on 29 June 1925. The new Turkish Republic also tried Sayyid Abdulkadir in the Diyarbakır Independence Tribunal for his alleged connection to the revolt, which gave the Kemalist government a chance to get rid of Abdulkadir, who was proved to be an anti-Kemalist. Abdulkadir, along with his son Mehmet, was found guilty of treason and condemned to death by the Independence Tribunals on 27 May 1925, even before Shaykh Said. The other son, Abdullah, managed to escape to Iran. The execution of Abdulkadir can readily be seen as the revenge of the Kemalists against an influential Naqshbandi shaykh who collaborated with the British against Mustafa Kemal. In the following period, none of the surviving members of the family took part in the Kurdish nationalist organizations in Turkey.

The Şemdinan family represented the autonomist strain of Kurdish nationalism. Sayyid Abdulkadir personified their attitudes. He was typical of most religiously oriented Kurdish political leaders in that he stopped short of advocating secession or outright independence—the position of his most significant rivals, the Bedirhani family. Yet Abdulkadir typified Kurdish nationalist leaders of all factions in two important respects. First, he actively began working for Kurdish autonomy only when the Ottoman Empire was near collapse. Second, he opposed Kemalist–Turkish nationalists because they advocated a unitary Turkish national state and consequently demanded the integration or subordination of the Kurds and other ethnic minorities.51

THE BEDİRHANI FAMILY

The major rival of the Şemdinan family for Kurdish leadership was the Bedirhani family (Figure 3). This family alleges descent from the Umayyad General Khalid ibn Walid.52 Şerefhan, a 16th-century Kurdish ruler, claims in his book Şerefname, the first book on Kurdish history, that the forefathers of the Bedirhani family practiced the Yezidi religion before Islam.53 The family belongs to the “Azizan” or “Azizi” branch of the Botan emirate in Cezire (Cizre) and was highly regarded by Şerefhan, who himself belonged to this family.54 Without a doubt, the most important member of the family was Bedirhan Paşa (1802/3–1869/70), who became the ruler of the Botan emirate in 1835.55 and ruled this
FIGURE 3. The Bedirhan family, based on a document in B. A., İrade Dahiliye, 1286/41717. See also Lütfi, Emir Bedirhan (Cairo: Matbaa-i İttihat). For more information about the members of this family, see Malmisanı, Çizira Botanlı Bedirhaniler ve Bedirhan Ailesi Derneği'nin Tutanakları (Sweden: APEC, 1994). Names in bold indicate membership in the SAK.
strong emirate for the next twelve years. Bedirhan carried an Ottoman title, mütesellim (tax collector), suggesting that he was a part of the Ottoman administration. It appears that Bedirhan’s authority surpassed in many ways the authority of the Ottoman governors in the region. This, however, does not mean that the Ottoman state did not have any control over the emirate. Available evidence suggests that the Ottoman Empire was in fact responsible for installing Bedirhan in power. Two American missionaries, Wright and Breath, spent four weeks at the court of Bedirhan and observed in November 1846 that:

[Bedirhan] told us that eight years ago, when he was weak and Turkey strong, he entered into an engagement with the latter; and that now, though the power changed hands, he did not violate his word. . . . He is an uncommon man. Eight years ago he was poor, without power, and little known. The Turkish government then took him by the hand; and now his wealth is incalculable.56

It is possible, as the missionary report suggests, that Bedirhan received aid from the Ottoman state to maintain himself as the ruler of the Botan emirate. In 1838, the year that the missionaries were referring to, there seems to have been an internal power struggle in the Botan emirate. We know that in 1838 the Ottoman state deployed some military forces to Cizre in Botan against local disturbances. We also know that Bedirhan aided the Ottoman forces in stabilizing the region.57 Contrary to the general belief that Ottoman authority in the region was nominal at best in the 18th and early 19th centuries, this report indicates that the Ottoman Empire was powerful enough to influence the internal politics of the emirate at least in the early 19th century.

A loyal subject until 1842, Bedirhan seemed very agitated with the new Ottoman administrative policies in the following five years and revolted against the Ottoman state in the summer of 1847.58 This revolt, provoked by the centralization policies of the Ottoman state in the Tanzimat Period,59 caused so much chaos in the region that upon its suppression on 29 July 1847, a new medal, the Medal of Kurdistan, was issued to those who had fought against Bedirhan.60 Bedirhan was arrested and sent to Istanbul with his large family two weeks after his capture.61

Kurdish nationalists claim that Bedirhan’s revolt was a nationalist uprising.62 However, an argument can be made against this claim. Nazmi Sevgen, in a study on the Bedirhan family, cites several Ottoman documents to demonstrate that this revolt was not nationalist in orientation. The Ottoman archives indicate that Bedirhan’s primary reason for the revolt did not stem from a nationalistic purpose in any real sense of the term, but from a new administrative system enforced by the Ottomans that aimed at dividing Bedirhan’s land. According to the new system, as Botan, the general name of the emirate’s core territory, remained in Diyarbakır Province, Cizre, a sub-district, was attached to Mosul, whose governor, Mehmed Paşa, was at odds with Bedirhan. A letter dated 10 December 1842 from the governor of Diyarbakır, Vecihi Paşa, to Bedirhan demonstrates this arrangement:

We have heard that there exists disharmony and quarrelsomeness between you and the governor of Mosul, Mehmed Paşa, stemming from the attachment of Cizre district to Mosul, and that you are in anxiety [vesvese]. . . . As long as you serve and stay loyal to the Ottoman state, Mehmet Paşa cannot do you harm. The matter was written to Istanbul and to the governor of Mosul, Mehmet Paşa. Hence, you should refrain from such anxiety.63
As this document indicates, Bedirhan was agitated by the attempt to divide his emirate administratively. Similar pieces of correspondence in the Ottoman archives conclusively demonstrate that Bedirhan revolted to keep his emirate administratively intact. Hence, sufficient data do not exist to support the assertion that Bedirhan was a Kurdish nationalist; rather, Ottoman sources suggest that he was a notable who just wished to protect his own interests against the increasing Ottoman centralization. Bedirhan’s disagreement with the Ottoman state arose due to new Ottoman administrative policies reconfiguring the Botan emirate, which aimed to generate more income for the state. Prior to 1847, Bedirhan seems to have been loyal to Ottoman interests and helped local governors to govern the Kurdish land. For this, he was a well-known and respected figure in the Ottoman provincial administrative structure.

Therefore, it should not be very surprising that even after his revolt was suppressed, Bedirhan was not condemned to death but placed on the Ottoman payroll. Immediately after the revolt, Bedirhan was sent to Istanbul, arriving on 12 September 1847, and then to Crete with his two brothers and three children, the oldest of whom (Hamit) was eleven in 1848. In Crete, Bedirhan remained ten years and was instrumental in arbitrating local disputes between the Christians and Muslims on behalf of the central government. For his service, upon his return to Istanbul in 1858, Bedirhan was awarded with the title paşa at the rank of mirimiran. After seven years in Istanbul, Bedirhan Paşa moved to Damascus, Syria, and when he died there in 1869–70, he had twenty-one daughters and twenty-one sons. How many of them were with Bedirhan in Damascus when he died is not known, but we do know that some of his older children were already working in Istanbul.

Although Bedirhan’s sons were critical of Sultan Abdulhamid, most of them were employed by the state during his reign (1876–1909) and afterward. Seven of them carried the title paşa. Some of his sons became governors of Ottoman sancaks (mutasarrıfs), public prosecutors, and judges. At the turn of the century, the family carried all traits of the Ottoman elite—they were members of the Ottoman bureaucracy and involved in new political formations in the empire. After the Young Turk revolution of 1908, the family participated in the formation of several Kurdish cultural societies, such as the Kurdish Society for Cooperation and Progress of 1908 (Kürt Teavun ve Terakki Cemiyeti) and Kurdish Hope of 1912 (Hevi). These Kurdish societies operated legally and promoted Kurdish identity among the Kurdish student population of Istanbul. In addition, in 1898, two of Bedirhan’s children, Mikdad Midhat and later Abdurrahman, published a Kurdish–Turkish newspaper, Kurdistan, in Istanbul, Cairo, and, later, England. This was the first newspaper published in the Kurdish (Kurmançî) language. Although the major theme in the newspaper was not to promote Kurdish nationalism but to criticize the regime of Sultan Abdulhamid II, it made the Kurds more visible in the Ottoman intellectual life.

**Emin Ali Bedirhan (1851–1926)**

Although Bedirhan Paşa should not be seen as a nationalist figure in Kurdish history, some of his children and grandchildren played very significant roles in the development of Kurdish nationalism. Many children of Bedirhan Paşa played active roles in
the Kurdish cultural organizations mentioned earlier, which provided the future Kurdish
nationalists with the organizational structure. In the wake of World War I, when Kurdish
nationalism emerged as a political movement, Emin Ali, one of the elder children of
Bedirhan, and his children became ardent advocates of Kurdish independence.

Emin Ali Bedirhan was undoubtedly the most devoted and well-known exponent
of Kurdish nationalism. Emin Ali (a.k.a. Mehmet Emin) was born in Crete and was
one of the twenty-one sons of Bedirhan Paşa. Of Bedirhan Paşa’s children, Emin Ali
distinguished himself as one of the better educated. Literate in at least Turkish, Arabic,
Kurdish (Kurmançî), and French, Emin Ali studied law and became a public prosecu-
tor in the Ottoman judicial system. As an Ottoman civil servant, Emin Ali served the
Ottoman state as a public prosecutor, a judicial inspector, and a judge in Adana,
Selanik, Ankara, and Konya. In 1906, when his cousin Abdürezzak (Abdulhamid’s
former head court chamberlain, or Başmabeynci) and his brother Ali Şamil (the mili-
tary governor of Üsküdar) became involved in the killing of Rıdvan Paşa, the mayor
of Istanbul who seemed to have close contact with the palace, Emin Ali was sent into
exile in June 1906 with other members of his family by Sultan Abdulhamid II. Nazmi
Sevgen states, based on research in the Ottoman archives, that Sultan Abdul-
hamid II paid very careful attention to the killing of Rıdvan Paşa, suspecting that this
would be a sign of a plot against him. Although this claim was not substantiated,
the Bedirhanis remained exiled until the CUP takeover. Subsequently, Emin Ali, after
his exile to Isparta and Akka in 1906, was allowed to return to Istanbul.

In 1908, Emin Ali became a founding member of what may have been the first
Kurdish organization, the Kurdish Society for Cooperation and Progress. This orga-
nization was a cultural club for the Kurdish nobility in Istanbul, which was aimed at
enhancing Kurdish culture and helping needy Kurds. The organization did not pursue
any political agenda and disintegrated before or during World War I. It was typical of
the early phases of nationalism in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, where the
formation of cultural societies usually preceded the organization of political or overtly
nationalist groups.

In 1918, Emin Ali joined Sayyid Abdulkadir in forming the SAK and became vice-
president of the society. However, when Abdulkadir identified himself as an autonomist,
Emin Ali deposed Abdulkadir from the presidency of the SAK and expelled him. In
return, Abdulkadir dissolved the central committee of the SAK and announced that new
elections would be held. The new elections, as mentioned earlier, resulted in Abdul-
kadir’s complete victory and consequently in the breakup of the SAK. Upset with the
result, Emin Ali formed another organization, the Kürt Teşkilat-ı İchtimaiye Cemiyeti
(Society for the Kurdish Social Organization), in 1920. In contrast to Abdulkadir’s
position advocating autonomy, this society promoted complete independence.

Although it seems at first glance that this split was a result solely of ideological
differences, primary sources suggest that pre-existing rivalry between the Şemdinan
and the Bedirhan families was a major contributor to this split. British sources observe:

The organizers of [the Society for the Kurdish Social Organization] profess to have joined issue
with Seid Abdul-Kadir on a question of principle, namely, the question of independence versus
autonomy. In reality personal rivalry counts for a great deal on both sides.
Supporting evidence for this view comes from Kadri Cemil, a member of the SAK. In his memoirs, Kadri Cemil mentions the family feud between the Bedirhanis and the Şemdinans in Kurdish organizations prior to the SAK. For example, Kadri Cemil argues that the formation of Kurdish organizations stemmed from personal and factional interests:

During the time of chaos that the Ottoman Empire was facing [in the early 20th century]—when the Ottoman state was not able to sustain them properly, Kurdish paşas and notables [ümera] who belonged to and were paid by the Ottoman system—panicked, and saw the promotion of Kurdish nationalism as the only remedy. These people, who carried with them their personal conflicts [emphasis added], formed the Kürt Teavun ve Terakki in 1908. Unfortunately, this organization did not last long, for its members had personal enmities.85

Kadri Cemil sees the same weakness persisting in the SAK and claims that pre-existing enmities were the reason for the split of the SAK.86 The very same point is observed by İsmail Göldas, a Kurdish researcher, when he states that the “existing hostility of the families . . . reflected itself, willingly or not, in their contradictory political behavior. . . . They were not able to go beyond this feudal conflict and to establish a democratically based Kurdish national consciousness.”87

It seems very likely that the family feud between the Bedirhani and the Şemdinan families originated in the second half of the 19th century, when Ubeydullah, the father of Abdulkadir, extended his influence over the areas formerly controlled by the Bedirhanis. As discussed earlier, we do not know whether the Şemdinans owned any Bedirhani land as their private estates; we do know, however, that in the 1870s and ’80s, the Şemdinans had great influence over the area that was formerly controlled by the Bedirhanis (see Figure 2).88 This appears to be a reason for the origin of the conflict between these families, which resulted in the competition for the rulership of Kurdistan. Primary sources clearly indicate that Abdulkadir and Emin Ali fiercely competed for the Kurdish leadership.

Until the end of his life, Emin Ali was active in Kurdish affairs. However, even during his Kurdish nationalist days, he maintained his Ottoman identity and participated in politics in the Ottoman Empire. For example, in 1920 Emin Ali was in the Ottoman political system; he joined Ottoman political parties, such as the decentralist Ahırar Fırkası (Party of the Free, est. 1908) and later the Hüriyet ve İttifak Fırkası (Freedom and Harmony Party, est. 1911, reopened 1919), both of which were known for their opposition to the CUP.89 As a bureaucrat, Emin Ali took part in the Ottoman judicial system in different capacities. Furthermore, an interesting note in the diary of Celadet, a son of Emin Ali, suggests that until 1923, Emin Ali was on the Ottoman payroll. In his entry dated 5 May 1923, Celadet notes that “My father’s [retirement] salary is cut; national government [the Ankara government] has passed a bill stopping the payments of the retirees living abroad.”90 Therefore, it is a mistake to think that Emin Ali withdrew from the Ottoman administrative and political system to conduct his secessionist activities until the creation of Turkish Republic. On the contrary, Emin Ali’s livelihood depended very much on the Ottoman state.

Emin Ali’s secessionist activities originated at the end of World War I, after which the Ottoman state disintegrated. It was only then that Emin Ali challenged Abdulkadir’s autonomist view and pursued a secessionist agenda, hoping to establish an inde-
pendent Kurdistan. It is very likely that Emin Ali saw complete independence from the Ottoman Empire as the only way to regain and recover his family’s territory, wealth, and legacy.

Although Emin Ali’s position in terms of the nature of a Kurdish state differed from that of Abdulkadir, they were united against the Kemalists, who, Abdulkadir and Emin Ali thought, constituted a great danger for their nationalist aspirations. Clearly, the Kurdish leaders were aware that the Kemalists fully intended to implement the first article of the National pact (Misak-ı Milli), which rejected the separation of any territory where the majority were Muslims. The boundaries of the Turkish state conflicted with that of Kurdistan as promoted by the SAK. In other words, both leaders were aware that Turkish nationalism would not give any chance to Kurdish nationalism, which aimed at creating a Kurdish state in Anatolia. Seen from this angle, it is understandable that Emin Ali, like his rival Abdulkadir, was an ardent opponent of the Kemalist movement. In the post-World War I period, Emin Ali, convinced of the Ottoman Empire’s collapse, offered collaboration to Greece against the emerging Kemalists. In a letter to Earl Curzon, Sir H. Rumbold, the British high commissioner in Istanbul, documents this assertion. The letter indicates that Emin Ali contacted the Greek representatives in 1921.

I have the honour to state that on the 25th instant Emin Ali Bey, the head of the Bedrhan family, called on Mr. Ryan, accompanied by his son Jeladet Bey, who is one of the more active promoters of Kurdish national movement. Emin Ali Bey said that, in view of the present situation, he and his friends had come into touch with the Greek representative here, who had listened favourably to the suggestion of a Kurdish movement against the Kemalists, which, without any formal co-operation, would promote the interests of both Greece and Kurdish nationalists.

This document reveals the extremes to which the Bedirhanis were willing to go to challenge the establishment of the Kemalist state, the extremes that even conflicted with the Islamic Kurdish background.

It was probably before the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 that Emin Ali left Turkey for Egypt, where he died in 1926. After Emin Ali’s death, his children—particularly, Süreyya, Celadet, and Kamran—became very prominent spokespeople for Kurdish nationalism. Süreyya spent most of his time in Syria and Cairo after World War I, published newspapers, and became heavily involved in Kurdish nationalist activities; however, primary sources do not mention Süreyya as a member of the SAK.

Celadet Ali and Kamran Ali Bedirhan

The other two sons of Emin Ali became involved in SAK activities with their father. They were both educated in Europe. Celadet, Emin Ali’s second-oldest son, was born in Kayseri and lived most of his life in France, Germany, and Syria. He held a master’s degree in law from Istanbul University and completed his studies in Munich. Prior to his activities as a Kurdish nationalist, Celadet was conscripted during World War I. He served faithfully in the Ottoman army as an officer and, like other Kurdish nationalists, Celadet turned against Turkey after the war. In the following period, Celadet became an ardent anti-Kemalist, for he believed that the new Turkish regime
would not allow an independent Kurdistan. It is well documented that he and his younger brother Kamuran accompanied Major Noel, a British intelligence officer whose main assignment was to assess the possibility of the creation of Kurdistan, in his travels in Kurdistan during 1919. Major Noel was as pro-Kurdish as he was anti-Kemalist. Aware of the Bedirhanis’ activities, Mustafa Kemal, in his famous Speech, correctly accuses Celadet and his brother Kamuran of opposing the Kemalist movement in Anatolia. It was, then, not a surprise that Celadet had left Turkey for Egypt in 1923 when the Kemalists declared the new republic.

In 1927, Celadet was in Syria and became the first elected president of the Hoybun, a Kurdish nationalist organization that was formed in Syria. The Hoybun actively supported the Kurdish revolts in Turkey during the 1930s. However, these revolts did not succeed; on the contrary, as a result, Turkey responded very aggressively to any Kurdish movement in Turkey. Kadri Cemil Paşa, another Kurdish nationalist and the contemporary of Celadet, claims that Celadet Bedirhan always entertained the idea of being the king of an independent Kurdistan. “Celadet Bedirhan had a desire to restore the Botan emirate,” Kadri Cemil states, “and himself as the ruler; he even wished to be the king of Kurdistan.” Clearly, Celadet was one of the most ambitious grandchildren of Bedirhan Paşa and a very passionate supporter of Kurdish independence.

Celadet’s devotion to Kurdish nationalism is even reflected in his family life. His wife Rusen, a Bedirhani herself, also took part in Kurdish nationalist activities during the Turkish Republican period in Syria. Rusen continued to be a supporter of Kurdish nationalism even after Celadet’s death in a 1951 traffic accident in Damascus. Celadet and Rusen had two children, Cemsit and Sinemhan. As another member of the European educated notable class, Celadet spoke Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish, German, French, and possibly Greek. Like the other members of the Bedirhani family, he contributed to the Kurdish intellectual life by publishing a journal, the Hawar, in Kurdish and French, in addition to Rohani and Roja Nu (with his brother Kamuran). He was also credited with producing Latin characters for the Kurmanci dialect of Kurdish.

Kamran Ali (1895–1978), another son of Emin Ali, was probably the most recognized member of the Bedirhani family in Europe. Kamran Ali received his degree in law from Istanbul University. He was an active member of the SAK and an ardent anti-Kemalist. At exactly what point he left Turkey is unclear, but he was in Syria helping his brother Celadet in Hoybun and publishing the Kurdish journal Hawar after 1923. From 1943 to 1946, Kamuran published another journal, Roja Nu (in Kurmanci and French), in Beirut. Kamuran spent his later years in Germany and France. In 1948 he moved to Paris and became a faculty member in the Institute of Oriental Languages (INELCO). After the revolt of the Iraqi Kurds in the 1960s, Kamran became the spokesperson for the Iraqi Kurdish movement in Europe. He presented the Kurdish movement to the United Nations. After Kamran’s death in 1978, the Kurdish Institute of Paris recorded his name as the honorary founder. From Paris, Kamran was also involved in the Kurdish movements in Turkey and sponsored several Kurdish students in France. He was married to a Polish princess and did not have any children. The Bedirhani family had several other members of the SAK. Due to their relatively passive role in the organization, I will not discuss them here.

Representing the traditional landed and urban notable class, the Bedirhanis assumed
leadership in the secessionist branch of Kurdish nationalism. Clearly, a great number of Bedirhanis received non-religious education and participated in the SAK, and the most active nationalists were educated in Europe. A majority of Bedirhan’s sons and grandsons were the members of the Ottoman elite. Some of them went as high as to carry the title paşा, one of the highest ranks in the Ottoman state. Children of Bedirhan committed themselves to Kurdish nationalism only after the World War I, when the Ottoman Empire ceased to exist. Adopting nationalist rhetoric, which seemed to be the most attractive and legitimate ideology of the time, this family wanted to rule Kurdistan.

As indicated earlier, some of the Bedirhanis were exiled in 1906 from Istanbul to other parts of the empire, but after 1908 they reobtained their governmental posts as administrators and military officers. After the establishment of the Turkish regime, however, most of the Bedirhanis remained silent, and their children seem to have been integrated into and served the republican government in different capacities. However, Emin Ali and his three sons Celadet, Süreyya, and Kamuran did not return to Turkey after 1923, for they were condemned to death by the republican regime. They stayed abroad and fought against Turkey and for Kurdish independence in the international arena.

CONCLUSION

The role of notables in nationalist movements has been a subject of much scholarly attention because it reveals significant clues about the social and political structure of Middle Eastern nationalism. An examination of this role in the case of the Kurds has been the principal aim of this study. Because Hourani’s notable paradigm has provided the field of Middle Eastern studies with a prominent theoretical framework about the structure, function, and politics of notables, this study has begun by analyzing the validity of Hourani’s proposition in the context of the Kurds. Exploring the social and familial background of two significant Kurdish families, this research has determined that, as is true of early Arab nationalism, Kurdish notables, or ayan, were the catalyst for social and political change among the Kurds and played a major role in the emergence and subsequent development of Kurdish nationalism. However, this study has also argued that Kurdish notables did not constitute a harmonious group; on the contrary, Kurdish nationalism was fractured by the long-standing disputes of notable families and limited by the Islamic concerns of the Naqshbandi shaykhs.

In addition, this research has revealed the Kurdish attitude toward the Istanbul (Ottoman) and Ankara (Kemalist) governments. Kurdish nationalist leaders were divided by their adherence to divergent visions of the political future of Kurdistan; however, they were united in their hostility against the rising Turkish state. The Kurds were comfortable with and experienced in interacting or negotiating with the Ottoman government, for many of them occupied significant posts in it. However, they were quite suspicious of the Kemalists. Emin Ali Bedirhan and Abdulkadir of Şemdinan opposed the new Turkish regime, which threatened their authority as Kurdish leaders and their hopes for a Kurdish state. They both offered their service to Britain in destroying the Kemalist movement in Anatolia. Kurdish leaders saw the Kemalist regime as the continuation of the CUP, which imposed Turkish nationalism on them.
They were undoubtedly aware of the formulation of the new Turkish nationalism, theorized by, among others, Ziya Gökalp, himself a Kurd from Diyarbakır. They were also aware of the inevitable conflict caused by two competing nationalisms in one territory, for they had had a similar experience earlier with Armenian nationalism. Kurdish leaders feared that Turkish nationalists were determined to crush Kurdish nationalism and international help for the fragile Kurdish nationalism would never materialize. It is noteworthy that the conflict caused by the two competing nationalisms in one territory laid the very foundations of the “modern Kurdish problem” in the Middle East and, particularly, in Turkey. Such a conflict is definitely not unique to Anatolia. A similar collision can readily be observed in the dynamics of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, in which two nationalisms compete for the same territory.

This study has also contributed to the ongoing debates on the origin of nationalist movements in the Middle East. Scholars of Arab nationalism have engaged in lively debates on the issue, and there seems to be a consensus that Arab nationalism is a more recent political phenomenon than was previously thought. Establishing an accurate time frame for the emergence of Kurdish nationalism is also important, for it allows us to make more precise observations and reliable comparisons in understanding the dynamics of Middle Eastern nationalisms. In accordance with this goal, the present study has concluded that Kurdish nationalism emerged as a full-fledged political movement only after World War I, when political loyalties were defined largely in terms of “homogeneous” nation-states. Prior to World War I, none of the Kurdish notables—certainly not the Bedirhan and Şemdinan families—were nationalists. Only when the Ottoman state began to collapse did Kurdish notables begin to articulate a nationalist ideology as a way to legitimize the perpetual desire for self-rule in Anatolia. Therefore, this study has concluded that Kurdish nationalism was not a cause but, rather, a result of the Ottoman Empire’s disintegration.

As demonstrated in the study, the Kurds, Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire, were the last group to put forward nationalist claims. Arabs were successful in realizing their dream of self-government, which resulted in the establishment of many Arab nation-states particularly after World War II. Like other multi-ethnic empires, such as Austro-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire suffered greatly from the rise of nationalist movements in the era preceding the Great War. Christian subjects of the empire were successful in creating national consciousness, in receiving Western assistance, and in gaining independence. Since Christian groups, such as Greeks, Serbs, and Romanians, constituted different millets in the empire, their separation came relatively more easily, at least in the ideological sense. This was not the case for the Kurds, whose leaders were of tribal and Sufi origin and were the members of the Ottoman elite. Kurdish nationalism did not and could not demand the termination of the pre-existing loyalties in favor of a national one; instead, Kurdish nationalist leaders utilized the pre-existing ties to mobilize Kurdish people. However, by doing so Kurdish nationalism became susceptible to pre-existing rivalries. Compared with Arab nationalism, the emergence of Kurdish nationalism as a political movement was belated, although the Kurds went through a similar process of cultural renaissance, particularly early in the 20th century. One of the reasons for this delay was that until the end of World War I, Kurdish leaders who were also members of the Ottoman bureaucracy still had hopes of reviving the Ottoman state. Obviously, the impact of this delay on the success of Kurdish
demands requires more research, but it stands out as a major distinction between Arab and Kurdish nationalism.

Another significant point for comparison is the distinction between the leadership of these two Muslim groups. While most Arab leaders resided in Arab lands, the Kurds had limited access to Kurdistan and to the local population. Some Kurdish leaders—for example, most of the Bedirhans—were born and raised outside Kurdistan. Their access to the area was restricted and closely monitored by the state. Finally, one can assert that, unlike Arab nationalism, Kurdish nationalism did not receive much international support. Great Britain was not convinced that Kurdish nationalism in the long run would help British interests in the region.

To conclude, I suggest that we will have a better understanding of Kurdish nationalism when we take into consideration its relationship with the Ottoman Empire, for it was born out of the political and intellectual environment in the late Ottoman era. Therefore, students of Kurdish nationalism should pay appropriate attention to the interaction between Kurdish nationalism and the Ottoman state. On the other hand, because the Kurds greatly contributed to the social, economic, and political life of the Ottoman Empire and later Turkey, I believe we can no longer afford to ignore the subject matter in Turkish studies and Middle Eastern history.

NOTES

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1Palestinian nationalism is, of course, an exception to this claim, for it has yet not been successful in forming a Palestinian state.

2See Robert Olson, Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Revolt (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989, 1991); Martin van Bruinessen, Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan (London: Zed, 1992). Olson’s praiseworthy study is based exclusively on British archives and can also be criticized for this reason. The present work revises Olson’s argument about the origin of Kurdish nationalism. Bruinessen’s book is based on his fieldwork in Iran and Turkey in the 1970s and contains very valuable anthropological information on Kurdish tribes and Sufi brotherhoods. However, his references to Kurdish nationalism are of secondary importance to the reader, for the book does not deal with nationalism directly. Although they lack the depth of analysis that Olson and Bruinessen enjoy, other informative studies are available on the Kurds, such as D. McDowall, A Modern History of the Kurds (London: I. B. Taurus, 1999); K. Kirisci and G. Winrow, Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-State Ethnic Conflict (London: Frank Cass, 1997); Lale Yalcin-Heckmann, Tribe and Kinship among the Kurds (Frankfurt and New York: P. Lang, 1991). None of these works deals directly with the composition of early Kurdish leadership that the present work intends to explore.

3Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd. ed., s.v. “Ayan” (H. Bowen). Meclis-i Ayan was first established in 1876 in Istanbul and, along with Meclis-i Mebusan, was suspended from 1878 to 1908. It was after 1908 that the Ottoman Parliament became a forum for notables to insert their influence into the government.


5The governor would always request assistance from the central government if he needed it to control his region.

6Here, however, the reader should be warned against seeing Arab nationalism as a single movement. Corresponding to the different political and intellectual environments of the area, Arab nationalism shows different characteristics in terms of ideology, leadership, and motivations. Hence, regional variations of Arab nationalism should be taken into account. However, it seems clear that Arab notables assumed big responsibilities in all regions in the process of nationalism’s growth.


See Olson, Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism. 12

Consul-General Abbott to Mr. Thomson, 15 July 1880, in Parliamentary Papers (Turkey, 1881) 5:9.

Melik Fırat, a grandson of the famous Naqshbandi Shaykh Said, also confirmed that the Şemdinian family owned considerable land in Kurdistan: personal interview with Melik Fırat, fall 1996, in his residence in Yalova.

Although ardently Sunni in orientation, most of the Naqshbandi families, including the Şemdinians, did not see a contradiction in including Fatima in their genealogy, although Fatima is seen as a major figure in Shi‘i Islam. Bruinessen, Agha, 217, traces the Qadiri origin back to Muhammad through Ali; however, the family tree of the Şemdinian family (Figure 1) uses Fatima as the link to the Prophet.

For example, British Parliamentary Papers, “Correspondence Respecting Kurdish Invasion of Persia,” 1881, paper no. C.2851, vol. C.361; microfiche no. 87.873-874; the same document was published in Parliamentary Papers, 5:1–82.


Jwaideh, “Kurdish Nationalist Movement,” 231.

Clayton to Trotter, 27 November 1880, in Parliamentary Papers, 5:74. See also Clayton to Trotter, 2 November 1880, in ibid., 5:54: “The Sheikh tried very hard to get the Christian to join him. . . . Some 400 or 500 Nestorians accordingly joined his force.”

See Olson, Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism, and Jwaideh, “Kurdish Nationalist Movement.”

Ronald Thomson to Earl Granville, Tehran, 31 October 1881, in Parliamentary Papers, 5:45.

Übeydullah to Dr. Cochran, 5 October 1880, in Parliamentary Papers, 5:47–48. The letter is mentioned
in Arsak Safraştıyan, *Kurds and Kurdistan* (London: Arwell, 1948), 62–63. However, the citation is incorrect.

Jawai deh, “Kurdish Nationalist Movement,” 226–33. In fact, using the British reports and memoirs of American missionaries, Jawaided argues that Ubedullah wanted an independent Kurdish state. Relying on Jawaided, Olson places the Ubedullah Revolt as the first stage in the emergence of Kurdish nationalism. See also, for example, a transcript of Ubedullah’s sermon to his fellow Naqshbandi halifes and shaykhs, published in Mehmet Bayrak, *Kürtt ve Uluulus Demokratik Mücadeleleri* (Ankara: Özge, 1993), 125–26. Bayrak cites a book written by a Russian captain, Avriyanov, as his source but fails to give complete citations.


The letter was sent to Mr. Goshan and dated 20 October 1880: *Parliamentary Papers*, 5:17.

The letter was dated 11 July 1880: ibid., 5:7.

Unless otherwise indicated, the information presented here was gathered from an interview with Abdullah’s grandson Hızır in Istanbul, Suadiye, 20 November 1996.

The area was also called “Nehri.”


From letters in *Takvim-i Vekâl*, an Ottoman newspaper, we know that this organization was also active in the urban areas of Bitlis, Musul, and Diyarbekir: see Tunaya, *Türkîyede Siyasi Partiler*, 1:404, fn. 3.

Hızır Geylan did not give me a specific year for this claim. The Hamidiye Regiment was formed in 1891 and renamed Asjret Ayalari in 1908. It was deployed in Yemen and Albania in 1908 and 1911, respectively. Since Abdullah was in exile until 1908, he possibly joined the Asjret Ayalari after the CUP takeover in 1908. It is quite possible, however, that he never participated in any military activities and was a member only on paper to attract Kurdish soldiers. I was not able to locate any supporting evidence for the claim that Abdullah was part of the Asjret Ayalari.

Ali Fuad Türkeldi, *Görüp İştiklerim*, 2nd ed. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yay., 1951), 195. See also Göldas, *Kürđistan*, 16. Clearly, Abdullah was an appointed bureaucrat rather than a politician, as his position suggests. Members of the ayan were appointed by the government.

He was also a member of the second Hürriyet ve İtilaf Firkası (Party for Freedom and Harmony) in 1919; see Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Türkîyede Siyasi Partiler*, vol. 2 (Istanbul: Hürriyet yay., 1986), 264.

For a better examination, see Donald Quataert, *Social Disintegration and Popular Resistance in the Ottoman Empire, 1881–1908* (New York: New York University Press, 1983).

See Olson, *Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism*, and Jawaided, “Kurdish Nationalist Movement.”


Silopi, ibid. The Ottoman government was aware of Abdullah’s relations with the British. A thick file is devoted to Sayyid Abdullah and the British: see B. A., Dahiliye Nezareti, Kalem-i Mahsusa (DH-KMS) 4403/28, Recep 1338 (1920).


F.O. 371/5068, registry no. E.4396/11/44; the report is dated 20 May 1920.


F.O. 317/5068; E. 4396/11/44.

F.O. 317/5069; E. 6148, no. 725/M.1743/5. The letter from High Commissioner J. H. de Bobeck to Lord Earl Curzon was dated 20 May 1920.


It should be noted that Mustafa Kemal, as result of his intense campaigning in Kurdistan, gained the support of some Kurdish tribes. However, these tribes had never been involved in Kurdish nationalist activities.


58Ibid., 139.
59A controversy exists, however, about the exact year of Bedirhan’s coming to power; some sources suggest that the year was 1821, and others claim that it was 1840–41: see Malmisani, Cizira Botanik Bedirhaniler ve Bedirhan Ailesi Derneği'nin Tutanakları (Sweden: APEC, 1994), 276, nn. 45, 46. Based on my research in the primary documents, I believe that the era 1835–38 is the period in which he established himself as the emir of the Botan emirate.
60Wright and Breath, “Visit of Messrs. Wright and Breath to Bader Khan Bey,” Missionary Herald, 42 (1846), 381.
61In 1838, a German officer, Helmut Von Moltke, was in Cizre and was reporting to Istanbul. His report, dated 15 June 1838, was published in Nazmi Sevgen, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu’da Türk Beylikleri (Ankara: Türk Kültürüne Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1982), 62–66.
62There is no exact date for the revolt, but from 1842 to 1847, Bedirhan was paying only lip service to Istanbul. The Ottoman local administration in the region was very suspicious of Bedirhan’s loyalty and was planning a military operation against him in 1846. However, we know the exact date of the first military clash between the government forces and Bedirhan: 4 June 1847 (17 Cemaziyelahir 1263).
63The Tanzimat (Reorganization) Period began with the declaration of Gülhane Hatı Hümayunu on 3 November 1839. The main aim was to renovate the Ottoman state structure through a series of centralization policies.
64Sevgen presents several other documents in his chapter on the Bedirhans: ibid., 61
65The Ottoman documents indicating this point are published in ibid.
66Ibid., 103, Malmisani gives this date as 19 September 1847: Cizira, 56.
67Malmisani, Cizira, 58.
68Technically, it meant provincial governor, but in the 19th century it became a civil-service rank. The holders of this rank were called pazas. For Bedirhan’s promotion to this rank, Sevgen (Doğu ve Güneydoğu, 115) shows an Ottoman document: B. A., Irade Dahiliye 1858 (1274/2108, dated 17 Zilkade 1274.
69An Ottoman document confirms this number and reveals the names of his children: see B. A., Irade Dahiliye, 1286/41717. The document is a letter written by the children of Bedirhan to Istanbul (Makam-i Mualla-i Sedaret-i Uzmanyaya requesting an increase in their salaries. In this document, the number of family members is indicated as 63 (almışmış neferden ibaret bulunan evlad ve ıyal ve ahfadın . . . ).
70For example, a son of Bedirhan, Necip, was working in Meclisi Vala Mazbata Kalemi in Istanbul in 1867: see Sevgen, Doğu ve Güneydoğu, 114–15.
71For example, Abdurrahman, a son of Bedirhan, attended the Young Turk Liberal Congress held in Paris in 1902; see Jawaidel, “Kurdish Nationalist Movement,” 293.
72See the family tree (Figure 3), and Lütfi, Emir Bedirhan (Cairo: Matbaa-i İctihad). This book, published in Ottoman Turkish, does not have a publishing date.
73This newspaper, published between 1898 and 1902, was collected and republished by M. Emin Bozar-
This incident seems to be a result of personal conflict between the mayor and the Bedirhanis. Sevgen, publishing the correspondence regarding the matter in the Ottoman archives, fails to support his claim and states that this conspiracy is beyond the scope of his work: ibid., 124–34.

Some sources suggest that Kurdistan Kavi Cemiyeti, established in 1900, was the first Kurdish society: see Silopi, Doğa Kurdistan. However, there is no supporting material for this claim.


The Society was announced in Vakit, 7 June 1920; for the excerpt, see Malmisanij, Çıza, 127. However, since a British report (F.O. 371/5068 E. 6148, no. 725/M.1743/5) mentions the establishment of this new organization on 20 May 1920, we can assume that it was established sometime in May 1920.

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Silopi, Doğa Kurdistan, 28.

Ibid., 29.

"Gölbaş, Kürtistan, 204.


Malmisanij, Çıza, 121.


This definitely meant that a separate Kurdistan would not be tolerated. However, the National Pact signed on 28 January 1919 by the Istanbul government was not very strict for the Arab land under the foreign occupation. It stipulated that in those areas, the Arabs were free to determine their political future. Although first signed by the Istanbul government, when the Grand National Assembly opened in 1920 the National Pact became the number-one priority for the Ankara government: see Kazım Karabekir, İstiklal Harbimizin Esasları (İstanbul: Emre, 1995), 116–17.

Doc. 194 [E 6215/43/93], 25 May 1921, in British Documents, 2:300.

The Bedirhanis offered collaboration with Greece, an adversary of Turkey, for mutual action against the Kemalists. However, noticing the contradiction between such an action and the background of the Kurds as a pious Islamic society, Britain seemed uninterested in such a cooperation, and no substantial result came out of these meetings: Doc. 189, E 5713/43/93, 11 May 1921, Sir H. Rumbold to Earl Curzon, in British Documents, 298. No document exists to substantiate a Greek–Kurdish alliance.

"Their names are mentioned in a list that Göldâş provides: Kürtistan, 44.

EL, 2nd ed., s.v. "Badakhanî, Thuraruya and Djaladat" (B. Nitîkîn).

Sevgen, Doğa ve Gûneydoğu, 133.


When exactly Celadet left Turkey is not known.


Most notably the Ağrı Dağı Revolt of 1930: see Silopi, Doğa Kurdistan, 104–22.

Ibid., 150.

She was a daughter of Salîh Avni, who was not one of the sons of Bedirhan Paşa, so he must have been his nephew.

For more information, see Malmisanij, Çıza, 190–206.


Mumcu, 190.


Such as Bedirhan’s other sons Murat Remzi, Mikdad Midhat, and Mehmet Ali, and his grandsons Asaf and Bedirhan Ali.