



BETWEEN REBEL FLAGS:

IRAQI VEXILLOLOGY AND STATE ICONOGRAPHY, 1921 – 2017

by

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment  
Of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts  
2020

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For my family

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## 1. Introduction

This thesis is concerned with Iraqi flags and national iconography from 1921 to 2017, a period of history covering the emergence of the Kingdom of Iraq under the League of Nations to the defeat of the Islamic State. During its existence, Iraq adopted seven national flags, perhaps the most modified flag of a nation-state during the preceding one-hundred years. Flags provide historians a unique opportunity to interact with symbols of state authority, communicating normative relationships like national identity and aspirational values such as goodness, sacrifice, and fertility. *Vexillology* is the auxiliary historical science concerned with flags and ensigns. Its allied field, *heraldry*, focuses on arms, official representations of families and states identified by a system of emblems. Considering its vexillology and heraldry, this thesis argues that Iraqi flags and iconography constitute an archive that reveals a national identity organized around an emphasis on ethnicity and transhistorical relationships.

Iraq was drawn from diverse Ottoman provinces, and its ethnic composition was not monolithic. Enclosed within the boundaries of the young nation were Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, Armenians, and Assyrians; organizing them around a national identity was challenging. Subsequent Iraqi governments pursued piecemeal policies designed to incorporate ethno-confessional minorities into the budding body politic. Iraqi flag design, or *vexillography*, changed as new regimes inherited fractious political situations following successful revolutions or coups. Frequently, political agendas corresponded with ethnicity; ideologies like Pan-Arabism prioritized primordial bonds above emphasis on ethnically neutral civic nationalism. Regimes attempting to smooth ethnic differences often struggled to make inroads with minorities. For example, the Free Officers' vexillography under Abd al-Karim Qasim contained Kurdish

symbolism despite warring against Kurdish *peshmerga* during a protracted, nine-year insurgency.

Contrarily, Iraqi governments often attempted to deemphasize ethnicity, attempting to base national identity around a metaphysical link to an imagined past. This often manifested in a presupposed connection to ancient Mesopotamia, present in the heraldry of Iraq under its Hashemite kings and later during the Free Officers' rule. This transhistorical tendency allowed Iraqis to participate in an imagined community of Mesopotamian descendants. For example, the 2005 Iraqi constitution's preamble begins, "We, the people of Mesopotamia, the homeland of the apostles and prophets, resting place of the virtuous imams, cradle of civilization, crafters of writing, and home of numeration." By providing a metaphysically neutral space dedicated to self-conceptualization, Iraqi iconography supplied unlimited room for its citizens to dwell in imagination. Virtually all Iraqi regimes during this period contextualized their reigns along historical lines, permitting upstart governments instant connectivity with a socio-constructed past.

The monograph contains three chapters corresponding to blocs of Iraqi vexillographic and heraldic history. Chapter 2 (1921-58) covers the Hashemite administration of Iraq after its establishment under the League of Nations. This period marked the entrance of two separate Iraqi flags accompanied by elaborate heraldry consistent with European conventions. Chapter 3 (1959 – 2003) addresses revolutionary governments under the Free Officers and Ba'th Party, highlighting the varying degrees Iraqi vexillography shifted between civic and ethnic nationalism. Chapter 4 (2004-17) encompasses the latest period of Iraqi history, associated with the Iraq War and the ISIS insurgency. The most crucial national question of the twenty-first

century was the appropriate placement of Husseinian memory and on official representations of Iraqi authority.



Figure 1.1 – Abd al-Karim Qasim (L) and Saddam Hussein (R). At various periods throughout the twentieth century, revolutionary Iraqi regimes were a source of apprehension in the United States and were often featured in print media. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Time*, April 13, 1959, accessed April 15, 2020, <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19590413,00.html>.  
*Time*, May 13, 2002, accessed April 15, 2020, <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,20020513,00.html>.

## 2. Introduction

This chapter considers Iraqi national symbols under the Hashemites from 1921 to 1958. Though it maintains a vexillological and heraldic focus, philatelic and archeological sources were consulted. The first section addresses the evolution of the Iraqi flag under Hashemite authority, its transformation, and its relation to symbols within the Sharifian orbit. Though under British hegemony, Hashemite flags reflected a considerable attachment to the Arab Revolt, its foundational struggle against the Ottomans from 1916 to 1918. The second section addresses Iraqi heraldry, an expression of Hashemite authority amidst historicized symbolism. During this period, the kingdom tackled a fundamental question of nation-building: How ought a newborn polity, lacking any historical antecedence, communicate its identity? The closing case study examines early Iraqi postage stamps as official efforts to historicize its identity within an imagined pre-Islamic past, one of Babylonian lions and Sumerian deities.

The King of Iraq, Faisal ibn Hussein al Hashemi, obtained his second crown on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1921. The previous year, Faisal governed the short-lived Arab Kingdom of Syria, a realm that succumbed to colonial designs following the lopsided Franco-Syrian War in 1920.<sup>2</sup> His coronation was a modest affair, including 1500 subjects and British colonial administrators in his capital, Baghdad.<sup>3</sup> Like his ensuing administration, the ceremony was a triangulation of British and Arab symbolism. The Iraqi king wore a British-style military uniform, a woolen field tunic, and bespoke pith helmet.<sup>4</sup> The coronation, held in a flag-festooned courtyard, included a

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<sup>2</sup> James L. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998, 51-137.

<sup>3</sup> Gertrude Bell to Hugh Bell, August 28, 1921, Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle, UK: Newcastle University, [http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letter\\_details.php?letter\\_id=501](http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/letter_details.php?letter_id=501).

<sup>4</sup> "King Faisal I – First Issue, 1927 & 1932," Rezonville, database, accessed March 26, 2020, <http://www.rezonville.com/ir06>.

centralized dais overlaid with Persian carpets, tufted chairs, and an unpretentious throne for Faisal. To ensure the ritual implied imperial sponsorship, the British diplomat Percy Cox joined Faisal onstage sporting a splendid white uniform. Following evocation, perfunctory remarks, and salutations, the band played “God Save the King,” as the Iraqis wanted for a national anthem.<sup>5</sup>

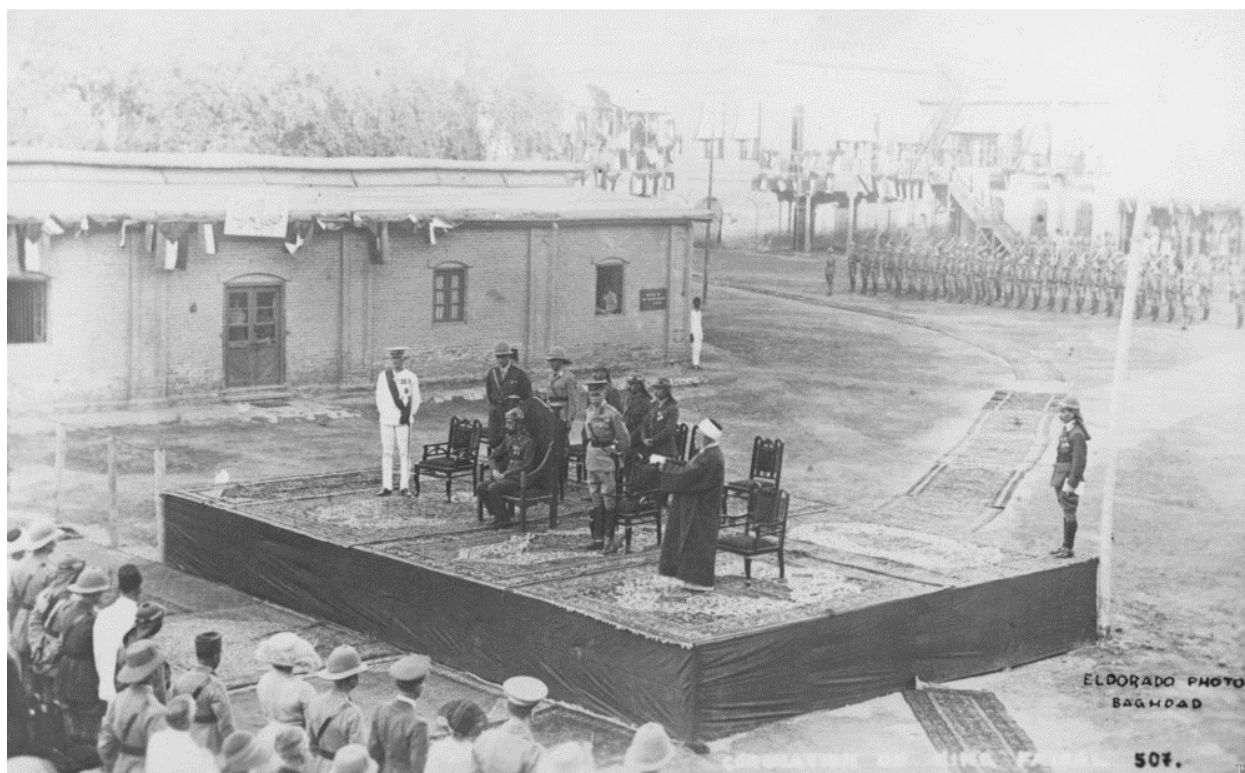


Figure 2.1 – The coronation of Faisal I on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1921.<sup>6</sup>

It was not preordained that Faisal would rule Iraq. He was a consensus candidate and a byproduct of post-World War I geopolitical anxieties. In 1920, the same year France devastated

<sup>5</sup> Gertrude Bell to Hugh Bell, August 28, 1921.

<sup>6</sup> “King Faisal I – First Issue, 1927 & 1932,” Rezonville.

its Syrian opposition, London faced stiff resistance in simultaneous sub-state conflicts. In neighboring Ireland, British troops clashed with nationalists in the Anglo-Irish War (1919-21) while simultaneously suppressing a virulent insurrection in southern Iraq. The campaign killed numerous civilians, necessitated the deployment of thousands of reinforcements, and compelled David Lloyd George to restructure the administration of Mandatory Iraq.<sup>7</sup> Since Faisal enjoyed the confidence of prominent diplomatic officers, under the provisions of the Cairo Conference in 1921 he would rule in Baghdad.<sup>8</sup> The arrangement, or “Sharifian Solution,” created Hashemite monarchies under a British umbrella throughout the post-Ottoman Middle East. The blueprint established kingdoms for three of Sharif Hussein’s sons, transforming longstanding *vilayets* into newborn polities dependent upon London. Therefore, the nexus of French colonial aspirations and a destabilized security situation permitted the installation of Faisal ibn Hussein in 1921 as the first king of Iraq.

Iraqi national iconography during its Hashemite period (1921-58) reflected a confluence of administrative authorities. The Hashemites retained the ability to adopt national symbols in preparation for its eventual independence and membership in the League of Nations. Hence, detachment from British hegemony became the lodestar of Hashemite policy from 1921 onward, necessitating a vision of Iraqi distinctiveness. Iraqi vexillology maintained an allegiance to the Arab Revolt, while its national arms communicated a message of maturity and singularity befitting an independent power. If its national iconography was a discourse in Iraqi identity, the period of 1921 to 1958 represented the conversation’s opening position. While Iraq did not exist prior to 1921, the roots of Iraqi national iconography predated the Cairo Conference. Symbols of

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<sup>7</sup> Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>8</sup> *Report on Middle East Conference held in Cairo and Jerusalem*, London: British Colonial Office, 1921.

Hashemite authority represented a version of Iraqi identity subsequent regimes dissented against. At a minimum, the Iraqi monarchy and their British sponsors had a hand in defining what constituted Iraqi distinctiveness and what was alien.

### Arab Revolt Flag Vexillology (1916 – 25)

Like many countries, Iraq's national flag was battle-born. It evolved from the Arab Revolt flag (1916-18), a banner which often accompanied mounted rebel commanders during the conflict and marked captured Ottoman territory.<sup>9</sup> It was a broad standard, boasting a 2:3 aspect ratio and appeared somewhat oversized when displayed on camelback.<sup>10</sup> In contemporaneous accounts the banner was known by "the Arab flag" or "the Hijazi flag" and displayed a conventional three-color layout, featuring a hoist-sided *triangle*.<sup>11</sup> The flag's color scheme, black, green, white, and crimson dissented from the iconic Ottoman standard with its red field and white moon-and-star. The colors represented bygone caliphates and its was a pastiche of quasi-Arab symbolism drawn from non-Ottoman history. One surviving artifact features a four-piece silken construction, though alternate textiles were possible.<sup>12</sup> The standard was flown on slender wooden flagstaffs adorned with spherical ornaments and tassels.

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<sup>9</sup> Lawrence makes oblique references to these flags throughout *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. It is never clear if he means the Arab Revolt flag or the Hashemite flag.

<sup>10</sup> "Pan-Arab Colours," Flags of the World, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/xo-arabc.html>.

<sup>11</sup> *Dictionary of Vexillology*, s.v. "Triangle," Flags of the World, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/vxt-dvt4.html#triangle>

<sup>12</sup> There are a few surviving examples of World War I era Arab Revolt flags. One example is displayed in the Martyr's Museum in Amman, Jordan.



The exact provenance of the Arab Revolt flag is opaque. Tim Marshall in, *A Flag Worth Dying For: The Power and Politics of National Symbols* credits the flag's design to Sharif Hussein while entertaining the notion of British involvement. On its origin, Marshall wrote:

The colors were combined into the designed and raised by the leader of the Arab Revolt of 1916, Sharif Hussein of Hejaz, who hoped to unite the myriad Arab tribes under one banner and win independence from Ottoman rule. Some historians argue a British diplomat, Mark Sykes, actually designed the flag; either way, it's clear there was a British involvement, and Arab unity served British interests in the region at the time.<sup>13</sup>

However, Marshall's interpretation begs more questions than it answers and encapsulates the fundamental historiographic problem of the Arab Revolt: Whose rebellion was it? If the insurgency and its battle-flag were Sharif Hussein's brainchildren, Arab agency is preserved. However, if Mark Sykes directed its design, the revolt and its banner seem a catspaw of British interests.

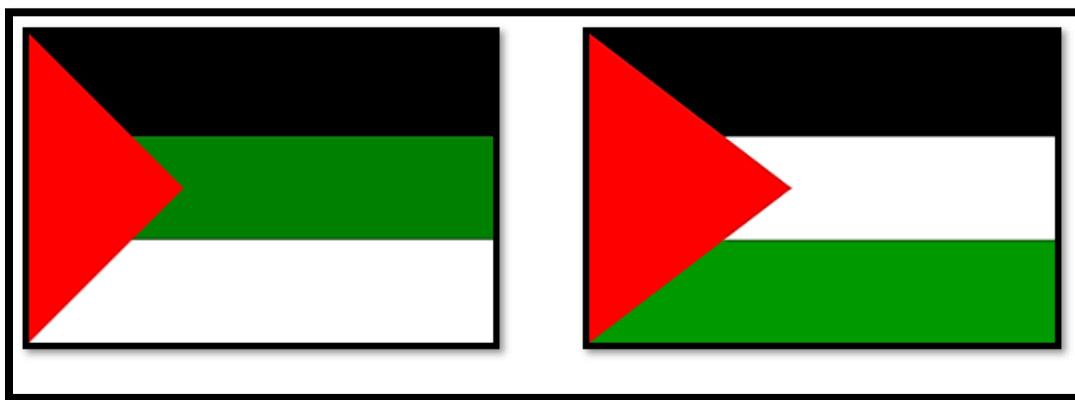


Figure 2.2 – From left to right: a comparison of the Arab Revolt flag (1916-18) and Iraqi National flag (1921-25).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Tim Marshall, *A Flag Worth Dying For: The Power and Politics of National Symbols* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 110.

<sup>14</sup> “Pan-Arab Colours: Arab Revolt Flag, Arab Liberation Flag,” *Flags of the World*, accessed March 3, 2020 <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/xo-arabc.html>.

This question was further examined by Elie Podeh in, “The Symbolism of the Arab Flag in Modern Arab States: Between Commonality and Uniqueness.” In addition to Mark Sykes, the 2011 article presents additional claimants for the standard’s design, early-twentieth-century Arab nationalist clubs.<sup>15</sup> The growth of Arab political associations within Ottoman cities occurred after the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 when the reform-minded Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) seized power.<sup>16</sup> The governing junta initiated the Second Constitutional Era (1908-20), a period of liberalization where heretofore marginalized Arabs were integrated within the body politic.<sup>17</sup> In response to greater political efficacy, city-dwelling intellectuals founded associations dedicated to advance Arabism during the Ottoman Empire’s final years. The nationalist clubs, located in urban centers like Constantinople, Beirut, and Baghdad, professed a range of political orientations.<sup>18</sup> Before long, these associations needed symbolic representations of their political aspirations and created flags that contrasted the Ottoman standard.

There were numerous associations dedicated to Arabism during the Second Constitutional Era. The Constantinople-based *al-Muntada al-Adabi* (1909-11) was an Arab literary society and selected a quad-color banner of white, black, green, and red.<sup>19</sup> According to vexillologist Ivan Sache, *al-Muntada al-Adabi* was inspired by the fourteenth-century poet Safi al-Din-al-Hili (d. 1349) who wrote, “White are our acts, black our battles, green our fields, And

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<sup>15</sup> Elie Podeh, “The Symbolism of the Arab Flag in Modern Arab States: Between Commonality and Uniqueness,” *Nations and Nationalism* 17, no. 2, (2011): 419-442.

<sup>16</sup> M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, s.v., “Young Turks,” (New York: Facts on File, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Hasan Kayali, “The Elections of 1914 and the Eclipse of the Reform Movement,” *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

red our swords.”<sup>20</sup> Choosing a less-crowded flag, the subversive *al-Fatat* designed a green, white, and black tricolor.<sup>21</sup> Sache further postulated *Hizb al-Lamrkaziya al-Idariya al-Uthmani* (Party for Ottoman Decentralization), a Cairo-based successor organization, used an identical flag. In a declaration of incipient Arabism, the party declared: “Praise be to our nation covered by the night (black), by our consciousness (white) and by hope (green).”<sup>22</sup> Like the Arab Revolt flag, both banners spanned a 2:3 aspect ratio.<sup>23</sup>

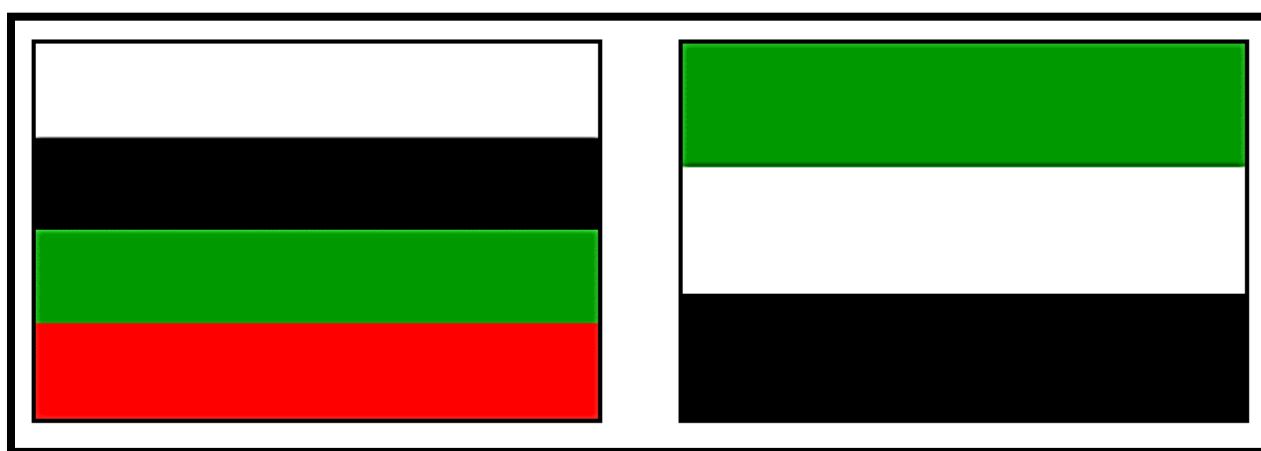


Figure 2.3 – Arab political club flags. From left to right: *al-Muntada al-Adabi* (1909-11) and *al-Fatat* (1914).<sup>24</sup>

There is additional secondary literature to support Elie Podeh’s assertion of the Arab Revolt flag’s activist provenance. In *Arab Nationalism: The Politics of History and Culture in*

<sup>20</sup> Ivan Sache, “Arab Literature Club, Istanbul (1909-1911),” *Flags of the World*, accessed March 3, 2020 <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/xo-arabc.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ivan Sache, “Society of Young Arabs (1914),” *Flags of the World*, accessed March 3, 2020 <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/xo-arabc.html>.

<sup>23</sup> This is following the examples cited by *Flags of the World*, but a 3:2 aspect ratio seems the most logical. Narrower ratios such as 2:1 make multipaneled flags look crowded as do excessive panels in general.

<sup>24</sup> “Pan-Arab Colours,” *Flags of the World*.

*the Modern Middle East*, Peter Wien examined the influence of Arab nationalist Fu'ad al-Khatib on Sharif Hussein:

One story goes that one day during the days of the Arab Revolt, a representative of the Allied power suggests to Sharif Husayn to flag the Arab boats leaving the coast for the Red Sea in order to distinguish them from Turkish vessels. When Husayn and al-Khatib discuss possible colors and shapes for this banner, the latter had a recollection of a reunion with nationalist friends in Beirut where they conferred about a flag to represent Arabism. Al-Khatib brought up the historical banner of grand Arab state: White for the Umayyads, black for the Abbasids, Green for the Fatimids.<sup>25</sup>

In this version, the contribution of proto-nationalist intellectuals displaces British contributions to the Arab Revolt vexillography. However, this relegates Mark Sykes to a mere bystander, an officer trained in military practicalities, but ignorant of Islamic history. To borrow from Chakrabarty, historiographic minimization of British contributions to the Arab Revolt provincializes European agency. However, Mark Sykes possessed the requisite understanding of regional history to recommend a symbolic convention to Hussein in 1916. He made several expeditions into Ottoman territory during the 1900s, cataloging the voyage in *Dar-Ul-Islam: A Record of a Journey through Ten of the Asiatic Provinces of Turkey*.<sup>26</sup> While he demonstrated an understanding of Arab society commensurate with early-twentieth-century orientalists, Sykes' vexillographical aptitude is unclear. In sum, Mark Sykes could have designed the Arab Revolt flag, but did he? Podesh conceded, "In the absence of new evidence, it is difficult to establish which narrative is more credible."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Wien, *Arab Nationalism: The Politics of History and Culture in the Modern Middle East* (Florence: Routledge, 2017), 32.

<sup>26</sup> Mark Sykes, *Dar-Ul-Islam: A Record of a Journey Through Ten of the Asiatic Provinces of Turkey* (London: Bickers and Son, 1904).

<sup>27</sup> Podesh, "The Symbolism of the Arab Flag in Modern Arab States," 424.

Without credible evidence whether Mark Sykes (or another British official) designed the flag, its provenance decentralizes into a vexillological Rorschach test. Inasmuch as the banner represented concepts beyond the Arab Revolt, the flag evokes several interpretations of varying degrees of Britishness. The question of ownership encapsulates the basic historiographic conundrum of Arab Revolt memory identified by Tim Marshall: Whose revolt was this? In an Arab-centric interpretation, the flag represented a kernel of proto-nationalism specific to the Second Constitutional Era but independent of (though conterminous with) British machinations. The second Sykes-centric version sidelines Sharif Hussein and makes the Arab Revolt a byproduct of duplicitous European wheeling and dealing. There are numerous possibilities between these two extremes. It is conceivable that Sykes' death in 1919 engendered a non-Arab provenance to memorialize his contributions in transforming the Near East. Under this interpretation, Sykes' contributions were benign, analogous to Betsy Ross' mythic influences on the American flag in 1776.<sup>28</sup>

Whether Sharif Hussein was a founding father of Arab nationalism, an unwitting colonial auxiliary, or something in between was irrelevant in 1921. After the Franco-Syrian War, Britain retained enough confidence in Hashemite durability to install Faisal ibn Hussein on the Iraqi throne. National flags attracted little attention throughout 1921; the Cairo Conference and subsequent Hashemite installation made them an afterthought. Mere days before his coronation Faisal deliberated with Gertrude Bell about Iraq's forthcoming flags. She recalled in a letter:

We then spent a happy hour discussing (a) our desert frontier to south and west and (b) the national flag and Faisal's personal flag. For the latter we arranged provisionally this [sketch] i.e. the Hijaz flag with a gold crown on the red triangle. The red I must tell you is the colour of his house so he bears his own nom on it. Father, do for Heaven's sake tell me whether the Hijaz flag is heraldically right. You might telegraph. It's a very good flag

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<sup>28</sup> For a full examination of the Betsy Ross mythos see, Marla R. Miller, *Betsy Ross and the Making of America*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2010).

and we could differentiate it for the Iraq by putting a gold star on the black stripe or the on the red triangle. The Congress will settle it directly it meets - do let me know in time. Also whether you have a better suggestion for Faisal's standard.<sup>29</sup>

That Iraq's flag was still unsettled in August 1921 seems to demonstrate a fixed vexillology within the Hashemite sphere. The correspondence indicated that Bell, an accomplished orientalist, presupposed the Hejazi flag for Iraq's national banner.<sup>30</sup> The differences between the national flags of Iraq, Transjordan, and Hijaz were minor to point of confusion. In the end, Iraq employed the Arab Revolt flag with a minor modification, swapping the positions of the green and white panels.<sup>31</sup>

#### Arab Revolt Flag Semiotics (1916 – 24)

This section is devoted to understanding the Arab Revolt flag as a signifier that projected two ideas: Arabs distinctiveness and Hashemite historical continuity. The national banners of the Kingdom of Syria (1918-20), the Kingdom of Hejaz (1920-25), the Kingdom of Iraq (1921-58), and the Emirate of Transjordan (1921-46) were all mild reconfigurations of the Arab Revolt flag.<sup>32</sup> The underlying semiotics of the Arab Revolt flag and its subsequent adoption by Hashemite polities indicated a historicized orientation of Arab identity after the First World War. There were substantial discursive elements imbedded within the flag: it was an anti-Ottoman symbol, a mark of rebellion, and supranational iconography. Marrying the symbolism of Arab political clubs to postwar vexillological representations of Hashemite authority required linking aspirational values such as sacrifice, purity, and hope to political symbolism. Therefore,

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<sup>29</sup> Gertrude Bell to Hugh Bell, August 28, 1921..

<sup>30</sup> Bell's suggested additions could not clarify the Iraqi flag. A star on the uppermost panel broke vexillological conventions and rather than Iraq, Jordan adopted a centralized star for its flag remain there today.

<sup>31</sup> "Pan-Arab Colours," *Flags of the World*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*.

Sharifian vexillology projected a kernel of primordial nationalism upon its post-Ottoman identity, a self-conceptualization uncontained by international borders imposed under European auspices. Finally, by evoking the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Fatimid caliphates on its flags, the Hashemites implied a historical continuity with past Arab rulers.

Considering its substantial associated literature, disentangling the historical insurrection, its much-ballyhooed players, and the subsequent Hashemite states is demanding. T.E. Lawrence in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926) documented the Arab Revolt's battlefield heroism and daring-do. While Lawrence omitted a detailed description of the Sharifian flag throughout his memoir, he dedicated considerable attention to an incipient Arab state under Sharifian captaincy. On Faisal ibn Hussein's early adventures, Lawrence recalled:

From Damascus four days later, his suite took horse and rode out east into the desert to take refuge with Nuri Shaalan, the Beduin chieftain; and the same day Feisal showed his hand. When he raised the Arab flag, the pan-Islamic supra-national State, for which Abdul Hamid had massacred and worked and died, and the German hope of the co-operation of Islam in the world-plans of the Kaiser, passed into the realm of dreams. By the mere fact of his rebellion, the Sherif had closed these two fantastic chapters of history.<sup>33</sup>

To Lawrence, the flag's physical appearance was irrelevant insofar that it communicated an anti-Ottoman and pro-Hashemite message. It is unclear whether Lawrence's views postdated the Arab Revolt, as he published *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* a decade after the uprising.<sup>34</sup> His reference to Sultan Abdul Hamid II and Kaiser Wilhelm II were unambiguous. In yoking their

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<sup>33</sup> T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: a Triumph* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1955), 53.

<sup>34</sup> There was tremendous drama surrounding the publication of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. According to Lawrence he completed an early edition of his manuscript around 1919, but lost his only copy. He undertook a massive rewriting project which stalled well into the 1920s.

enemies together Lawrence united the British and the Arabs in a common cause while camouflaging London's colonial ambitions.<sup>35</sup>

The collapse of the German Empire notwithstanding, to Lawrence, the flag symbolized Arab ascendancy over an unjustified Ottoman rulership. Ethnic exclusivity undergirded the insurgency and made Arab emancipation a wartime objective. When the Hashemites turned against Constantinople in 1916, they were uninterested in ejecting the CUP from power or engendering an Ottoman restoration. Instead, as Sharif Hussein explained to Henry McMahon, "... the whole of the Arab nation without any exception have decided in these last years to live, and to accomplish their freedom, and grasp the reigns of their administration both in theory and practice ...."<sup>36</sup> Therefore, to represent its distinctiveness Sharif Hussein selected a pastiche of Arab symbolism drawn from non-Ottoman periods caliphal rulership. In signifying the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Fatimid dynasties, the Arab Revolt flag presumed historical incompatibility with non-Arabs. Considering all the Gunpowder Empires (Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal) were excluded, it is evident the Hashemites spurned an identity outside the Arabophone world.

To cement their legitimacy, the Hashemites manipulated the organizational banners that inspired the Arab Revolt flag. Before the insurgency, political clubs such as *al-Muntada al-Adabi* and *al-Fatat* ascribed an aspirational meaning to their flags.<sup>37</sup> It is common for

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<sup>35</sup> After the publication of the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence in 1923 these designs well understood. This was perhaps the source of Lawrence's aggrandizement of the historical significance of the Arab Revolt. In the introduction Lawrence lamented, "It was evident from the beginning that if we won the war these promises would be dead paper, and had I been an honest adviser of the Arabs I would have advised them to go home and not risk their lives fighting for such stuff: but I salved myself with the hope that, by leading these Arabs madly in the final victory I would establish them, with arms in their hands, in a position so assured (if not dominant) that expediency would counsel to the Great Powers a fair settlement of their claims."

<sup>36</sup> Hussein ibn Ali al-Hashemi to Henry McMahon, July 14, 1915, in *Correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon and the Sherif Hussein of Mecca*, (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1937), 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> "Pan-Arab Colours," *Flags of the World*.



organizations and governments to reconfigure a flag's symbolism throughout its lifetime. Without a fixed color convention, "The meaning of flags can be temporarily captured by dominant discourses and invested with meaning."<sup>38</sup> Since the discourse of Arabism leaned away from brotherhood and towards rebellion in 1916, color symbolism changed from concepts (purity, sacrifice, etc.) towards political objectives. A reimagining was necessary to articulate Hashemite wartime aims, thus reconfiguring black, green, white, and red as representations of Arab-ruled caliphates. The color scheme provided a veneer of historicity to the Arab Revolt and permitted Hashemite authority to piggyback onto an imagined golden age.

If white, black, and green represented the Umayyads, Abbasids, and Fatimids, which caliphate did red symbolize? Red flags were associated with the Hashemites since the sixteenth century, and its addition to the Arab Revolt flag implied a twentieth-century restoration of Arab rule.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, red was the semiotic linchpin of the Arab Revolt flag, placing the Hashemites in historical continuity with the pre-Ottoman caliphates. The four-color combination ignored six-hundred years of Ottoman rulership and made the Arab Revolt a transhistorical and liminal space engendering a glorious future under Hashemite captaincy. The correspondence between Sharif Hussein and Henry McMahon before the Arab Revolt was explicit in this intent. The first letter from Hussein sought, "England to approve the proclamation of an Arab Khalifate of Islam."<sup>40</sup> Later, the British affirmed this objective when McMahon answered, "We declare once more that His Majesty's Government would welcome the resumption of the Khalifate by an Arab of true race."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> George Horvath, "The Semiotics of Flags: The New Zealand Flag Debate Deconstructed," in *Language and Literature in a Global World* (Singapore: Springer, 2018), 121.

<sup>39</sup> "Hashemite Flags," King Abdullah II, accessed March 13, 2020, <https://kingabdullah.jo/en/page/the-hashemites/hashemite-flags>.

<sup>40</sup> "Hussein ibn Ali al-Hashemi to Henry McMahon, July 14, 1915," in *Correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon and the Sherif Hussein of Mecca*, 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

The intimations and promises outlined throughout the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence were not honored after World War I. The downfall of the Ottoman Empire did not facilitate a Hashemite-led caliphate but enabled British domination under the Mandate System. Though the postwar settlement denied Iraqis political independence, the groundwork for an eventual ejection of Britain was laid. The inability to manifest an Arab supranational government in 1921 did not erode Hashemite gravitas; their authority in Iraq persisted until 1958. The internal strife which challenged and eventually toppled Hashemite authority in Iraq was rooted in the unrealized political aims articulated by Sharif Hussein to McMahon. Though a universal Arab polity did not materialize in 1921, attempts at greater Arab interconnectivity were attempted throughout the century, notably in 1963, after the Ba’th Party toppled Abd al-Karim Qasim.

#### Second National Flag Vexillology (1925-1958)

The Iraqi flag remained in its Arab Revolt configuration until 1925, when the constitution stipulated a modification. The kingdom’s governing document, the Organic Law, detailed the basics of administration and clarified monarchy’s role. On the national banner, Article IV stipulated:

The flag of 'Iraq shall be of the following shape and dimensions. The length of the flag shall be double its breadth. It shall be divided horizontally into three colours of equal size and parallel to each other, the upper section being black, the others white and green respectively. On the side of the staff there shall be a red trapezoid, the greater base of which shall be equal to the breadth of the flag and the lesser base equal to the breadth of the white section, the height being equal to one-quarter of the length of the flag. In the centre there shall be two white stars of seven points each, in a perpendicular position, parallel to the staff. <sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Constitution of Iraq (Organic Law)* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1929), 4.

Rather than a complete overhaul, the constitution modernized its national colors. From a vexillological standpoint, several features that differentiated Iraq's second national flag from its 1921 predecessor: a *trapezoid*, a modified aspect ratio, and dual seven-pointed stars.<sup>43</sup> This section focuses on the second national flag's geometry and design, and postpones a more in-depth consideration of its star symbolism. While the second national flag was an iteration of its forerunner, 1920s state representations occurred within an imperial milieu wherein British and Iraqi interests compromised in official portrayals of authority.

Trapezoids, an unusual vexilloid feature, were mostly unknown on flags during the 1920s. One explanation for its adoption under the Organic Law was the Art Deco movement (1910-39) which undergirded visual arts during the interwar period. Borrowing from Cubism, the movement employed streamlined surfaces and geometric shapes, projecting modernity and confidence.<sup>44</sup> Whether the Hashemites or colonial administrators injected this feature is unknown, but it is obvious the trapezoid was not a random modification. Like all creative endeavors, visual arts are products of their time, communicating ideas within the context of dominant artistic trends. Though thousands of miles away from European and American cities, vexillographers in Baghdad were not immune from the interwar domination of Art Deco. The same inertia that placed a simple trapezoid on the Iraqi flag in 1925, erected the renowned Chrysler Building in 1930. The second national flag possessed membership within a global artistic movement, demonstrating the interconnectivity of interwar design, culture, and politics.

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<sup>43</sup> *Dictionary of Vexillology*, s.v. "Trapezoid," Flags of the World, accessed March 16, 2020, <https://fotw.info/flags/vxt-dvt2.html#trapezium>.

<sup>44</sup> Victoria Charles, *Art Deco* (New York: Parkstone Press, 2013), 7-14.

<sup>45</sup> "Chrysler Building," The Skyscraper Center, database, accessed March 16, 2020, <http://www.skyscrapercenter.com/building/chrysler-building/422>



Figure 2.4– Iraqi Second National Flag (1925 – 58).<sup>46</sup>

In addition to an innovative trapezoid, the second national flag narrowed its parameters, reducing its aspect ratio from a robust 2:3 to a comparatively lithe 1:2.<sup>47</sup> The reasons for this modification rested within British vexillological conventions observed throughout its commonwealth and evidenced London’s far-reaching powers to influence Iraqi policy. The Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of 1922 stipulated that Iraq would receive, “... advice and assistance as may be required during the period of this treaty, without prejudice to her national sovereignty.”<sup>48</sup> Flags throughout the British Commonwealth shared a standardized 1:2 aspect ratio; they were subcomponents of a broader imperial aegis. Though vexillological uniformity situated Iraq

<sup>46</sup> Željko Heimer, *Mamlakat al-Iraq*, digital facsimile, *Flags of the World*, accessed March 15, 2020, [https://fotw.info/flags/iq\\_kingd.html](https://fotw.info/flags/iq_kingd.html).

<sup>47</sup> Zoltán Horváth, “Kingdom of Iraq,” *Flags of the World*, accessed March 16, 2020, [https://fotw.info/flags/iq\\_kingd.html](https://fotw.info/flags/iq_kingd.html).

<sup>48</sup> *Treaty of Alliance between Britain and Irak, Signed at Baghdad, October 10, 1922* (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1925), 3.

among storied overseas possessions like Jamaica and South Africa, its design remained rooted in the Arab Revolt.<sup>49</sup> The 1:2 aspect ratio evidenced the limits of British control under the Mandate System; it was more influential than heavy-handed. Rather than manipulative crypto-colonialism, the reconfigured aspect ratio evidenced a triangulation of British and Iraqi interests during the 1920s.

A further investigation of colonial flags requires a comparative analysis of French and British vexillology during the 1920s. As imperial metropolises, both powers placed miniaturized copies of their respective banners within the *cantons* (designated positions of honor) of colonial flags.<sup>50</sup> In the French Mandates, its colonial administrators affixed the *drapeau français* on the cantons of the Alawite State (1922 - 36), the State of Damascus (1920 - 24), and other territories in Mandatory Syria. This practice extended throughout the British Empire, a vexillological convention observed within its Commonwealth, Mandates, crown colonies, and dependent territories. There were limited exceptions to this convention, generally representing territories which entered the British Empire under abnormal circumstances. In addition to Iraq, flags without a British canton included Gibraltar (1713 – pres.), the Sultanate of Egypt (1914-22), the Emirate of Transjordan (1921 – 46), and the Sheikhdom of Kuwait (1899 – 61).<sup>51</sup> For reference,

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<sup>49</sup> The Jamaican and South African flags are well-known examples of postcolonial vexillology. In both examples, the former colonies replaced their flags with dramatic departures from its previous designs. On the other hand, Australia and New Zealand retained their British canton flags long after their independence. New Zealand's flag survived a 2016 national referendum which produced a bevy of flags designed by citizens. One such design included a black field with a kiwi bird shooting a green laser beam from its eyes. See, Elle Hunt, "New Zealand's New Flag: 15 Quirky Contenders," *The Guardian*, May 14, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/15/new-zealands-new-flag-15-quirky-contenders>.

<sup>50</sup> Whitney Smith, *Flags: Throughout the Ages and across the World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 13. Smith defines cantons as, "...the upper hoist corner of a flag or rectangular field filling that area." Though notable flags like Chile exist, cantons are generally one-quarter proportions. Notable examples of one-quarter cantons include the flags of the United States and New Zealand.

<sup>51</sup> This is far from a comprehensive list. A notable examples includes the Sultanate of Egypt (1914 - 22) which had a semi-colonial relationship with London, but like Iraq and Kuwait was administratively non-conformist.

Figure 2.5 provides a visual comparison of the French and British Mandates' flags during the period of 1713 - 1961.

Gibraltar notwithstanding, most non-British canton flags represented territories within the Middle East.<sup>52</sup> That Iraq escaped the vexillological uniformity imposed upon British territories evidenced an exceptional relationship between London and Baghdad during the interwar period. Armed Iraqi tribesmen resisted overt colonization in 1920, launching an insurgency resulting in numerous civilian fatalities and costing David Lloyd George's government £40million.<sup>53</sup> The installation of Faisal ibn Hussein on the Iraqi throne did not alter Baghdad's sub-state power imbalance. Though the crisis abated, a rebellion against unpopular British policies remained a possibility. Even a decade after the Hashemite ascendancy, Iraqi tribesman owned an estimated 100,000 rifles, while government forces possessed a mere 15,000 shoulder-arms.<sup>54</sup> An additional insurrection within the British Isles, the Anglo-Irish War (1918-21), extended London's security obligations and made an impingement upon Iraqi sovereignty a needless expenditure.<sup>55</sup> Hashemite Iraq maintained its second national flag, never under serious threat of British heavy-handedness in matters of its vexillology.

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<sup>52</sup> One notable exception, the Colony of Aden (1937 – 63) had nineteenth-century roots, managed as settlement under British Indian authority (see Figure 2.5).

<sup>53</sup> Dodge, *Inventing Iraq*, 8. There are varying accounts of the British response in 1920. Dodge reports that upwards of 130,000 troops were needed to suppress the rebellion. During archival research for this thesis I found contemporaneous accounts citing far fewer troops employed, around 10,000 men. See, John Randolph, *British Military Occupation of Iraq and British Policy Towards Iraq Army* (Baghdad: Department of State, November 27, 1927). The reports are on microfilm 890g.015 (1910-1929), M722, roll 21.

<sup>54</sup> Jeremy Black, *Introduction to Global Military History: 1775 to the Present Day*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York: Routledge, 2013), 115.

<sup>55</sup> S.J. Connolly, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, s.v., "Anglo-Irish War," (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

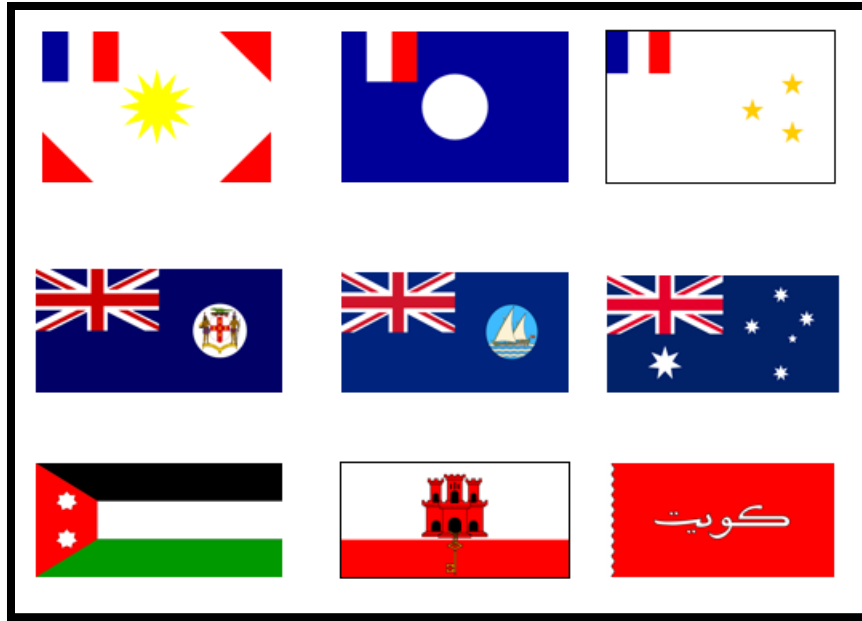


Figure 2.5 – Comparison of French and British imperial flags, 1713 – 1961. Top row – the Alawite State, the State of Damascus, the State of Aleppo. Middle row – the Colony of Jamaica, the Colony of Aden, and New Zealand. Bottom row – the Kingdom of Iraq, Gibraltar, and, the Sheikdom of Kuwait. <sup>56</sup>

### Second National Flag Semiotics (1925-1958)

There were numerous diplomatic questions unanswered after the First World War concluded in 1918. While the Ottoman Empire was dismembered under treaties with the Allied Powers, its successor republic possessed enough oomph to press London for a favorable settlement on its southeastern border. The “Mosul Question” centered around Ankara’s forthcoming discharge of a third Ottoman *vilayet* to Mandatory Iraq, a matter the Turks contested from 1918 onward. The

<sup>56</sup> For these flags see, “Alawite State, State of Damascus, State of Aleppo, Jamaica, Colony of Aden, New Zealand, Iraq, Gibraltar, and Kuwait,” Flags of the World, database, accessed March 22, 2020, <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/host.html>.

question was answered in 1923 after the Turkish War of Independence (1919-23) ended and its borders were secured under the Treaty of Lausanne.<sup>57</sup> In 1924 the League of Nations established the so-called Brussels Line, creating a tentative boundary between Mandatory Iraq and the Turkish Republic.<sup>58</sup> Iraq ratified the Organic Law in 1925, and the following year the Treaty of Ankara cemented the Turkish border.<sup>59</sup> This move added a substantial Kurdish population to Iraq, challenging the primordial nationalism presupposed in the Arab Revolt and its corresponding symbolism embodied by the second national flag.

The Mosul annexation coincided with the 1925 ratification of the Organic Law, the constitution which prescribed the second national flag. On its national banner, the document stipulated in part, “In the centre there shall be two white stars of seven points each, in a perpendicular position, parallel to the staff.”<sup>60</sup> The addition of the seven-pointed stars was understood to symbolize Arab-Kurdish unity following the League of Nations’ partitioning of the Mosul *vilayet* by the Brussels Line in 1924.<sup>61</sup> The move pulled southern Kurdistan into Mandatory Iraq and grafted a patchwork population of Kurds, Armenians, Assyrians, and Turkmen onto an otherwise ethnically homogenous Arab bloc.<sup>62</sup> As a communications platform, flags possess a limited capacity to transmit information. This constraint was exacerbated by the ethnic underpinnings of Arab Revolt semiotics mixed with Kurdish

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<sup>57</sup> Mustafa Baduk, *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire*, s.v., “Lausanne, Treaty of,” (New York: Facts of File, 2009).

<sup>58</sup> *Historical Dictionary of Iraq*, 2nd ed., s.v., “Treaty of Ankara,” (Lanham, UK: The Scarecrow Press, 2013).

<sup>59</sup> *Treaty between the United Kingdom and Iraq and Turkey: Regarding the Settlement of the Frontier Between Turkey and Iraq* (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1927).

<sup>60</sup> *Constitution of Iraq (Organic Law)*, 4.

<sup>61</sup> John Randolph, *Report No. 68: National Flag of Iraq* (Baghdad: Department of State, May 14, 1925). These State Department cables are located in the National Archives at College Park. The reports are on microfilm 890g.015 (1910-1929), M722, roll 21.

<sup>62</sup> Jordi Tejel Gorgas, “Making Borders from below: the Emergence of the Turkish–Iraqi Frontier, 1918–1925,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 54, no. 5, (2018): 811-826.



symbolism. The inclusion of dual seven-pointed stars, a symbolic Arab-Kurdish union, marked the first representation of a non-Arab minority on state iconography. The second national flag inadvertently implied an ethno-sectarian stratum which included Kurds but othered Assyrians, Turkmen, Armenians, and Jews.

Iraqi independence in 1932 only accelerated tensions between Baghdad and marginalized persons; minority groups often formed militias to resist state authority.<sup>63</sup> This ethno-sectarian divide first manifested during an August 1933 military incursion against Assyrian rebels operating around Dohuk. Elements of the Iraqi army and Kurdish irregulars conducted punitive raids against Assyrian settlements, the worst attacks focusing around the village of Semele. Hundreds of civilians were killed during the operation, a contemporary report stating:

The London Times declared yesterday that there was reason to believe 500 had already been slain, 200 of whom had no connection with the revolt. According to The London Times, a British official who visited the villages around Simel, forty miles north of Mosul, reported to London that he had found them full of panic-stricken women and children and had counted 315 Assyrian dead apparently killed by the so-called irregular police.<sup>64</sup>

Violence against Assyrians predated the Semele Massacre in 1933. During a series of lesser-known massacres, concurrent with the Armenian Genocide, the Ottomans killed thousands of Assyrians during the First World War.<sup>65</sup> The episode highlighted a profound contradiction within Iraqi identity, a question which has harried its society for one-hundred years: Given that

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<sup>63</sup> Adeed Dawisha, *Iraq: a Political History from Independence to Occupation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 36-39.

<sup>64</sup> Ferdinand Khun Jr., "Britain to Take Up Massacres in Iraq; Rulers Plan Flight," *New York Times*, August 17, 1933.

<sup>65</sup> Hannibal Travis, "The Assyrian Genocide a Tale of Oblivion and Denial," in *Forgotten Genocides* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 124-127.

Arabism was Iraq's foundational political orientation, what was the appropriate role of non-Arabs in Iraqi society?

Flags are ill-equipped to answer more in-depth questions about societal ills. As representations of state authority, official iconography often reflects imperfections of national character without intimating a remedy. In rejiggering the symbolism of Second Constitutional Era political flags (Figure 2.3) from generic aspirational values into features of Arab distinctiveness, there was always be a degree of othering implied in Arab Revolt-rooted vexillology. Contemporary observers found the veneer of Arab-Kurdish unity dubious. John Randolph, the American consul in Baghdad, reported:

The real reason for the presence of the two stars in the National flag, however, seem to be due more of less to a plan brought forward several years ago at an Arab Conference in Damascus, when it was suggested and agreed, I am informed, that the Kingdom of the Hijaz was to have no stars in its flag, the Arab Kingdom of Syria was to have one star, and the Arab kingdom of Iraq was to have two stars, a plan, which, it was thought, looked forward to an ultimate union of federation of Arab states. The plan did not work out, but the Arab leaders of Iraq have placed the two white starts on the Iraq flag. <sup>66</sup>

Indeed, a June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1924 *Baghdad Times* article reported the Iraqi statesmen, Naji al-Suwaidi and Yasin al-Hashimi, advocated for flag's two-star configuration. <sup>67</sup> Both al-Suwaidi and al-Hashimi were dedicated Arab nationalists and improbable advocates for Arab-Kurdish unity. <sup>68</sup> The most favorable interpretation of their vexillography was to honor the defunct Sharifian order, and a poignant gesture following the Kingdom of Hijaz's capitulation in December of 1925. It was not that Iraq should have adorned its national flag with iconography relating to

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<sup>66</sup> John Randolph, *Report No. 68*.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, Annex No. 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Historical Dictionary of Iraq*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v., "Yasin al-Hashimi."

ethno-sectarian minorities. Instead, the idea that its semiotics should denote primordial nationalism was a roadblock to ethnic unity during the 1920s and 1930s. It is the reason the Free Officers under Abd al-Karim Qasim replaced the second national flag in 1959 with a more equitable design.

### Description of Iraqi Heraldry (1931-1958)

Heraldry, “the Shorthand of History,” is an auxiliary historical science concerned with the identification and analysis of arms.<sup>69</sup> Properly put, *arms* are a distinct pictorial representation of a royal, nobleman, or vassal using a system of paramilitary symbolism. Arms is catchall terminology governing all heraldic images, from unpretentious family crests to full achievements of arms, replete with crowns, capes, and martial implements. In monarchies, the sovereign’s arms usually become its civic heraldry, the case with the Kingdom of Iraq under the Hashemites. While a national flag received considerable attention under the 1925 constitution, Iraq procrastinated on its national heraldry. Article IV of the Organic Law stipulated, “...the arms, insignia and decorations of the State shall be determined in accordance with special laws.”<sup>70</sup> In European heraldry, the form and symbolism of arms were delineated in *letters patent*, a detailed description authorized by royal proclamation. The document, sometimes called a *blazon*, outlined the arms and codified its distinctiveness, limiting confusion between other heraldic devices.<sup>71</sup> In twentieth-century Iraq, administrative decrees were transmitted via the *Iraq Government Gazette*. Published in English, the periodical permitted the government to document

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<sup>69</sup> Arthur Charles Fox-Davies, *The Art of Heraldry: an Encyclopaedia of Armory*, (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, 1904), v. For information about heraldic history see, Ottfried Neubecker, *Heraldry: Sources, Symbols, and Meaning*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976), 6-7.

<sup>70</sup> *Constitution of Iraq (Organic Law)*, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Neubecker, *Heraldry*, 42.

contemporaneous lawmaking and communicate within the broader Anglophone world. Rather than a traditional patent, the Hashemite government published its blazon in the gazette. In a long-winded missive dated June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1931, the king decreed:

The Coat of Arms of the State of Iraq shall consist of a mantling having the colours of the 'Iraq flag, the red being at the top followed downward consecutively by the black, the white, and the green, surrounded by a gilt margin, and wrinkled in the form of a rose at the two upper corners and bound by a gilt ribbon ending in a form of a tassel. On the top of the mantling shall be placed the crown of 'Iraq supported by two stars, with the colours of the "Iraq flag, each with seven rays, symbolizing the Arabs and the Kurds. In the centre of the mantling shall be a shield with a frame on the upper side of which shall be inscribed "al Adlu Asa'ul Mulk", and at the bottom of it "1339", being the Hijra date of the accession of H.M. King Faisal I, to the throne of 'Iraq. On both sides of the frame, between the two aforementioned inscriptions, there shall be certain ornaments of Arab style, and in the center of the shield, four date trees bending which appear in the horizon representing the Tigris and the Euphrates running downward and meeting in front of the date tree, thus representing Shatt-al-Arab, On the junction of the two rivers there shall be a sword and lance crossed, the former being on the right and the latter on the left side. The shield shall be supported by an Arab horse on the right side and a Babylonian Lion on the left. On the lower part of the mantling, beneath the shield, there shall be a cotton branch and a sheaf of seven ears of wheat crossing each other.<sup>72</sup>

This announcement was made sixteen months before Iraq was granted its independence in October 1932. The Hashemites went an entire decade before adopting its arms; the timing and opulence of their creation were probably linked. Iraqi heraldry intended to communicate its distinctiveness and political maturity in a manner understood by European powers.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Iraq Government Gazette* 28, June 7, 1931. As with the previous State Department papers, this copy of the *Iraq Government Gazette* is located in the National Archives at College Park. The reports are on microfilm 890g.015 (1910-1929), M722, roll 22.

<sup>73</sup> The reporting of the Semele Massacres echoed about readiness for independence, a common complaint of metropolises throughout history. The *New York Times* reported, "The British are fully aware, too, that excesses against the Assyrians tend to justify the suspicions of the French and others who contend that the Iraqis were not ready for nationhood." See, Khun, "Britain to Take Up Massacres in Iraq."



Figure 2.6 – Hashemite achievement of arms (1931 - 1958).<sup>74</sup>

#### Semiotics of Iraqi Heraldry (1931-1958)<sup>75</sup>

Though the creation of Hashemite arms was tied to Iraqi independence, its specifics conveyed a deeper message about a presupposed national character and identity. Though the scientific qualities of heraldry make a semiotic analysis practical, the Iraqi example is visually overwhelming. Its design contained over a dozen distinct armorial accessories, each projecting a notion about Hashemite Iraq on the precipice of independence in 1931. As with its vexillology, Iraqi heraldry was a product of its time, communicating a message about its monarchy's fitness

<sup>74</sup> "Iraq," The Red Lion, database, accessed March 22, 2020, <https://www.hubert-herald.nl/Iraq.htm>.

<sup>75</sup> I'm deeply grateful to my classmate Natalie Salive who introduced me to the topicETD of lion semiotics. Though she did not directly contribute to this project, our discussions on animal studies and leonine representations on state iconography influenced the direction of this section.

in three parts. This symbolism included endorsements of Hashemite authority, agricultural fertility, and transhistorical connectivity with an assumed Mesopotamian past. Though their selection was not arbitrary, there is nothing about inherently “Iraqi” about these symbols. They were, as Eric Hobsbawm said, invented traditions which “...is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules of ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”<sup>76</sup>

*Hashemite Royal Authority:*

The first message Iraqi Hashemites wished to convey was the righteousness of their authority as monarchs. Its arms signified this message with a crowned *crest*, the Hashemite ascension year, its royal motto, and cavalry weapons (Figure 2.7).<sup>77</sup> The crown was a departure from the previous Ottoman heraldry, another emulation of European arms, which featured a turban.<sup>78</sup> Of its numerous qualities, the crown was an overtly European symbol, meant to dampen perceptions of otherness within the Iraqi regime. Its crest symbolized a willingness to conform to Western standards of monarchical convention. Though seemingly boilerplate, the saber and lance crossed over the Shatt al-Arab remind viewers of Arab military prowess made manifest in the Arab Revolt.<sup>79</sup> As with its crown, the weapons are another nod towards British-Arab partnership and

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<sup>76</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1.

<sup>77</sup> Neubecker, *Heraldry*, 52. Throughout armorial history crowns were a royal prerogative with lesser houses often added helmets, while supranational polities such as the Holy Roman Empire, the Papacy, or the bore embellished crowns and tiaras.

<sup>78</sup> Ivan Sache, “Ottoman Empire: Flags and coats of arms shown in the Topkapi Museum (Istanbul),” *Flags of the World*, database, accessed March 25, 2020, <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/tr-topk.html#coa>.

<sup>79</sup> “Heraldic Meanings,” s.v. “Sword / Dagger / Dart/ Sabre / Scimitar,” American College of Heraldry, accessed March 25, 2020, <http://www.americancollegeofheraldry.org/achsymbols.html>.

played into romantic notions of Sharifian cavalymen harrying Ottoman troops during World War I.



Figure 2.7 – Symbols of Hashemite authority on Iraqi national arms.

To balance its Eurocentric symbolism, traditional elements were incorporated on its *escutcheon* (shield), a rounded and embellished with decorative lattice expressly stipulated as “... Arab style...”<sup>80</sup> The inscribed motto “*al adlu asa’ul mulk*” (justice is the foundation of property) speaks to the crown’s capacity to make and decipher laws. It symbolized the centralization of authority from its traditional tribal powerbases towards the Hashemite throne in Baghdad. The lowermost portion of the escutcheon where the Eastern Arabic numerals ١٣٣٩

<sup>80</sup> *Iraq Government Gazette* 28, June 7, 1931. Neubecker, *Heraldry*, 52. An *escutcheon* is the portion of an armorial achievement which featuring a shield and is the main component of a coat of arms. Rounded shields are somewhat rare in heraldry, another sign of the arms’ 20<sup>th</sup> century and non-European provenance. For a counterpointing evolution of escutcheon design in European heraldry, see Neubecker, *Heraldry*, 76-77.

(1339 AH) marked the year of Faisal's coronation on the *hijri* calendar.<sup>81</sup> From a semiotic standpoint, the inclusion of Islamic enumeration signified Hashemite piety and blood-relation to the Prophet Muhammad, therefore buttressing Sharifian legitimacy in Iraq. By balancing symbols familiar in European heraldry with distinct Arab representations, the Hashemite arms embodied the equilibrium Faisal I demonstrated when communicating to both Iraqis and the British.



Figure 2.8 – Symbols of agricultural fertility on Iraqi national arms.

### *Agricultural Fertility*

The escutcheon's interior depicted the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates at the Shatt al-Arab, the sources of agricultural yields for thousands of years. Its riverine symbolism was

<sup>81</sup> On the Gregorian calendar, Faisal's coronation occurred on August 23, 1921 which corresponds to the 18<sup>th</sup> day of Dhu'l Hijja, 1339 AH. For calculations see, "Conversion of Hijri A.H. (Islamic) and A. D. Christian (Gregorian) Dates," calculator, Islamic Philosophy Online, accessed May 5, 2020, <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/hijri.htm>.



understood by Europeans and Arabs alike.<sup>82</sup> Though Iraq's agriculture declined during the twentieth century, the imagery propagated an identity contingent upon ancient waters for subsistence. The semiotics of a given subject need not conform to a greater reality; signifiers may project possibilities ranging from the aspirational to the propagandistic. During the 1920s, Iraq dominated the date-processing industry accounting for over 80% of global output with its production boosted under British sponsorship during the 1930s.<sup>83</sup> However, wheat and cotton yields were hampered by limitations of the Iraqi irrigation system and competition with other cotton-producing possessions like India.<sup>84</sup> Regardless of its actual output, representations of fecundity were an essential feature of Iraqi identity to Europeans and Arabs alike. Agricultural signifiers bolstered British paternalistic tendencies while reinforcing a universal human aspiration - that one's nation is a land of peace and plenty.

### *Transhistorical Continuity*

In an oblique reference to a continuity with an imagined past, the Iraqi government stipulated that two mammals, a lion and a horse, were placed on its national arms.<sup>85</sup> The mammalian *supporters* (figures attached to arms) are standard features throughout European and postcolonial heraldry.<sup>86</sup> However, the placement of an Arabian horse, like its golden weapons, reminds viewers of a martial identity rooted in Hashemite cavalry prowess of the Arab Revolt, a link to Iraq's recent history. While horses enjoy occasional representation on arms, lions are near-

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<sup>82</sup> While the exact Arabic etymology is unclear, Mesopotamia come from the "Hellenistic Greek Μεσοποταμία < μεσοποτάμιος between rivers." The term did not enter into English until 1651. See, *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "Mesopotamia" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>83</sup> Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963: Capital, Power, and Ideology*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997, 31.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-39.

<sup>85</sup> *Iraq Government Gazette* 28, June 7, 1931

<sup>86</sup> Neubecker, *Heraldry*, 52 – "Supporters are decorative devices which do not form part of the arms proper. They usually have the form of animals or men." For a brief look at postcolonial heraldry see, Lilian Cailleaud, "The Colonial Influence on Emblems of Independent Nations in Africa," *Vexillum*, no. 8 (December 2019): 4-8.

ubiquitous supporters. Ottfried Neubecker identified fifty distinct derivations of lions throughout armorial history in various poses symbolizing hereditary rulership.<sup>87</sup> For example, when a leonine supporter exposes its forepaws and stands single-footed, it is considered *rampant*. A beast with groundward facing paws, is *passant*. Heraldic jargon includes unique terminology for crouching lions, sleeping lions, and lions chopped to pieces.<sup>88</sup> An examination of Hashemite arms begs the question: was a leonine supporter included on the Kingdom of Iraq's arms intended to suggest a linkage between Hashemite authority to pre-Islamic Mesopotamia?



Figure 2.9 – Representations of transhistorical continuity on Iraqi national arms.

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<sup>87</sup> Neubecker, *Heraldry*, 110-112.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 111.

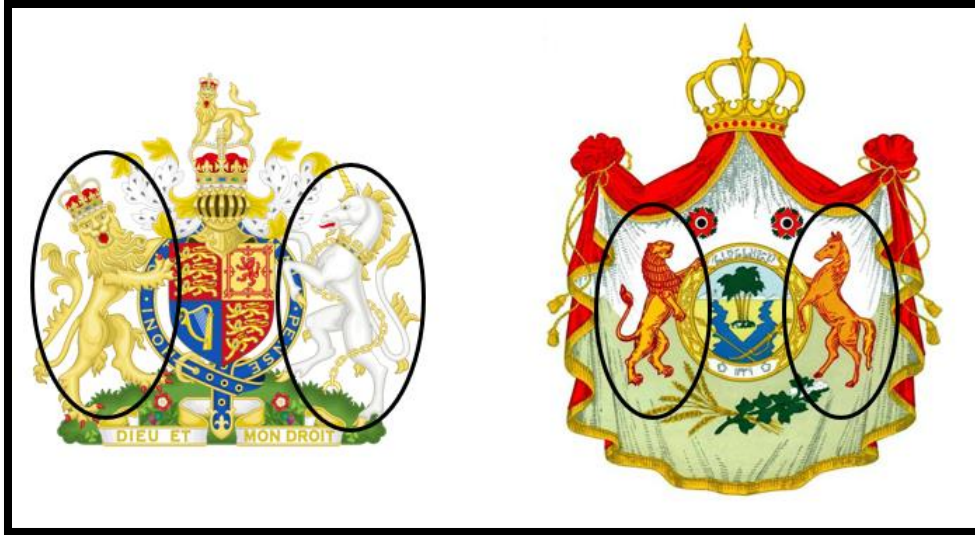


Figure 2.10 – Comparison on British (left) and Iraqi (right) animal supporters. <sup>89</sup>

Though the *Iraq Government Gazette* stipulated a “Babylonian lion” on its national arms, not all beasts are created equal. Indeed, lions were associated with the Mesopotamian deity Inanna (sometimes called Ishtar), though the creature featured on the Hashemite arms was a contemporary heraldic accessory. <sup>90</sup> Along with the Kingdom of Iraq, numerous twentieth-century nation-states employed leonine supporters on their heraldry. Far-flung examples included Morocco, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Sierra Leon, and imperial Iran, each featuring lions in various poses. <sup>91</sup> The starkest instance came from Britain itself, whose royal arms included a *sinister* lion and *dexter* unicorn, both in a rampant posture (Figure 2.10). <sup>92</sup> Whether the Hashemites intended an obsequious emulation of British heraldry or subtle manipulation is

<sup>89</sup> Sodacan, *Royal coat of arms of the United Kingdom, adopted 1837*, digital facsimile, 2010, Wikimedia Commons, accessed April 15, 2020,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English\\_heraldry#/media/File:Royal\\_Coat\\_of\\_Arms\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_heraldry#/media/File:Royal_Coat_of_Arms_of_the_United_Kingdom.svg).

<sup>90</sup> Chikako E. Watanabe, “The Symbolic Role of Animals in Babylon: a Contextual Approach to the Lion, the Bull, and the Mušhuššu,” *Iraq* 77, (2015): 215-224.

<sup>91</sup> Geoffrey Briggs, *National Heraldry of the World* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974).

<sup>92</sup> Neubecker, *Heraldry* 44-50. In heraldic terminology *dexter* is the right portion of arms and *sinister* is the left.

unknown. Much of Faisal's effectiveness stemmed from his diplomatic aptitude, arbitrating between British domination and Iraqi needs, an awareness his successors struggled to replicate.

To further interrogate whether a Babylonian lion or a modern facsimile appears on the Iraqi achievement necessitates a thorough consideration of their respective functions. In contemporary armorial representations, leonine supports are ferocious guardians of royal authority. Like Iraq, in postcolonial Africa, numerous successor regimes selected lion supporters to represent their new polities, irrespective of an association with former metropolises.<sup>93</sup> Though willing to eject foreigners from their countries, postcolonial elites often maintained a vestigial continuity with colonial authority. Though its intentions were obscure, Iraq preferred an oblique connection with Britain while implying a relationship to Babylonia to engender Iraqi distinctiveness. By conditioning its lion, the Hashemites situated themselves between imperial authority and an imagined pre-Islamic realm populated with fantastic creatures and goddesses.

An examination of Mesopotamian artifacts projects an alternate narrative, one differing from Hashemite propaganda featured in the *Iraq Government Gazette*. While their full function is unknown, Babylonian lions projected a different symbolism, often depicting animals in a subservient fashion (Figure 2.11).<sup>94</sup> From a semiotic standpoint, it seems reasonable to assume lion iconography transmitted different messages to ancient Mesopotamians than twentieth-century Iraqis. This included lions trampled underfoot and manhandled by heroic hunters, the playthings of divine beings. The commoditization of animals in Mesopotamian religious art was intended to elevate gods above mortals, not kings above commoners. Putting aside the arms'

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<sup>93</sup> Cailleaud, "The Colonial Influence on Emblems of Independent Nations in Africa."

<sup>94</sup> Watanabe, "The Symbolic Role of Animals in Babylon."

obvious anachronisms, the employment of pre-Islamic iconography highlighted the interconnectivity of history and burgeoning Iraqi national identity during the 1930s.

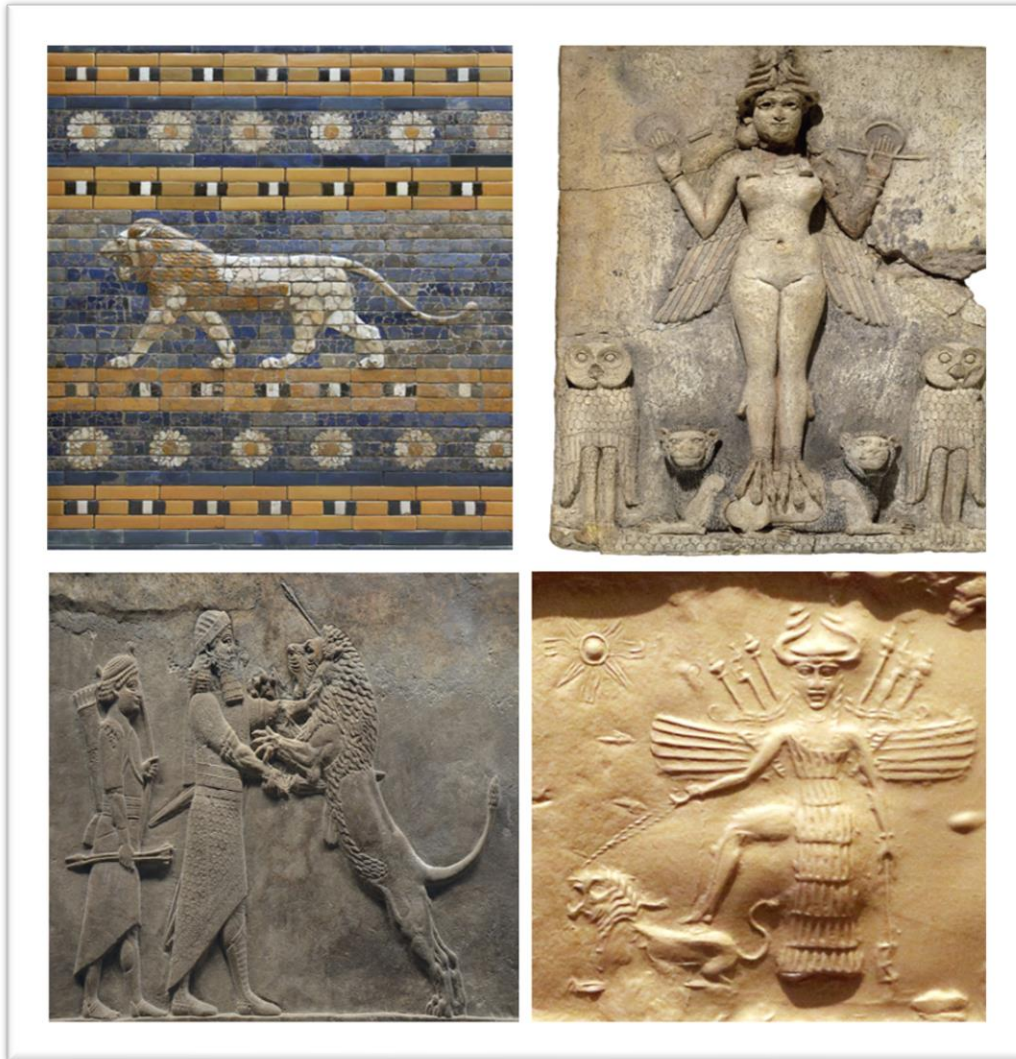


Figure 2.11 -Mesopotamian religious iconography featuring lions: From the Ishtar Gate featured in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin is *Walking Lion from the Processional Way* (top left), from the British Museum is the so-called *Burney Relief* (top right), also from the British Museum is in Assyrian relief *Lion Hunt of Ashurbanipal* (bottom left), and from the Oriental Institute Museum is an Akkadian representation of Inanna on a seal (bottom left).<sup>95</sup>

<sup>95</sup> *Walking Lion from the Processional Way*, relief, Mesopotamia, 604 BCE – 562 BCE, Pergamon Museum, accessed March 26, 2020, <https://www.smb.museum/en/museums-institutions/pergamonmuseum/collections->

### Case Study: Mesopotamian Themed Iraqi Postage Stamps

This analysis does not suggest an antagonistic relationship between Iraq and the British Empire, wherein both actors made Machiavellian gambits on a historicized chessboard. Instead, the British and Hashemites engaged in activities that mutually informed their positions in post-Ottoman Mesopotamia in a process Orit Bashkin called “Iraqi hybridity.”<sup>96</sup> Under this rubric, pluralistic tendencies pervaded across class and ethno-sectarian strata and comingled with British administration, creating blended notions of Iraqi distinctiveness. Cultural hybridization accounts for the obscured attributions of Iraqi state iconography in Hashemite Iraq. A simple question such as, “Did Britain directly contribute to Iraqi iconography?” could reasonably be answered as, “Yes, no, and sometimes.” The contributions to a greater Iraqi identity during the Hashemite rule were a mosaic of notions without a distinct Arab or British attribution. For a national character to take root, ideas about a population must be communicated and accepted as valid. Britain could no more dictate the parameters of Iraqi identity than Baghdad could outright reject its Mandatory interlocutors. As Bashkin elaborated, “These hybrid relationships thus contest the assumption of the colonizers to identify a recognizable colonized subject who is in need of civilizing and guidance.”<sup>97</sup>

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[research/collection-highlights.html](#). *Burney Relief* (Queen of the Night), fired clay relief, Mesopotamia, 19<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the British Museum, accessed March 26, 2020, [https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=1355376&partId=1](https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1355376&partId=1). *The Lion Hunt of Ashurbanipal*, relief, Mesopotamia, c. 600 BCE, <https://blog.britishmuseum.org/lion-hunting-the-sport-of-kings-2> British Museum, accessed March 26, 2020, <https://blog.britishmuseum.org/lion-hunting-the-sport-of-kings-2>. Sailko, “Akkadian period seal in black limestone with foot on a lion’s back and a devotee,” Wikimedia Commons, accessed March 26, 2020, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Periodo\\_accadico,\\_sigillo\\_in\\_calcare\\_nero\\_con\\_ishtar\\_con\\_piede\\_su\\_schiena\\_di\\_leone\\_e\\_una\\_devota,\\_2350-2150\\_ac\\_ca.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Periodo_accadico,_sigillo_in_calcare_nero_con_ishtar_con_piede_su_schiena_di_leone_e_una_devota,_2350-2150_ac_ca.jpg).

<sup>96</sup> Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 3-15.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.



Figure 2.12 - Iraqi postage stamps depicting various symbols of Mesopotamia (c.1925).<sup>98</sup>

Nowhere was this interplay more present than in the production of postage stamps during the British occupation of Ottoman Mesopotamia and the subsequent administration of Mandatory Iraq. Unlike flags and national arms, stamps were symbols of Hashemite authority Iraqis encountered daily, regardless of confession, ethnicity, or social strata. Iraqi postal history is a treasure trove of philatelic representations of state authority, beginning with repurposed Ottoman stamps under British auspices in 1914.<sup>99</sup> After pre-occupation supplies were exhausted, a bevy

<sup>98</sup> “British Mandate Issue, 1923-1923,” Rezonville, database, accessed March 26, 2020, <http://www.rezonville.com/iraq#/ir05/>

<sup>99</sup> Clayton Rubec and Akthem al-Manseer, *Guide to the Postal Stationary of Iraq* (London: Royal Philatelic Society London, 2016), 1.

of Mesopotamian-themed postage stamps were issued in Mandatory Iraq starting in 1923.<sup>100</sup> The stamps depicted a broad swath of ancient history, covering thousands of years and irrespective of the specific polities which ruled Mesopotamia. As with its lion supports, the transhistoricity of pre-Islamic Mesopotamia only required the flimsiest of plausibility. For example, the postage stamps featured in Figure 2.12 feature imagery from three distinct polities which occupied Mesopotamia; that the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Parthian Empires were not interrelated was irrelevant. In a sign of sectarian unity, additional stamps highlighted themes of Islamic landmarks within Baghdad, the Abu Hanifa Mosque (Sunni), and al-Kadhimiya Mosque (Shia) both featured in the 1923 set (Figure 2.14).

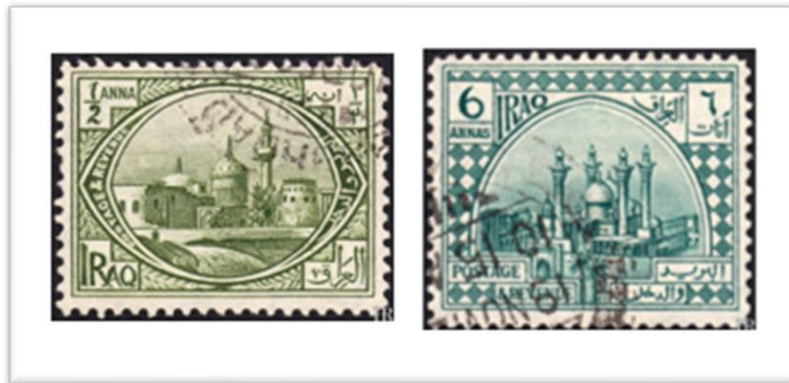


Figure 2.13 – Abu Hanifa Mosque and al-Kadhimiya Mosque postage stamps (c.1923)<sup>101</sup>

<sup>100</sup> “British Mandate Issue, 1923-1923,” Rezonville.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.





Figure 2.14 – Iraqi postage stamps celebrating its Babylonian UNESCO World Heritage sites (c. 2019).<sup>102</sup>

That Iraqis purchased the stamps and mailed letters within a British-administered postal system seems to contradict some postcolonial theorists' suggestions of an insidious relationship between historicization and colonialism. In the Iraqi example, the kingdom was assembled from whole cloth in 1921. Though under British sponsorship, London needed more than a Hashemite puppet-state - it needed Iraqis who accepted their own distinctiveness. As with its flags and heraldry, postage stamps permitted a semblance of historical continuity much gentler than Chakrabarty asserted in, "Historicism is what enabled European domination of the world in the

<sup>102</sup> These are commemorative stamps from my personal collection.

nineteenth century.”<sup>103</sup> When it came to its national iconography there were limits on acceptability within Mandatory Iraq which precluded British philatelic domination. Historical and cultural themes notwithstanding, Iraqi postage stamps predominantly featured its three Hashemite kings Faisal, Ghazi, and Faisal II. It is worth noting George V never appeared on an Iraqi postage stamp during this period, though his sovereignty over Iraq from 1921 to 1932 was unquestionably true.<sup>104</sup> If further evidence is needed, consider the 2019 stamps (Figure 2.15) which commemorated Iraq’s UNESCO World Heritage sites. They were released almost one-hundred years after Mandatory Iraq issued a Mesopotamian-themed postage stamp and seventy years after the Hashemites fell.

### Conclusion

This chapter was concerned with graphic representations of Iraqi state authority during its Hashemite period (1921-58). The period after the First World War saw unprecedented change throughout the Middle East. The collapse of the Ottoman Empire left its Arab provinces vulnerable to European colonial ventures under the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Sharifian Solution. Though Iraq was established in 1921, its state iconography had roots in the Second Constitutional Era of the Ottoman Empire. Arab political clubs permitted during the 1900s and 1910s laid the groundwork for proto-nationalism and represented their movements in a four-color scheme: red, white, green, and black. The colors stood for aspirational values of Arabism, and this convention carried into the creation of the Arab Revolt flag under the Hashemites in

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<sup>103</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9.

<sup>104</sup> “George V Stamps,” The Stamp Museum, accessed March 26, 2020, <https://www.postalmuseum.org/discover/collections/philatelic-collection/british-stamps/george-v-stamps>.

1916. Iraq used a modified version of this flag until 1958, despite adding a sizable non-Arab population of Kurds, Assyrians, and Turkman in 1926.

Iraq refrained from pictorial representations of state authority until its impending admission into the League of Nations. In 1931 Iraq published its national heraldry, an elaborate design intended to communicate the kingdom's maturity and preparedness for independence the following year. The arms were a triangulation of British and Arab symbolism, which conveyed notions of Iraqi distinctiveness in a manner understood by Europeans. Though historically questionable, Hashemite arms communicated authority, agricultural fertility, and a transhistorical continuity with pre-Islamic Mesopotamia. This subject was seen on postage stamps beginning in 1923 and messaged a willingness to associate with a presupposed past to supplement Iraq's limited historical superstructure. In sum, Iraq's iconographic representations of state authority were grounded in the realities of the Hashemite ascendancy in Mandatory Iraq. As a group, its flags, heraldry, and state iconography amounted to an opening argument for future discussions on Iraqi distinctiveness, a discourse which turned violent during the late 1950s and 1960s.

### 3. Introduction

This chapter is concerned with symbols of state authority from 1959 to 2003. During this period, Iraq underwent a dramatic political transformation, overthrowing its monarchy in 1958 and enduring a turbulent decade before the Ba’th Party consolidated its hold on Iraqi governance in 1968. Alterations in state iconography manifested a range of good-faith attempts to define Iraqi identity within several categories. The first notion was expressed as a desire to define Iraqiness within the context of its geographic parameters and without privileging a specific ethnicity. This required the state to imply a metaphysical connection to Mesopotamian peoples who inhabited Iraq thousands of years before its establishment in 1921. The second version of Iraqi identity was rooted in Pan-Arabism, the interconnectivity of Arabs throughout the Middle East. This orientation permitted Iraq to engage as a regional player but often placed Baghdad at odds with its Kurdish population. These two extremes were not monolithic and equal helpings of civic nationalism and Pan-Arab nationalism pervaded during this period.

The first modification of Iraqi iconography occurred in 1959 after the dissolution of the short-lived Arab Union, a brief supranational Hashemite polity that linked Iraq and Jordan.<sup>105</sup> The previous year a politically unaligned (but nominally Nasserist) cabal of military commanders overthrew the Hashemite government and established the Republic of Iraq. The so-called Free Officers, headed by General Abd al-Karim Qasim, attempted to create a republic free from diplomatic obligations and dedicated to civic nationalism. Its vexillology reflected a redesign of the second national flag, rejiggering its color scheme and adding a Mesopotamian icon to its central panel. Its heraldry was an elaborate armorial achievement based upon

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<sup>105</sup> *Historical Dictionary of Iraq*, s.v., “Arab Union.”

twentieth-century socialist designs. Though the Free Officers' representations only lasted a handful of years, it denoted the first instance of Iraqi iconography unencumbered by the baggage of colonial paternalism.

The Ba'th Party completed its takeover of Iraq in 1968 when Abdul Rahman Arif was removed as president. It marked the end of a decade of vacillation between leaders of varying levels of commitment to Pan-Arabism. Under the leadership of Saddam Hussein, who assumed full control of Iraq in 1979, the country accelerated its drive towards preeminence within the Arab world. Though Iraq's attempted a union with Egypt and Syria failed in 1963, its state iconography reflected a willingness to increase its international profile. In 1980, Iraq brawled with the Islamic Republic of Iran during the catastrophic Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), marking a return of trenches and poisonous gas to battlefields reminiscent of World War I. This period and subsequent decades demonstrated the incredible capacity of Iraqis to endure hardship. In 1990, a daring invasion of Kuwait placed Saddam on a collision course with the United States and established the preconditions for the Iraq War twelve years later. It was during the Gulf War which Hussein modified the Iraqi flag with the *takbir* of Islam, the well-known *allahu akbar* (God is Great). The convention remains on the Iraqi flag into the present, fourteen years after Saddam met the gallows in 2006.

#### Vexillology of Republican Iraq (1959 – 1963)

Similar to the Arab Revolt model, Iraq's third national flag was a product of rebellion. In 1958, after successfully storming the royal palace in Baghdad and overthrowing Faisal II, the Free Officers remade symbols of state authority with vivacity. Unlike the previous military uprisings

under Bakr Sidqi (1936) and Rashid Ali (1941), the Free Officers' coup d'état permanently dislocated the Hashemites from power in Iraq. To demonstrate the ancien régime's capitulation, its successor government selected national symbols that communicated a new chapter in Iraqi history.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, the Free Officers' vexillography reflected a necessary differentiation between the defunct Iraqi monarchy and its newborn republic. Through its iconography, the junta advanced the discourse of Iraqi identity, rejected the perceived kowtowing of the Hashemite kings, and advanced a vision of civic nationalism. The Republican flag, which served from 1958 to 1963, permitted the Free Officers to denounce Hashemite rule while simultaneously inventing symbols of state authority Iraqi citizens would not reject.

Though it dissented from the previous Arab Revolt-inspired design, the Republican flag was conventional by twentieth-century vexillological norms.<sup>107</sup> Similar post-World War II patterns included Canada, Cameroon, Mongolia, and Moldova.<sup>108</sup> The banner consisted of three vertical panels colored black, white, and green (see Figure 3.1). The Free Officers amended the four-color convention devised during the Second Constitutional Era by adding yellow, a hue associated with Kurds.<sup>109</sup> In the center (white) panel was a two-piece icon, a golden circle inside of a crimson eight-pointed star. This feature was an intentional inclusion of Mesopotamian symbolism designed to evoke an Iraqi identity independent of ethno-confessional groups. Like its predecessor, the Republican flag maintained the 1:2 aspect ratio dictated under Article IV of the Organic Law.

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<sup>106</sup> Michael Eppel, *Iraq from Monarch to Tyranny: From the Hashemites to the Rise of Saddam* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), 147-149.

<sup>107</sup> "Republic of Iraq: 195-1963," Flags of the World, database, accessed March 27, 2020, [https://fotw.info/flags/iq\\_1959.html](https://fotw.info/flags/iq_1959.html).

<sup>108</sup> Kent Alexander, *Flags* (New York: Mallard Press, 1992), 28-124.

<sup>109</sup> "The National Flag of Kurdistan," Fondation-Institut kudre de Paris, accessed April 3, 2020, [https://www.institutkurde.org/en/kurdorama/the\\_national\\_flag\\_of\\_kurdistan.php](https://www.institutkurde.org/en/kurdorama/the_national_flag_of_kurdistan.php).

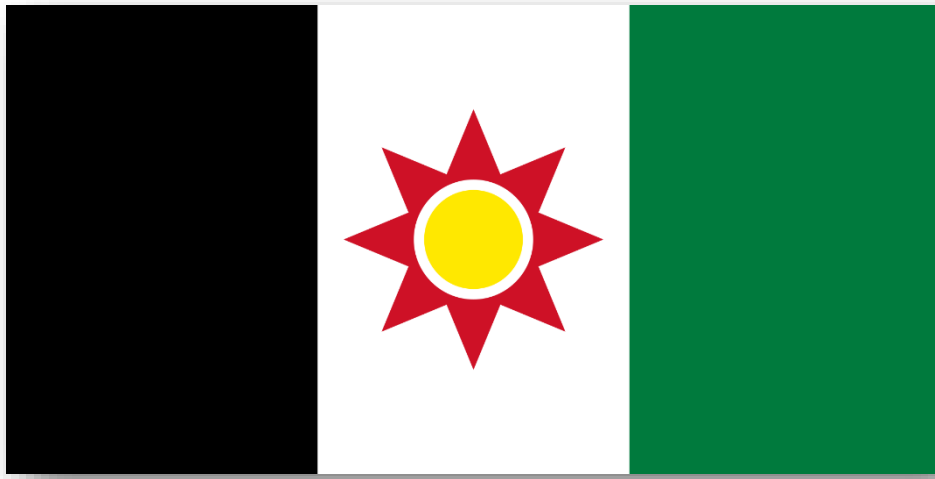


Figure 3.1 – The national flag of the Republic of Iraq (1959-63). <sup>110</sup>

#### Iraqi Republican Flag Semiotics (1959-1963)

This section considers the intersection of Mesopotamian identity with Iraqi notions of Arabness and Kurdishness. Though the banner’s color convention evoked Arabs (black, white, green, and red) and Kurds (yellow), its Mesopotamian elements require in-depth analysis. The Republican flag’s semiotics reflected the predicament of post-Hashemite governance. Iraqi national symbols needed to unmoor from Hashemite memory to better communicate Qasim’s centralization of state authority. On the justification of the Free Officers’ actions, Michael Eppel explained, “...the social transformation vital to the survival of Iraq and its extrication from the swamp of

<sup>110</sup> Orzetto, *Flag of Iraq*, digital facsimile, Wiki Commons, accessed March 27, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi\\_Republic\\_\(1958%E2%80%931963\)#/media/File:Flag\\_of\\_Iraq\\_\(1959%E2%80%931963\).svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iraqi_Republic_(1958%E2%80%931963)#/media/File:Flag_of_Iraq_(1959%E2%80%931963).svg).

backwardness could not be accomplished from within the regime.”<sup>111</sup> Therefore, to message a unitary and forward-looking Iraq, the junta modified national vexillography, maintaining desirable elements of Arab identity while redoubling representations of ethnic unity. In addition to its nationalist color scheme, the Mesopotamian icon was an attempt to triangulate diverse ethnicities into a historicized and pre-Islamic framework.

As with the Hashemites, the Free Officers struggled to maintain a balance between Arab preeminence and the integration of ethno-confessional subgroups. In 1958, the mere elimination of the Hashemite monarchy and its vestigial colonialism was insufficient to answer more profound questions about Iraqiness. In effect, Qasim needed to maneuver a diverse population between two civic orientations, *watanī* and *qawmī*, competing versions of nationalism with profound implications.<sup>112</sup> The Pan-Arabism or *qawmiyya*, of the 1950s and 1960s existed in a broader context of a global movement towards non-alignment during the Cold War.<sup>113</sup> While Third Worldism and other radical ideologies persisted in Iraq during this period, Qasim feared Pan-Arabist inclinations would embolden Nasser.<sup>114</sup> Qasim favored the opposite nationalist orientation, *watanī*, stressing a broader patriotism centered upon the geographic limitations of Iraq.

A rejection of Pan-Arabism did not guarantee the acquiescence of ethno-confessional minorities. The significant Kurdish, Assyrian, and Turkmen populations around Mosul resisted integration into mainstream Iraqi society. Thirty-two years following the Treaty of Ankara (1926), the assimilation of ethnic minorities still overshadowed domestic policy. The issue was

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<sup>111</sup> Eppel, *Iraq from Monarch to Tyranny*, 149.

<sup>112</sup> Orit Bashkin, “Hybrid Nationalism: Watanī and Qawmī Vision in Iraq under ‘Abd al-Karim Qasim, 1958-61,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43, no. 2 (May 2011): 293 – 312.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*



explicitly addressed throughout the 1958 Interim Constitution in several articles relating to Arab-Kurdish relations, touting their partnership while reiterating the centrality of Iraqi Arabs.<sup>115</sup> The document stated in part, “The Iraqi structural is based on cooperation of principles between its citizens and respecting their rights and maintaining their freedom. Arabs and Kurds are considered partners in this country w[h]ere the constitution will state their nation rights under Arab unity.”<sup>116</sup> This constitutional element was intended to dampen inclinations towards Kurdish semi-autonomy, a sticking point that resulted in the First Iraqi-Kurdish War (1961-70). The conflict outlasted the Free Officers and preset the conditions for further violence in Northern Iraq, something antithetical to nationalization efforts after 1958.<sup>117</sup>

Though its efforts proved futile, the Qasim regime marked the first instance of an Iraqi government’s attempt to engender a deeper Mesopotamian identity through vexillography.<sup>118</sup> The Free Officers’ fabrication, an eight-pointed star and disk, evoked the celestial motifs popular in Babylonian carvings. Familiar during the Kassite dynasty (c. 1531 – 1155 BCE), *kudurru* were polished oblong stones used to adjudicate the boundaries and land grants of Babylonian rulers.<sup>119</sup> The stones were oftentimes embossed with Mesopotamian deities’ icons implying divine endorsement of terrestrial governance.<sup>120</sup> For example, the uppermost panel of the *Kudurru of King Melishipak II* (Figure 3.2) featured, “The crescent of Sin, the moon god, and the star set with the rays of Shamash, the sun god, flank the goddess Ishtar, represented by the

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<sup>115</sup> *Interim Constitution*, Baghdad: The Republic of Iraq, 1958, article 3.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Ismet Sheriff Vanly, “Kurdistan in Iraq,” in *A People without a Country: Kurds and Kurdistan* (New York: Olive Branch Press 1993, 149-153.

<sup>118</sup> Amatzia Baram, “Mesopotamian Identity in Ba’thi Iraq,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 19, no. 4 (Oct., 1983): 426-455.

<sup>119</sup> Zainab Bahrani, “The Babylonian Visual Image,” in *The Babylonian World* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 162.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

planet Venus.”<sup>121</sup> Both Shamash and Ishtar were represented by eight-pointed figures throughout Mesopotamian artwork, though the goddess’ icon was oftentimes encircled to better resemble Venus. Whether this represented a flexible association of celestial bodies between Shamash and Ishtar is unclear since the latter had a strong association with Venus.<sup>122</sup> In 1959, the specifics of the Mesopotamian pantheon were superfluous as Iraqi iconography only needed a thin association with an imagined past.



Figure 3.2 – Comparison of the Kudurru of King Meli-shipak II (c. 1186-1172 BCE) and the Kudurru of Nebuchadnezzar I (c. 1125 – 1104 BCE).<sup>123</sup>

<sup>121</sup> “*Kudurru of King Melishipak II*, limestone stele, 1186-1172 BCE, Louvre Museum, accessed March 31, 2020, <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/kudurru-king-melishipak-ii>.

<sup>122</sup> Irene E. Toyne, “Ancient History and Worship of the Planet Venus,” *Popular Astronomy* 17, (February 1909): 80-84. There seems to be a stronger association with Ishtar in contemporary depictions of the Mesopotamian pantheon, with the so-called “Star of Ishtar” depicted without an enclosing circle. This sidelines other prominent members like Marduk, the patron of Babylon.

<sup>123</sup> *Kudurru of King Melishipak II*, limestone stele, 1186-1172 BCE, Louvre Museum, accessed March 31, 2020, <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/kudurru-king-melishipak-ii>. *Kudurru of Nebuchadnezzar I*, limestone stele, 1125 – 1104 BCE, The British Museum, accessed April 4, 2020,

Like Romulus and Remus' mythic founding of Rome in 750 BCE, of which fifteenth-century Byzantines could dwell in imagined continuity, the Free Officers' implication was not literally true.<sup>124</sup> Instead, it was a nationalist advertising campaign endeavoring to influence a diverse population to adopt a new, transhistorical identity rooted in old Mesopotamia. The situation of a twentieth-century national mythos within an ancient milieu required Iraqis to assume a metaphysical relationship with pre-Islamic peoples of yore. To remain consistent with Qasim's tendency towards *wataniya*, the state employed a palatable iconography on its flag, one drawn from a limited pool of neutral symbols with plausible historicity. Outwardly, Republican vexillography needed to reject Pan-Arabism while broadcasting Iraqi neutrality towards regional and global powers.<sup>125</sup> This semiotic neutrality was also disseminated inwardly; by employing an innocuous Mesopotamian icon, the Republican flag implied a universal in-group suitable for all Iraqis regardless of ethnic or confessional identity.

The conceptual semiotic model outlined in Table 3.1 illustrates the gradation of potential Iraqi identities the Republican flag messaged. While it considers coterminous Arab, Mesopotamian, and Kurdish identities, other Iraqi subnational components such as Assyrians or Turkmen are analyzable. Zones A, B, F, and G refers to Iraqi Arabs who subscribed to varying degrees of non-Arab identity. For example, Zone A describes those Arabs uninterested in the Free Officers' egalitarian vision, while Zone B were those Iraqis holding opposite views. Kurds in Zones D, E, F, and G represent varying degrees of non-Kurdish self-conceptualization to

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[https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?images=true&objectId=369364&partId=1](https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?images=true&objectId=369364&partId=1).

<sup>124</sup> Ioannis Stouraitis, "Roman Identity in Byzantium: a Critical Approach," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 107, no. 1 (2014): 175 - 220.

<sup>125</sup> Bashkin, "Hybrid Nationalism," 295.

include persons of mixed ethnicity or perhaps Kurds living in Arab provinces.<sup>126</sup> Zones B, C, D, and G show Iraqis professing a predominantly Mesopotamian lineage regardless of their ethnic identities before 1959. Since Mesopotamian identity was a product of twentieth-century Iraqi nationalism it seems improbable many embraced this category. Under Saddam Hussein, the Ba’thi government undertook a robust program of Mesopotamianization which dwarfed the Free Officers’ vexillographic offering.<sup>127</sup> If anything, Iraqis which front-loaded a pre-Islamic identity were Assyrians, an indigenous ethnicity rooted in ancient Mesopotamia who needed no reminder of Iraq’s remote past.<sup>128</sup>

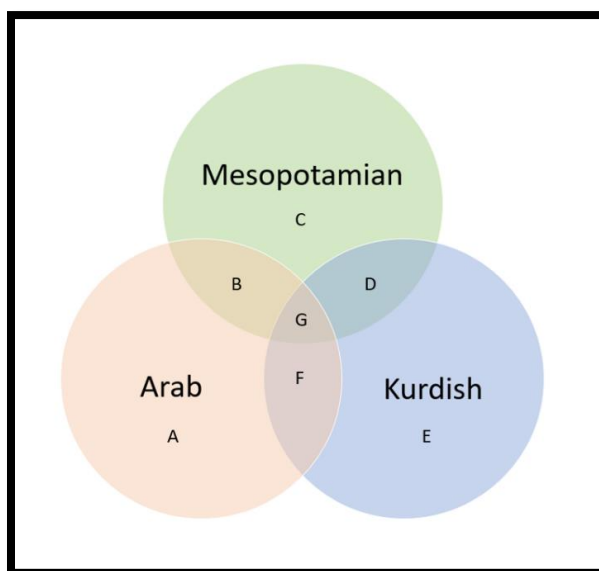


Table 3.1 – Conceptual semiotic model of potential Iraqi identities messaged under the Republican flag (c. 1959 – 1963).

<sup>126</sup> Jennifer Roy and Ali Fadhil, *Playing Atari with Saddam Hussein* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018). The novel features an Iraqi family of mixed Arab/Kurdish ethnicity surviving the Gulf War in 1991 near Basra. The family has a comfortable live and even mixes socially with Ba’thi elites. It is based on Ali Fadhil’s childhood and does not hinge on his ethnicity. Rather than Kurds residing in Iraq, they were Iraqis who happen to be Kurds.

<sup>127</sup> Amatzia Baram, “Mesopotamian Identity in Ba’thi Iraq.”

<sup>128</sup> *Historical Dictionary of Iraq*, s.v., “Assyrians.”

### Description of Iraqi Heraldry (1959 – 1963)

Like its vexillography, Iraqi heraldry under the Free Officers communicated a rejection of Hashemite authority in 1958. Though less ostentatious than its predecessor, the Free Officers' arms revisited comparable themes of Iraqiness dating from the 1930s. Under legislation passed in 1959, the "Emblem of the Iraq Republic" was described as:

The Emblem of the Iraqi Republic shall consist of a circle from which eight beams diffuse. Each beam consists of three stretchings, the colour of golden yellow. Between every two beams a deep red projection of a star emerges. Amidst th[at] circle a blue area exists. In the centre of which there is a golden spike surrounded by a black wheel with eight rectangular projections at the inner side, encircled by a white ring that extends till the black circumference. In the middle of this white ring there is an Arabic sword that embraces the wheel at the left hand-side, and a Kurdish dagger that embraces it at the right hand-side. Between their two tops the phrase 'THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ' shall be written in Kufi writing, and between their hilts there is written the phrase 'JULY 14' and '1958' underneath, in Kufi writing, too. The colour of the sword, the dagger and the Kufi writing is black.<sup>129</sup>

In addition to removing its British-backed monarchy, Baghdad's remake of its national arms was a criticism of European-inspired heraldry and a turn towards socialist iconography. Decorated with Mesopotamian symbols, Iraqi arms under the Free Officers complemented the imagined pre-Islamic identity of the Republican flag. Rather than reiterate this aspect of Iraqi *wataniya*, this section focuses on modern symbols embedded in Iraqi heraldry from 1959 to the Ba'thi ascendancy during 1963.

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<sup>129</sup> Peter Symes, "The First Banknotes of the Central Bank of Iraq," PJ Symes, accessed April 6, 2020, <http://www.pjsymes.com.au/articles/CBI-First.htm>.



Figure 3.3 – National arms of the Republic of Iraq (c 1959 – 1963).<sup>130</sup>

Beyond the eight-pointed sunbursts of Shamash, the remaining symbols represented a range of conventions employed on national heraldry throughout history and without a distinctly Iraqi provenance. As in Hashemite heraldry, the escutcheon featured dual melee weapons, though the Free Officers' revision imparted Arab and Kurdish symbolism on its blades. These weapons replaced the dual seven-pointed stars stipulated in 1925 under the Organic Law and which culminated in the 1931 release of the Hashemite achievement of arms.<sup>131</sup> While not officially sanctioned through legislation, the wheat and cogwheel represented Iraqi industry and

<sup>130</sup> *Iraq 4*, digital facsimile, Heraldry of the World, database, accessed April 7, 2020 <https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/heraldrywiki/index.php?title=File:Iraq4.jpg>.

<sup>131</sup> *Iraq Government Gazette* 28, June 7, 1931.

agricultural abundance.<sup>132</sup> Iraq's economy transitioned from agriculture to oil extraction decades before the Abd al-Karim Qasim seized control, receiving its initial royalty in 1927.<sup>133</sup> Finally, the national motto and commemorative date surrounding the escutcheon memorialized the Free Officers' coup (July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1958) and the country's official name, the Republic of Iraq, *al-jumhūryya al-iraqiyya*.<sup>134</sup>

### Semiotics of Iraqi Heraldry (1959 – 1963)

This section considers the semiotics of Iraq's short-lived heraldry under Qasim's government from its creation in 1959 to replacement in 1963. If its armorial representations were mild reconfigurations of Hashemite arms, what was the purpose of the Free Officers' remake of Iraqi national iconography? There were two messages Iraqi heraldry conveyed after the monarchy's downfall in 1958. Since the Free Offices envisioned a burgeoning stability following their July 14<sup>th</sup> Revolution, the first notion communicated on the Republican arms was the consolidation of state authority, administration, and governance.<sup>135</sup> Second, Abd al-Karim Qasim transmitted an aspirational message concerning economic equality and justice, a common theme in twentieth-century socialist heraldry. The Free Officers' arms communicated that Iraq would mature and flourish under Qasim and an ascendant *watanīya*.

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<sup>132</sup> Symes, "The First Banknotes of the Central Bank of Iraq." In the legislation the wheat is described as a "golden spike."

<sup>133</sup> Abbas Alnasrawi, *The Economy of Iraq: Oil, Wars, Destruction of Development and Prospects, 1950 -2010*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 17.

<sup>134</sup> Symes, "The First Banknotes of the Central Bank of Iraq."

<sup>135</sup> Avshalom H. Rubin, "Abd al-Karim Qasim and the Kurds of Iraq: Centralization, Resistance and Revolt, 1958–63," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 3 (May 2007): 352-382.

The insurgent Free Officers were instantly transformed into incumbents when the ancien régime was toppled in 1958. Previous military dictators, Bakr Sidqi (1936) and Rashid Ali (1941), maintained the monarchy and kept Iraqi iconography intact.<sup>136</sup> In both examples, Hashemite ministers regained control of Iraq and initiated a restoration, something impossible after Faisal II's death. Though Abd al-Karim Qasim and the Free Officers toppled the Hashemites, their rule required consolidation; the interim constitution, national flag, and revamped heraldry were designed to assist the concentration of power in Baghdad.<sup>137</sup> The new regime had numerous enemies within Iraq, including unruly Kurds, conspiratorial Ba'thi, and former Hashemite loyalists infuriated by Faisal's regicide. Sixty years later, one courtier considered the incident in light of other turbulent Iraqi regimes, "There is a big difference between yesterday and today - in terms of the security we had but also in terms of ethics, honour and leadership. All of the horrors of the coup are a black spot on Iraq's history."<sup>138</sup> To consolidate its gains, the Free Officers needed all Iraqis to understand the termination of the Hashemite state, the inauguration of a new republic, and Qasim's plenipotentiary power.

Many Republican symbols rehashed values and messages communicated under Hashemite authority. In several cases, the 1959 model employed facsimiles of its predecessor's symbolism, substituting the Free Officers' motto and commemorative date around the escutcheon.<sup>139</sup> Figure 3.4 highlights this changeover; "The Republic of Iraq" (*al-jumhūriyya al-iraqiyya*) replaced the previous slogan "justice is the foundation of property" (*al-adlu asa'ul*

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<sup>136</sup> Ashley Jackson, *Persian Gulf Command: A History of the Second World War in Iran and Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 45-65.

<sup>137</sup> The consolidation of power under Qasim extended into ordinary facets of Iraqi life. While state emblem appeared on Iraqi postage stamps after 1959, the strongman's image soon appeared on numerous stamps, an honor previously reserved for the Hashemite kings and never their prime ministers.

<sup>138</sup> Mohammad al-Zaidi, "The Last Iraqi King's Driver: His Death Remains 'A Black Spot On Iraqi History,'" Niqash, blog, accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.niqash.org/en/articles/society/5955>.

<sup>139</sup> *Iraq Government Gazette* 28, June 7, 1931



*mulk*). The panel bearing “14 July 1958” (١٤ تممؤز ١٩٥٨) replaced the previous *hijiri* date of Faisal I’s coronation “1339” (١٣٣٩), a switcheroo loaded with republican meaning. By proclaiming the Republic of Iraq was founded in 1958, the Free Officers memorialized the downfall of the monarchy and nullified the events of the previous decades. The replacement slogan cemented the official nomenclature of Iraqi republicanism, and the motto *al-jumhūryyia al-iraqiyya* is maintained into the present, one of a handful of lasting contributions to Iraqi iconography dating to 1959.<sup>140</sup>

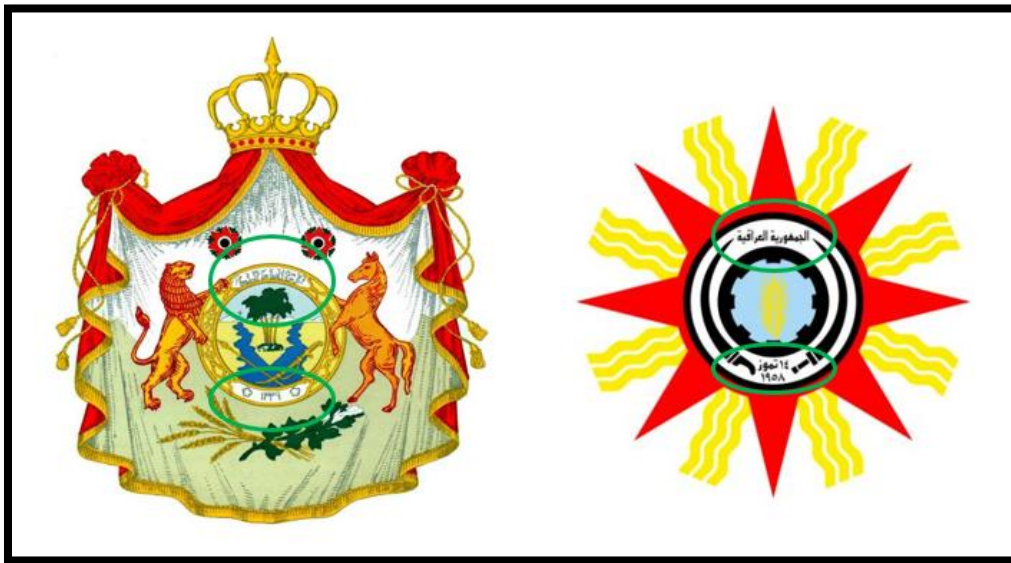


Figure 3.4 – A comparison of commemorative dates and mottos on Iraqi heraldry between the Free Officer and the Hashemite regimes (c. 1931 – 1963).

The Republican arms also employed socialist symbols common throughout twentieth-century postcolonial and Soviet-aligned heraldry. This was a troublesome design choice as Qasim objected to establishing a partnership with left-leaning intellectuals, the Iraqi Communist

<sup>140</sup> While the motto “*al-jumhūryyia al-iraqiyya*” was included on subsequent arms, the 1958 date was omitted.

Party (ICP), and Moscow.<sup>141</sup> Figure 3.5 highlights additional socialist arms, including the Mongolian People's Republic, Laos, Angola, the Hungarian People's Republic, and the German Democratic Republic. These emblems often featured five-pointed stars and symbols of bountiful agriculture and industry. Farming implements, subsistence crops, hammers, and cogwheels were common motifs throughout the twentieth century; the well-known hammer and sickle of the Soviet Union was a salient example.<sup>142</sup> Whether the sunburst of Shamash intentionally emulated communist star symbolism is unclear. Though the Mesopotamian iconography was disproportionate to contemporary socialist designs, the sunburst shared a communist (red and gold) color scheme.<sup>143</sup>

That Iraqi arms lacked an unambiguous communist flair reflected Abd al-Karim Qasim's ambitions of diplomatic neutrality. Having rejected colonialism, the Free Officers were uninterested in close relations with Moscow or encouraging home-grown radicals.<sup>144</sup> Though Qasim earlier adopted a friendly relationship with the ICP, the relationship soured, and Iraq's generalissimo sought to affect the image of the republic's indispensable leader.<sup>145</sup> Therefore, the Republican arms reflected Qasim's objective of consolidating power without foreign interference.<sup>146</sup> Without a clear connection to global communism, the heraldic devices were platitudes to ensure Iraqis understood the regime respected its working class, whether they toiled as farmers or roughnecks. Hence, the official stance that the sunburst meant, "The liberty, which

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<sup>141</sup> Johan Franzén, *Red Star Over Iraq: Iraqi Communism Before Saddam* (London: Hurst and Company, 2011), 92 - 96.

<sup>142</sup> Neubecker, *Heraldry*, 220. Neubecker analyzed Soviet military medals including a postwar painting of Georgy Zhukov resplendent in star-shaped Soviet military medals.

<sup>143</sup> Sarah Klein, "Interview with Gerd Koenen – The Fading of a Political Color," Goethe Institut, accessed April 9, 2020, <https://www.goethe.de/en/kul/ges/eu2/kar/21254970.html>.

<sup>144</sup> Franzén, *Red Star Over Iraq*, 92 – 96.

<sup>145</sup> Roby Barrett, "Intervention in Iraq, 1958-1959," Middle East Institute, April 1, 2008, <https://mei.edu/publications/intervention-iraq-1958-1959>.

<sup>146</sup> Eppel, *Iraq from Monarch to Tyranny*, 152 – 156.

Iraq regained by the July 14 Revolution by the time of sunrise,” from a semiotic, diplomatic, and archaeological standpoint was untrue.<sup>147</sup>



Figure 3.5 – Assorted twentieth-century socialist heraldry. Top row (from left to right): People’s Republic of Mongolia (1960 – 92), Laos (1992 – Pres.), and Angola (1992 – Pres.). Bottom row (from left to right): The Republic of Iraq (1959-63), Hungarian People’s Republic (1949 – 56), German Democratic Republic (1955 -90).<sup>148</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Symes, “The First Banknotes of the Central Bank of Iraq.”

<sup>148</sup> “Mongolia” Heraldry of the World, database, accessed April 11, 2020, <https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/heraldrywiki/index.php?title=Mongolia>. “Laos,” Heraldry of the World, database, accessed April 11, 2020, <https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/heraldrywiki/index.php?title=Laos>. “Angola,” Heraldry of the World, database, accessed April 11, 2020, [https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/heraldrywiki/index.php?title=National\\_Arms\\_of\\_Angola](https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/heraldrywiki/index.php?title=National_Arms_of_Angola). Thommy, *Coat of Arms of Hungary 1949 – 56*, digital facsimile, WikiCommons, accessed April 11, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coat\\_of\\_arms\\_of\\_Hungary#/media/File:Coat\\_of\\_arms\\_of\\_Hungary\\_\(1949-1956\).svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coat_of_arms_of_Hungary#/media/File:Coat_of_arms_of_Hungary_(1949-1956).svg). Fritz Alfred Behrendt, *Emblem of the German Democratic Republic*, WikiCommons, accessed April 11, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist\\_heraldry#/media/File:State\\_arms\\_of\\_German\\_Democratic\\_Republic.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_heraldry#/media/File:State_arms_of_German_Democratic_Republic.svg).

### Iraqi Republican Vexillology (1963 – 2003)

The Ramadan Revolution in February 1963 marked Iraq's pivot towards the Ba'th Party and greater engagement in regional politics.<sup>149</sup> During the uprising Qasim was captured and murdered by Ba'thi rebels following numerous firefights throughout the capital between government forces and insurgents. The cornerstone of Abd al-Karim Qasim's governance, diplomatic neutrality and a centralized power base in Baghdad was abandoned.<sup>150</sup> After the Ramadan Revolution, a junta under General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr and other Ba'th Party notables endeavored to unite Iraq, Syria, and Egypt under a resurrected United Arab Republic (UAR).<sup>151</sup> In anticipation of an eventual unification, Iraq adopted a uniform vexillography grounded in Egyptian design.<sup>152</sup> Iraq's fourth national banner replaced the Republican flag, though Ba'thi ascendancy was thwarted in November 1963 and forced underground. The Free Officers returned under the leadership of the Arif brothers, Abdul Salam (1963-66) and Abdul Rahman (1966 - 68), both admirers of Nasser and Pan-Arabism. Since its overall political orientation remained unchanged, Iraq's 1963 vexillography persisted, extending beyond 1968 when the Ba'th Party regained control.<sup>153</sup>

The design change represented a return to a conventional flag pattern and remained a staple of Arab vexillography from the 1950s onward.<sup>154</sup> The flag's aspect ratio returned to its pre-Mandate proportions (1:2), increasing to 2:3, a dimension that remains into the present on the Iraqi, Syrian, and Egyptian flags. In an admission that Kurdish peace remained elusive, the

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<sup>149</sup> Eppel, *Iraq from Monarch to Tyranny*, 204 – 208.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>151</sup> Zoltán Horváth, "Evolution of the Iraqi Flag," *Flags of the World*, database, accessed April 10, 2020, [https://fotw.info/flags/iq\\_evol.html](https://fotw.info/flags/iq_evol.html)

<sup>152</sup> Ian MacDonald, "Egypt as United Arab Republic (1958-1972)," *Flags of the World*, database, accessed April 10, 2020, <https://fotw.info/flags/eg-uar.html>.

<sup>153</sup> Horváth, "Evolution of the Iraqi Flag."

<sup>154</sup> Podeh, "The Symbolism of the Arab Flag in Modern Arab States," 426 – 431.

second Republican flag eliminated yellow from its palette, returning to an Arab Revolt tricolor (red, white, and black). There was a trio of green five-pointed stars in the central (white) panel, each symbolizing a constituent subcomponent of the defunct United Arab Republic. Though the three republics never merged, the stars remained on Iraq's flag and their symbolism was reimagined from the transnationalism to the three precepts of the Ba'th Party: unity, freedom, and socialism.<sup>155</sup> The Iraqi flag remained in this configuration until 1991, employed for twenty-seven years without a modification, and became the second longest-serving flag after the banner stipulated by the Organic Law in 1925.



Figure 3.6 – Iraqi Republican flag (1963 – 1991).<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Peter Smith, “Iraq’s Flag Redesign Erases One of the Last Public Symbols of the Hussein Regime,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 23, 2008.

<sup>156</sup> Horváth, “Evolution of the Iraqi Flag.”



Figure 3.7 – Iraqi flag with *takbir* in Saddam Hussein’s handwriting.<sup>157</sup>

In 1991 the Iraqi flag underwent another essential modification, the addition of the *takbir* of Islam, *allahu akbar*, written in Saddam Hussein’s handwriting. The change occurred on the eve of the Gulf War, in what Saddam called “the Mother of All Battles.”<sup>158</sup> While Hussein was an observant Muslim, under his rulership, the republic was predominantly secular and refrained from pursuing a religious agenda until 1991. Throughout the Islamicate world, most national flags eschew religious slogans, notable acceptations including Saudi Arabia and Somaliland. Regardless of confessional identity, there are vexillological reasons to keep phrases off a national flag relating to identifiability. According to vexillologist Ted Kaye, “A flag is a graphic symbol. Lettering is nearly impossible to read from a distance, hard to sew, and difficult to reduce to

<sup>157</sup> Lauris Kaplinski, Former Iraqi Flag, digital facsimile, Openclipart, accessed April 10, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag\\_of\\_Iraq#/media/File:Flag\\_of\\_Iraq\\_\(1991%E2%80%932004\).sv](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_of_Iraq#/media/File:Flag_of_Iraq_(1991%E2%80%932004).sv).

<sup>158</sup> Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi, *Saddam Hussein: A Political Biography*, New York: The Free Press, 1991, chap. 11.

lapel-pin size.”<sup>159</sup> In the 1991 example, Hussein wanted to communicate an imperiled Iraq, one needing divine assistance against an overwhelming military response to Kuwait’s invasion. Though the *takbir* contained a profound religious connotation, its addition to the Iraqi was more public relations than piety.

### Iraqi Republican Flag Semiotics (1963 – 2003)

The meaning of the Iraqi flag evolved during this period, corresponding to increasing levels of sacrifice and discomfort for Iraqis. When the Ba’thi militia overthrew the Free Officers in 1963, the ensuing diplomatic reorientation undertaken by Iraq and its attempted entrance into the United Arab Republic marked its emergence onto the world stage. In previous decades, Iraq was either sheltered under an umbrella of British military might or committed to non-alignment under Qassim. In redesigning its flag along Egyptian lines, Baghdad communicated a willingness to identify with republics of ethnic affiliation. During the late-twentieth century, Iraq advanced its self-conceptualization beyond membership to preeminence, as it tackled the “Persian Menace” of Iran, ostensibly to protect all Arabs. In the decade following the downfall of the Ba’th Party, some Iraqis recalled with pride the overwhelming casualties its military forces incurred throughout the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) and the Gulf War (1991).<sup>160</sup> Yet crippling sanctions and an unstable geostrategic climate after 9/11 forced Iraq into another confrontation with the United States.

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<sup>159</sup> Ted Kaye, *Good Flag, Bad Flag: How to Design a Great Flag* (Boston: North American Vexillological Association, 2010), 4.

<sup>160</sup> Dean Yeats, “Discontent in Iraq Over New National Flag,” Reuters, January 26, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-flag/discontent-in-iraq-over-new-national-flag-idUSL2662290320080126?sp=true>.

The notion of *watanīya*, whether Iraqiness was a matter of association between persons of shared civic identity, was distressed after 1963. Ironically, it was armed Kurdish resistance to Qasim's nationalism, which permitted his overthrow. While the army was committed in the First Iraqi-Kurdish War (1961-70), the Ba'thi uprising took advantage of a diminished military presence around Baghdad.<sup>161</sup> The two events were not coordinated but highlighted the precarious position *wataniya* nationalism placed Iraq. Baghdad was simultaneously transitioning to a Pan-Arab diplomatic stance while attempting to engender patriotism by force.<sup>162</sup> The war shattered hopes of civic nationalism, and a peace settlement in 1970 created a semiautonomous Kurdistan, codified in another interim constitution. Article 5 read "(a) Iraq is a part of the Arab Nation. (b) The Iraqi People are composed of two principal nationalisms: the Arab Nationalism and the Kurdish Nationalism."<sup>163</sup> Though the Ba'thi government was uninterested in ethnic supremacy, its vexillography mirrored the genuineness of divisions between Arabs and Kurds.

The association of Arabness with the Iraqi state reached its zenith during the 1980s. Though Iraqi vexillography was unchanged during this decade, national identity was transformed through a violent confrontation with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Mobilizing ten percent of the prewar male population, the Iran-Iraq War exposed Iraqi troops to tremendous casualties with 200,000 killed, 400,000 wounded, and 70,000 taken prisoner.<sup>164</sup> The war and Ba'thi nationalism became commingled as Dina Rizk Khoury explained:

The war experience and its meaning became the cornerstone of the Iraqi state's attempts to transform the Iraqi self, particularly, the male self. Attempts at shaping the public culture of heroism and manliness and of death and mourning were regulated in

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<sup>161</sup> Eppel, *Iraq from Monarch to Tyranny*, 204-210.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 185-192.

<sup>163</sup> *Interim Constitution of Iraq*, Baghdad, 1970.

<sup>164</sup> Rob Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 10. For casualty figures see, Efraim Karsh, *The Iran Iraq-War, 1980-1988* (Oxford: UK, Osprey Publishing, 2002), 89.



incorporating war celebrations with commemoration rituals under the purview of neighborhood party officials.<sup>165</sup>

If the Ba’th Party existed to advance the interests and prosperity of Arabs, then the Iran-Iraq War and its attendant symbolism were expressions of Pan-Arabism in wartime. Saddam Hussein and the Ba’th Party, therefore, assigned an anti-Persian meaning to the endurance of its soldiers on Iranian and Iraqi battlefields. While this propaganda effort perhaps had limited effectiveness, the Iranian bombardment of Iraqi cities and Tehran’s instigation of a Kurdish insurgency only reinforced the thesis.<sup>166</sup>

Saddam harbored these views for decades, expounding upon his opinions during prolonged interrogations by the Central Intelligence Agency after his capture by American forces in 2003.<sup>167</sup> John Nixon, one of Hussein’s numerous interrogators later recalled, “Saddam truly saw himself as the guardian of Arab against the Persian menace. Because of this, he said, the world saw Iraqis as the “most noble people.”<sup>168</sup> Another interrogation session included a litany of 548 acts of war Iran committed before to 1980, in which Saddam recited from memory.<sup>169</sup> To the Ba’th Party behind the lines, the 200,000 fatalities were martyrs, *shaheed* of Iranian belligerence, and worthy of epic memorialization. The nexus of the Iran-Iraq War, remembrance, and vexillology met during the 1983 unveiling of the *Shaheed Monument* complex. It consisted of “...a circular platform, 190 meters in diameter, floating over an underground museum and carrying a 40-metre high split dome.”<sup>170</sup> In the center of the monument resided an enormous

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<sup>165</sup> Dina Rizk Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 9.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-92.

<sup>167</sup> John Nixon, *Debriefing the President* (New York: Blue Rider Press, 2016), 96.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>170</sup> Samir al-Khalil, *The Monument: Art, Vulgarity and Responsibility in Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 23.

Iraqi flag, rendered in twisted metal and intimating the union of sacrifice and state. Though anti-Iranian sentiments evolved since 1988, the memorial remains into the present, a palimpsest with successive iterations of the national flag repainted after 1991, 2004, and 2008.<sup>171</sup>

The Iran-Iraq War crippled Iraq's economy and was a direct contribution to Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.<sup>172</sup> Before the encounter, Baghdad leveled a bevy of accusations against Kuwait, including oil market manipulation and unscrupulous sovereign debt practices.<sup>173</sup> The 1990 conquest and occupation of Kuwait provoked a massive deployment of international troops under the leadership of United States president George Bush. Days before the allied assault, Bush wrote to Saddam attempting to stimulate an Iraqi retreat and said in part, "That most Arab and Muslim countries are arrayed against you as well should reinforce what I am saying. Iraq cannot and will not be able to hold on to Kuwait or exact a price for leaving."<sup>174</sup> In electing to add the *takbir* (God is Great) to the Iraqi flag in January 1991, Saddam reimagined the invasion of Kuwait along religious lines, to communicate to the Arab and Muslim states Bush referenced. In his wartime speech, "The Mother of all Battles," Hussein vocalized this sentiment as, "We in Iraq will be the faithful and obedient servants of God, struggling for his sake to raise the banner of truth and justice, the banner of "God is Great." Accursed be the lowly."<sup>175</sup> This last-minute declaration of public piety was confusing as Saddam Hussein spent much of his administration suppressing religious factions inside Iraq. John Esposito pointed out this

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<sup>171</sup> The notion of the Shaheed Monument as a palimpsest is attributed to my advisor on this project, Professor Peter Wien.

<sup>172</sup> Walid Khalidi, "Iraq vs. Kuwait: Claims and Counterclaims," in *The Gulf War Reader: History, Documents, Opinions*, New York: Time Books, 1991, 57 – 65.

<sup>173</sup> *Historical Dictionary of Iraq*, s.v., "Kuwait."

<sup>174</sup> George Bush to Saddam Hussein, January 9, 1991, in *The Gulf War Reader*, 179. It is not clear that Saddam Hussein read this letter during the war. It was reported that Iraqi foreign minister Tariq Aziz never delivered the message. Saddam did not need a letter from Bush to inform him of the deep divisions in the Arab world over his 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Both Egypt and Syria supported the US-led coalition providing thousands of troops to the Americans, something unthinkable in 1963.

<sup>175</sup> Saddam Hussein, "The Mother of All Battles," in *The Gulf War Reader*, 315.

inconsistency, noting it was curious that Saddam would "...cloak himself in the mantle of Islam and call for a jihad." <sup>176</sup>

If a legitimate expression of piety was unlikely, what then was the purpose of this midnight hour modification of Iraqi vexillography? By 1988 Iraq, the preeminent military power in the Middle East, incurred hundreds of thousands of casualties checking Iranian power, presumably to the benefit of Gulf states like Kuwait. <sup>177</sup> Saddam wanted a tremendous degree of financial compensation after the Iran-Iraq War, something akin to the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe following World War II. <sup>178</sup> When diplomatic relations with Kuwait soured in 1990, Iraq invaded yet still retained a presupposition of moral superiority. When the blunder of this argument became apparent, Saddam recast the Iraqi military and holy warriors heroically engaging atheistic Westerners and traitorous Arabs. To Saddam, the handwritten *takbir* encapsulated his tenure as a leader and his willingness to gamble with Iraq's future in 1991. Therefore, the *takbir* did not communicate a private confessional message, but was a propagandistic statement highlighting inherent goodness, decency, and selflessness of Iraqis unjustly maligned by duplicitous forces.

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<sup>176</sup> John Esposito, "Islam and the Gulf War," in *The Saddam Hussein Reader*, New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2002, 303.

<sup>177</sup> This is something a conjecture as Israeli military power was similarly potent during this period. While Iraq had a deep bench of battle-tested soldiers and commanders, Israel possessed a professional army and a superior airpower to say nothing of unwavering US support from friendly administrations dating back to the Truman.

<sup>178</sup> Khalidi, "Iraq vs. Kuwait," 60 - 61.



Figure 3.8 – The *Shaheed Monument* in Baghdad (c. 2015).<sup>179</sup>

#### Description of Iraqi Heraldry (1965 – Present)

The heraldry of Iraq from 1965 onward mirrored common themes throughout its vexillology. Similar to the proposed banner of the reconstituted United Arab Republic, its constituents adopted a common armorial representation rooted in Arab history. Beginning in 1965, Iraq abandoned the elaborate pastiche of the Free Officers' design, choosing a streamlined model resembling the national emblems of other republics throughout the world.<sup>180</sup> The arms consisted

<sup>179</sup> Zahraa H. Salih, *Al Shaheed Monument*, digital photography, 2015, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/31190914@N06/17283132924>.

<sup>180</sup> The use of eagles in heraldry has ancient roots, but reached its heyday in modern Europe. See, *Neubecker*, *Heraldry*, 105.

of a single oversized eagle supporter representing Saladin (Salah ad-Din), the twelfth-century Ayyubid sultan linked to Egypt, Syria, and Iraq. On the eagle's breast, a tapered escutcheon portrayed the UAR banner, displayed vertically.<sup>181</sup> To maintain continuity with its vexillography, Iraq updated its heraldic shield after 1991, 2004, and 2008 whenever the flag was modified. Finally, the eagle's claws clutched a scroll bearing the republic's name in Arabic, *al-jumhūryya al-iraqiyya*, a holdover from the Free Officers' arms.



Figure 3.9 – Iraqi national arms under the Ba’th Party (c. 1965 – 1991).<sup>182</sup>

<sup>181</sup> “Iraq,” The Red Lion, database, accessed April 11, 2020, <https://www.hubert-herald.nl/Iraq.htm>.

<sup>182</sup> Knorrepoes, *Iraq 2*, digital facsimile, Heraldry of the World, database, accessed April 11, 2020, <https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/heraldrywiki/index.php?title=File:Iraq2.jpg>.

### Semiotics of Iraqi Heraldry (1965 – Present)

Under the proposed United Arab Republic, a heraldic association with Saladin ensured the broadcastability of a message with maxim plausibility. The eagle's employment as Iraqi political iconography referenced its presence on the Citadel of Cairo, a massive twelfth-century stronghold constructed by Saladin.<sup>183</sup> From a semiotic standpoint, Saladin's biography was ideal for communicating Iraqi identity during this period. He was born in Tikrit, near Saddam Hussein's birthplace, and was ethnically Kurdish, permitting a broader semiotic association. As with its Mesopotamian symbolism, Saladin's eagle theoretically allowed a widespread association with the Ba'th Party. Baghdadi politicians could employ this symbolism as an aspirational icon, comingling Iraq's unruly minority with Arab hero-worship. Like the sunburst of Shamash, the thoughtfulness of a mixed Arab-Kurdish metaphor could not persuade *peshmerga* fighters (uninterested in Iraqi nationalism) to disarm and seek peace with Baghdad.

The inclusion of mythic figures on national arms has a long history. For example, Greek heraldry used Hercules to support its escutcheon from 1864 to 1924; the royal arms of the United Kingdom feature a unicorn (Figure 2.11).<sup>184</sup> The utility of Saladin's eagle was better enjoyed by Iraqi Arabs than Kurds. In making a Kurdish hero the national symbol of Iraq, the Ba'thi government communicated a desire to reconcile the discrepancy of Iraqi and Kurdish nationalism; yet the conflict continued. Therefore, its inability to broadcast anything beyond the Arab-led administration of Iraq was rooted in governance, not symbolism. Today, the point is sidelined by more significant political strife in Iraq. However, the eagle enjoys placement on the

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<sup>183</sup> Nasser O. Rabbat, *The Citadel of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Royal Mameluk Architecture* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 24.

<sup>184</sup> "National Arms of Greece," Heraldry of the World, database, accessed April 11, 2020, [https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/heraldrywiki/index.php?title=National\\_Arms\\_of\\_Greece](https://www.heraldry-wiki.com/heraldrywiki/index.php?title=National_Arms_of_Greece).

heraldry of Egypt and Palestine, two polities also connected with Saladin through Arab governance rather than ethnicity.

### Conclusion

Iraq faced tremendous political transformation during the mid-twentieth century and produced a bevy of national iconography reflecting its conversion from a British-aligned monarchy to an Iraqi republic. The severance of its Hashemite dynasty forced Iraq to confront inconsistencies in its national identity rooted in an unidentifiable placement for its ethnic minorities. This problem was compounded in the absence of clearly understood measures of Iraqiness. In one sense, a broad civic nationalism obliged Iraqi citizens to reconceptualize a sense of belonging around an identity without defined boundaries. National iconography under the Free Officers attempted to circumvent the absence of a historical Iraq by appropriating Mesopotamian imagery associated with Shamash, a sun god. These symbols were employed on both the Republican flag in its central panel and on Iraqi heraldry, mixed with socialist icons.

This trend was short-lived and Iraqi iconography from 1963 onwards referenced Pan-Arabism with slight nods towards Kurdish ethnicity in mild employment of *watanīya*. 1991 and the Gulf War witnessed a dramatic modification of the Iraqi flag, with the addition of *takbir* written in Saddam's handwriting. The declaration of divine supremacy, prevalent in Islam, was repurposed to highlight Iraqi suffering and victimization after the Iran-Iraq War. Iraqi heraldry during this period focused on a metaphysical link to Saladin, which transcended history and permitted Iraqis placement in a Pan-Arabist milieu. With minor revisions, the 1960s observed the final iteration of Iraqi heraldic design and vexillography. Henceforth, modifications to its state symbols were mild reconfigurations that addressed contemporary matters in the Iraqi body politic without deleting its icons. In that the conversation about Iraqiness on visual

representations of state focused on smaller matters such as erasure of the *takbir* and the removal of its stars, questions Iraq tackled in 2004 and 2008.



#### 4. Introduction

This chapter considers modifications to the Iraqi flag during the twenty-first century, beginning with the dissolution of the Ba'th Party in 2003 and ending with the downfall of the Islamic State in 2017. The toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 created a power-vacuum in Baghdad which the Americans filled until a viable Iraqi government was established in 2004. The subsequent Shi'i dominated administration pursued a policy of de-Ba'thification, marginalizing millions of Iraqis in the process. The parliament undertook aggressive means of modifying the national flag to remove vestigial Ba'thi symbolism, meeting roadblocks from Sunnis and failing to overcome the practical limitations of vexillography. In 2004, Iraqis overwhelmingly rejected a unity flag intended to evoke feelings of civic nationalism. Ultimately, the modification process was gradual, taking years to complete. It began with the removal of Saddam Hussein's *takbir* in 2004 and ended with the elimination of Ba'thi stars in 2008.

In 2014, Iraq faced a reinvigorated al-Qaeda, rebranded as the Islamic State and known for its black jihadi banner. The movement sought to unmake Iraq and subsume its identity within a Salafi-aligned supranational entity. Many Iraqis who supported the Islamic State were disaffected provincial Sunnis who rebelled against the Shi'i government in Baghdad. The 2000s witnessed an outbreak of ethno-sectarian violence during the American occupation which tore Iraq apart and undermined presuppositions about its identity. What did it mean to be an Iraqi in the twenty-first century? Two competing versions of Iraq were presented during this period. One proffered that Iraqis should imagine a future where ethnic, sectarian, and confessional distinctions were seemingly erased, but the reins of government were in Shi'i hands. The second version of identity under the Islamic State considered Iraq irredeemably corrupt and requiring

total revision. Between these two extremes, it was difficult to understand the trajectory of Iraqiness and some Sunnis longed for simpler times under Saddam Hussein.<sup>185</sup>

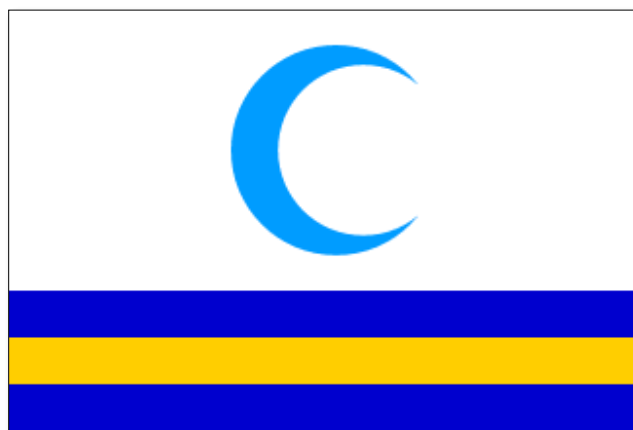


Figure 4.1 – The replacement flag proposed by the Interim Governing Council, designed by Rifat Chaderchi (c. 2004).<sup>186</sup>

#### Iraqi Vexillology (2004 to Present)

Iraqi history took another major turn when the Anglo-American forces toppled Saddam Hussein and the Ba’th Party on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2003.<sup>187</sup> A transitional ruling council was established under the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) headed by US diplomat L. Paul Bremer.<sup>188</sup> The CPA and interim government arranged a host of renovations to Iraqi governance including attempts at a

<sup>185</sup> Jane Arraf, “15 Years After U.S. Invasion, Some Iraqis Are Nostalgic For Saddam Hussein Era,” NPR, April 30, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/04/30/605240844/15-years-after-u-s-invasion-some-iraqis-are-nostalgic-for-saddam-hussein-era>

<sup>186</sup> Pascal Gross, *Iraq: 2004 IGC Proposal*, 2004, Flags of the World, database, accessed April 13, 2020, <https://www.crwflags.com/fotw/flags/iq!04.html>.

<sup>187</sup> John Keegan, *The Iraq War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), 202.

<sup>188</sup> Michael R. Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), chap. 24.

new flag in 2004. During the previous year, Iraq maintained its national vexillography, replete with Saddam Hussein's *takbir*. The inclination to terminate the national flag had numerous champions among American and Iraqi officials interested in separating Iraq from its Ba'thi past.<sup>189</sup> The interim government empowered several Iraqi artists to fabricate a suitable replacement for the tricolor, producing a multitude of flags designs ranging from mild reconfigurations to a complete redesign.<sup>190</sup>

Of the numerous replacement flags proposed in 2004 the most controversial was a unity banner designed by the founder of modern Iraqi architecture, Rifat Chaderchi.<sup>191</sup> Heedless of the longstanding animosity between Iraq and Israel, the Chaderchi design resembled the Zionist national flag, employing a bleached field with an oversized crescent moon. Underneath the icon, Chaderchi placed two ultramarine stipes symbolizing the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and like Free Officers' golden circle in Shamash's sunburst, a yellow strip represented Iraqi Kurds.<sup>192</sup> For his part, Chaderchi maintained his design's innocence insisting his instructions were to "...present Iraq as a Western country and to include references to the past. He said his inspiration was simple flags like those of Canada and Switzerland."<sup>193</sup> Thought the utilization of geographic and minimalist designs is common among modern vexillography, notable examples including The Gambia and Nauru, the project was needlessly audacious.<sup>194</sup> It is unlikely an intellectual of Chaderchi's stature was unaware his project resembled Israel's flag. To further muddy the

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<sup>189</sup> L. Paul Bremer and Malcom McConnell, *My Year in Iraq: The Struggle to Build a Future of Hope* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006), 101.

<sup>190</sup> Ernest Beck and Julie Lasky, "In Iraq, Flag Design, Too, Comes Under Fire," *The New York Times*, April 24, 2004.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Simon Jeffery, "Colouring the Outcome," *The Guardian*, April 27, 2004.

<sup>193</sup> Beck and Lasky, "In Iraq, Flag Design, Too, Comes Under Fire."

<sup>194</sup> Steven A. Knowlton, "Applying Sebeok's Typology of Signs to the Study of Flags," *Raven* 19, (2012): 57-98, 67.

waters, the architect's design circumvented competition against other Iraqi artists due to Chaderchi's brother's position on the interim council.<sup>195</sup>

Though Chaderchi's controversial redesign was rejected, the episode revealed that elements of Iraqi society wanted a national flag without an attachment to Saddam Hussein. A consensus to remove Saddam's handwriting and replace the *takbir* emerged, as members of the interim council expressed discomfort in removing *allahu akbar* on religious grounds. As with the Gulf War modification, the 2004 *takbir* was a minor modification packed with significance. The Islamic proclamation received a makeover in Kufic script, a well-known Abbasid period Arabic calligraphy distinguished by its angular appearance and hailing from Iraq.<sup>196</sup> The Ba'thi three-star pattern, color scheme, and aspect ratio remained in continuity with the 1991 revision. The release of the Kufic-modified flag occurred after the transition of power from the CPA to the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) in June 2004.<sup>197</sup> The planned date was June 30<sup>th</sup>, however, to preempt retaliatory terrorist attacks, the United States granted Iraqi sovereignty two days early on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2004.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Beck and Lasky, "In Iraq, Flag Design, Too, Comes Under Fire."

<sup>196</sup> "An Early Kufic Qur'an," The British Library, accessed April 13, 2020, <https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/kufic-quran>.

<sup>197</sup> "Iraqi Flag Raising Ceremony," C-SPAN, video recording, June 30, 2004, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?182517-1/iraqi-flag-raising-ceremony>. In the ceremony marking national sovereignty held outside the Iraqi embassy in Washington DC, the previous Saddam-era flag was flown. After the previous flag imbroglio, the IGC waited until full sovereignty to tinker with Iraq's flag. The Kufic-modified flag was likely produced during the late-summer of 2004.

<sup>198</sup> George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2010), 359.



Figure 4.2 – Iraqi national flag with Kufic *takbir* (c. 2004).<sup>199</sup>

The Kufic flag remained in service until 2008, when the Iraqi parliament enacted legislation stipulating the removal of the Ba’thi stars. Though a mere four years passed, Iraqi governance underwent a dramatic transformation as political power bases were realigned along ethno-sectarian lines. Under the 2005 constitution, the parliament’s seats were apportioned to previously unrepresented blocs, shifting power away from Sunnis and redirecting it towards Shi’i and Kurdish interests.<sup>200</sup> Article 12 of the constitution stipulated, “The flag, national anthem, and emblem of Iraq shall be regulated by law in a way that symbolizes the components of the Iraqi people.”<sup>201</sup> This impacted vexillography during 2008 when Kurdish politicians pushed for

<sup>199</sup> Pascal Gross and Graham Bartam, *Jumhuriyyat al-'Iraq, The Republic of Iraq*, 2004, digital facsimile, Flags of the World, database, accessed April 13, 2020, <http://fotw.fivestarsflags.com/iq.html>.

<sup>200</sup> *Constitution of Iraq*, 2005. In most cases, the constitution does not specifically reserve parliamentary seats along confession or ethno-sectarian lines. However, the electoral system incentivized gerrymandering and created a parliament roughly cut along these demarcations.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, article 12.

a temporary redesign of the Iraqi national banner resulting a purge of its Ba’thi stars.<sup>202</sup> Sunni political parties such as the National Dialogue Front and the Accordance Front, favored a reimagined meaning of the stars from their Ba’thi connotation (unity, freedom, and socialism) to benign aspirational values.<sup>203</sup> The modification passed without serious opposition, save from a Shi’i bloc dedicated to Moqtada al-Sadr, who sought a postponement until a permanent design was agreed upon.<sup>204</sup>



Figure 4.3 – Iraq’s seventh national flag (c. 2008).<sup>205</sup>

<sup>202</sup> Waleed Ibrahim, “Iraqi Parliament Chooses Temporary Post-Saddam Flag,” Reuters, January 23, 2008, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-flag/iraqi-parliament-chooses-temporary-post-saddam-flag-idUSL2252044920080123>. The urgency around this change stemmed from a planned parliamentary conference in Iraqi Kurdistan later in 2004. The Kurds refused to fly the Iraqi flag and pushed for a temporary replacement flag, which resulted in the 2008 model.

<sup>203</sup> “العلم العراقي الجديد.. بقيت الألوان وحذفت النجوم وتغيير الخط،” (The New Iraqi Flag ... Colors Remained, Stars were Deleted, and the Font Changed), *Al Riyadh*, January 23, 2008, <http://www.alriyadh.com/311262#>.

<sup>204</sup> Ibrahim, “Iraqi Parliament Chooses Temporary Post-Saddam Flag.”

<sup>205</sup> Eugene Ipavec, *Iraq, 2008 -*, digital facsimile, 2008, Flags of the World, database, accessed April 14, 2020, [https://fotw.info/flags/iq\\_evol.html#2004](https://fotw.info/flags/iq_evol.html#2004).

### Semiotics of Iraqi Vexillology (2004 to Present)

The final epoch of Iraqi vexillography faced questions of identity and governance similar in preceding decades. The topping of Saddam Hussein's Ba'thi regime in 2003 opened a Pandora's Box of ethno-sectarian enmity exemplified during the Iraq War (2003-11) and its successor conflict, the Iraqi Civil War (2014-17). During early 2003, the United States initiated a policy of de-Ba'thification where previous members of the ruling party were legally permitted from attaining positions in government. This greatly impacted the 2,000,000 party members and drove a wedge between Sunnis, the CPA, and later the Iraqi government.<sup>206</sup> While decisions about official representations of state were made in Baghdad, questions about Iraqiness were unsettled during a period of near-constant warfare. While civilians were under Iranian bombardment during the 1980s, the levels of the non-combatant casualties from 2003 to 2017 was unprecedented in Iraqi history. During this period over 200,000 civilians perished, adding to hundreds of thousands killed under Saddam Hussein in wars, insurrections, and political violence.<sup>207</sup> The new government altered previous ethno-sectarian arrangements, changing the calculus of Iraqi nationalism. Without Saddam or authoritarian rule, what would Iraqi identity mean in the twenty-first century?

Its controversy notwithstanding, Chaderchi's design presented the first iteration of Iraqi post-Saddam Iraqiness. It was a forward-looking design, hopeful that ethnic unity was within reach following the downfall of the Iraqi strongman. Throughout his career, Chaderchi's architecture consisted of vibrant, modernist designs which triangulated between traditionalist and

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<sup>206</sup> Bremer and McConnell, *My Year in Iraq*, 39 -42.

<sup>207</sup> Iraqi Body Count, database, Conflict Casualties Monitor, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.iraqbodycount.org>. For a rough tabulation of killing under Saddam see, John F. Burns, "The World; How Many People Has Hussein Killed?," *The New York Times*, January 23, 2003.

contemporary values.<sup>208</sup> His vexillography in 2004 shared a commitment to optimism which envisioned an Iraq unencumbered by ethno-confessional turbulence, a neo-*wataniya* harkening back to Iraq's pre-Ba'thi commitment to civic nationalism. Like the Hashemite arms, Chaderchi's flag attempted to communicate an identity based on geographic proximity to ancient waterways. While not intentionally subversive, the Chaderchi design implied an incipient identity which pressed Iraqis beyond their collective comfort-zone during a period a societal upheaval. Additionally, its association with the American-backed interim council tainted his vexillography, ensuring truculence from a broad swath of Iraqis.

In pushing the conversation beyond the boundaries of acceptability, the Chaderchi design set into motion the cornerstone of twenty-first century Iraqi vexillology – the question of Saddam. Of the countless Husseinian images destroyed during de-Ba'thification, Saddam's *takbir* was the most difficult eradicate. Like all iconoclasm, a broken image cannot be destroyed, as the justification of removal is itself a partial recapitulation of the offensive image.<sup>209</sup> Consider the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas by the Taliban in 2001 or the spate of Confederate statue removal in the United States in 2017. In both instances the offensive images' nontertiary were enhanced because of removal efforts, sparking widespread condemnation and controversy.<sup>210</sup> In the case of the *takbir*, Islamic tradition further frustrated official attempts at de-Ba'thification as the memory of Saddam comingled with a declaration of divine supremacy. The Kufic

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<sup>208</sup> Agence France-Presse, "Father of Modern Iraqi Architecture Dies of COVID-19," *The Jakarta Post*, April 12, 2020, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/life/2020/04/12/father-of-modern-iraqi-architecture-dies-of-covid-19.html>.

<sup>209</sup> James Simpson, *Under the Hammer: Iconoclasm in the Anglo-American Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 15.

<sup>210</sup> "Flashback: The Destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan," NBC News, March 6, 2015, <https://www.nbcnews.com/video/flashback-the-destruction-of-the-buddhas-of-bamiyan-409457219869>. Shannon Van Sant, "Judge Blocks Removal Of Confederate Statue That Sparked Charlottesville Protest," NPR, September 19, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/14/760876494/judge-blocks-removal-of-confederate-statue-that-sparked-charlottesville-protest>.



camouflage applied in 2004 was insufficient to calm Kurdish and Shi'i objections towards a continued Husseinian presence on the Iraq flag, hence the modification in 2008.

The removal of the Ba'thi stars in 2008 followed a period a tremendous violence and hardship for Iraqi citizens. The insurgency surpassed its highwater mark in 2007, as violence receded after waves of Iraqi troops, allied Sunni militia, and thousands of American reinforcements fanned into the countryside to overwhelm al-Qaeda strongholds.<sup>211</sup> Regardless of the protestation of Kurdish politicians, the 2008 vexillography occurred when favorable conditions on the battlefield made it politically possible to undertake another act of de-Ba'thification. Though many Sunni militiamen defending Anbar province were angered by the stars' removal, the frustration with Bagdad never came to blows.<sup>212</sup> Throughout Iraq, Sunnis who venerated Hussein made pilgrimages to his elaborate mausoleum in al-Awja, where his gravesite was festooned in the outlawed *takbir* banners, portraiture, and flowers.<sup>213</sup> There Saddam's supporters could mourn the transformation of Iraq in a sacred space disconnected from the nation's deep ethno-sectarian strife. The Iraqi government outlawed pilgrimages in 2009 though it is unclear if this restriction was honored.<sup>214</sup> The mausoleum was destroyed by security forces fighting Islamic State fighters in 2015 and afterwards rumors circulated that Saddam loyalists removed his remains and cached for safekeeping.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> There are numerous monographs about the Surge; for a contemporaneous account see, Linda Robinson, *Tell me How this Ends: General David Petraeus and the Search for a Way out of Iraq* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008).

<sup>212</sup> Leila Fadel and Hussein Kadhim, "Some Sunni Muslims Won't Salute Iraq's New Flag," McClatchy DC, blog, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/world/article24475240.html>.

<sup>213</sup> "Iraq Bans Visits to Saddam's Grave," BBC News, July 7, 2009, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8138166.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8138166.stm)

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> "Saddam Hussein's Tomb Destroyed as Battle for Tikrit Rages," March 16, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/16/saddam-husseins-tomb-destroyed-as-battle-for-tikrit-rages>. "12 years after his death, where is Saddam Hussein's body?," Al Arabiya English, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2018/04/16/12-years-after-his-death-where-is-Saddam-Hussein-s-body->.

### Islamic State Vexillography (2014-2017)

Perhaps the greatest change in Iraqi vexillography occurred in 2014 when the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) conquered enormous tracts of territory in Northern Iraq and Eastern Syria.<sup>216</sup> At its apogee in late 2014, the Islamic State controlled over 45,000 square kilometer area the size of Denmark.<sup>217</sup> The organization was a reconstitution of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) which secreted underground following overwhelming force applied during the Surge.<sup>218</sup> The Islamic State instituted a totalitarian regime rooted in a literal interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence and under the leadership of a self-styled caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.<sup>219</sup> Baghdadi started his career in a Camp Bucca, a massive American detainee facility in 2004 known for indoctrinating inmates in jihadi ideology. Al-Baghdadi was an intellectual trained in Islamic theology and demonstrated his bonafides to the leadership al-Qaeda inside Camp Bucca.<sup>220</sup> He served in various positions in al-Qaeda during the Iraq War, never as battlefield commander, but as a spiritual advisor to AQI leadership. After several notable officers such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi were killed, al-Baghdadi gained control of the organization and reconstituted it.<sup>221</sup>

Dating to 2006, the Islamic State flag was a basic two-color design, sporting a black field and white calligraphy.<sup>222</sup> As with many jihadi organizations, the Islamic State's flag featured the *shahadah*, the central confession of Islamic faith – “There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is

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<sup>216</sup> Toby Dodge and Becca Wasser, “The Crisis of the Iraqi State,” in *Middle Eastern Security, the US Pivot and the Rise of ISIS* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2014), 13.

<sup>217</sup> Seth G. Jones, et. al., *Rolling Back the Islamic State* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2017), ix.

<sup>218</sup> Joby Warrick, *Black Flags: the Rise of ISIS* (New York: Doubleday, 2015), chap. 19 -20.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 256 -257.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, chap. 16.

<sup>222</sup> William McCants, “How ISIS Got Its Flag,” *The Atlantic*, September 22, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/isis-flag-apocalypse/406498>.

the messenger of Allah.” The *shahadah* is stylized with the first clause, “There is no god but Allah” written in white, while the second clause, “Muhammad is the messenger of Allah,” is written in black on a white seal. This vexillographic feature differed from other organizations such as the Taliban or al-Qaeda which used a traditional presentation of the *shahadah* with elaborate calligraphy, compared to the Islamic State’s Kufic script.<sup>223</sup> As a key element of ISIS propaganda revolved around multitudes of flags, this design choice reduced logistical burdens and permit ISIS fighters to manufacture battle-flags with black cloth and paint. Though official documentation from the Islamic State is unavailable, the flag’s aspect ratio appears as 2:3.



Figure 4.4 – the ISIS black banner (c. 2014).<sup>224</sup>

<sup>223</sup> Ahmad bin Hanbal, al-Tirmiz, quoted in, Mustazah Bahari and Muhammad Haniff Hassan, “The Black Flag Myth: An Analysis from Hadith Studies,” *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 6, no. 8 (September 2014): 15-20, 16.

<sup>224</sup> “Misappropriating the Black Flag,” Quilliam Foundation, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.quilliaminternational.com/misappropriating-the-black-flag>.

### Semiotics of Islamic State Vexillology (2014-2017)

The underlying semiotics of the Islamic State's vexillology differed from any previous Iraqi flag. In part to establish the legitimacy of the regime, the Islamic State fashioned a flag based in medieval history and employing a vexillographical layout common among jihadi groups.<sup>225</sup>

During the eighth century Khorasani rebels overthrew the Umayyads and established the Abbasid Caliphate in 750 CE. According to tradition the Abbasids employed black banners in fulfillment of an eschatological hadith, "(Armies carrying) the black flag will come from Khurasan. No power will be able to stop them, and they will finally reach Eila (Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem) where they will erect their flags."<sup>226</sup> Though scholarly opinion differs in attributability to the Prophet Muhammad, the vexillography of the Islamic State was interested in broadcasting a message of intimidation.<sup>227</sup> Unlike previous national flags in Iraq, the black banners were focused on engendering compliance amongst Iraqis and Syrians living under its rule, hence the tremendous acts of torture committed by ISIS members.<sup>228</sup> Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was not interested in refashioning Iraq as had Abd al-Karim Qasim or Saddam Hussein but unmaking it.

Its religious beliefs notwithstanding, the central political philosophy of the Islamic State was rooted in a presupposed illegitimacy of the Middle East under Sykes-Picot. In the well-known propaganda film, "The End of Sykes-Picot," an ISIS fighter wearing a *dishdasha* and a Kalashnikov, investigates a destroyed checkpoint on the Syrian-Iraqi border.<sup>229</sup> The unknown fighter saunters about the wreckage, denigrating Iraqi state and military iconography saying in

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<sup>225</sup> "Misappropriating the Black Flag," Quilliam Foundation.

<sup>226</sup> Bahari and Hassan, "The Black Flag Myth."

<sup>227</sup> Ibid.

<sup>228</sup> Kirk Semple, "Yazidi Girls Seized by ISIS Speak Out After Escape," *The New York Times*, November 14, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/15/world/middleeast/yazidi-girls-seized-by-isis-speak-out-after-escape.html>.

<sup>229</sup> "Video: Islamic State Media Branch Releases 'The end of Sykes-Picot,'" Belfast Telegraph Digital, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/video-news/article30397575.ece>.

part, “This is the flag of Iraq. The flag of *shirk*. The Prophet Muhammad says, ‘whoever calls for nationality is not from me.’”<sup>230</sup> The English-speaking narrator expounds on the artificiality of boundaries in the Middle East, refers to al-Baghdadi as “the Breaker of Borders,” and raises a small ISIS flag over the checkpoint.<sup>231</sup> As with its flag, the film communicates the irredeemably of the present political system and its attendant governments in Damascus and Baghdad. The Islamic State’s dual message a of political reformation and righteousness gave the organizational flag a different semiotic quality than previous Iraqi banners.

From a semiotic standpoint, the flags of the Islamic State and the Arab Revolt share similar qualities. As rebel flags, both banners made promises about their respective worlds after the enemy was destroyed. In the Arab Revolt case, the Hashemites predicated a post-Ottoman state which reconstituted bygone caliphates under a Sharifian aegis. Believing colonialism was the source of corruption, the Islamic State wished to eradicate the boundaries established by Sykes-Picot and enact borders of their choosing. Both were transhistorical identities rooted in the presupposition that duplicitous agents inhibited justice and necessitated violence for redress. Therefore, the underlying message communicated by the Islamic State was their ability to remake Iraq and Syria into something more suitable. Though reviled, the Islamic State was like the Hashemites, Free Officers, or Ba’thi movements in their aspirations to dislodge the ruling elites and dictate their vision of governance and identity.

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> “Video: Islamic State Media Branch Releases ‘The end of Sykes-Picot,’” Belfast Telegraph Digital.

## Conclusion

From 2003 onward, Iraqi civilians endured a level of suffering unseen during any period in its history. As it neared its centennial, questions about Iraqi identity were still unanswered and its national icons reflected a mix of uncertainty and unpreparedness for the future. During the 2000s the gradual removal of Husseinian elements from the Iraq flag evidence a growing confidence to look beyond the memory of Saddam. The sudden emergence of the Islamic State thrust Iraqis back into warfare and many cities devolved into hellscapes under ISIS domination. Three years later, the Islamic State was destroyed in Iraq, but questions about national unity and identity remain open. Even in the midst of fighting the 2015, the Iraqi parliament was considering another flag modification to incorporate the ethnic subcomponents, one legislator saying , ““ We of course, wish like other nations that Iraq will be stable and have a national anthem and flag that unites all Iraqis with their diverse backgrounds...but I think that this very issue will be resolved when Iraqis reach stability, maybe after 10 years.””<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Dina al-Shibeeb, “Iraq Puts New National Anthem and Flag ‘on Hold,’” Al Arabiya, May 11, 2015, <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/perspective/features/2015/05/11/Iraq-puts-new-national-anthem-flag-on-hold-says-official->.

## Chapter 5. Conclusion

Iraq underwent tremendous iconographic transformation during its first century of existence. Beginning in 1921, Iraq attempted to present itself as a post-Ottoman domain prepared to demonstrate its maturity and readiness for independence. During this period, Iraqi iconography emphasized Arab distinctiveness and connectivity to ancient Mesopotamia, while establishing a transhistorical link between medieval caliphates and the incipient Hashemite realm. Despite upheaval during the 1930s and 1940s, Iraqi iconography remained unchanged until removed by the Free Officers in 1959. Under Abd al-Karim Qasim, official symbols of state authority placed Mesopotamian symbolism into the forefront employing the sunburst of Shamash commingled with quasi-socialist heraldry. This inclination was subsumed under the Ba’thi Party which emphasized Pan-Arabism and under Saddam Hussein and added the *takbir* of Islam. While this feature remains into the present, Iraqis struggled to find an appropriate way to diminish Husseinian memory on vexillography without committing a sacrilegious defacement of God’s name. Finally, the suppression of the Islamic State in 2017 represented the opposite of Iraqi nationalism, a political energy which questioned the very reason for Iraqi existence in the first place.

The seven national flags and supporting heraldry represented a wide latitude between successive Iraqi governments, often tinkering with various notions of national identity. Between ethnic identity, transhistorical association, and aspirational values, governments used vexillography to inform its citizen of the direction Baghdad was headed. The public either opted to dwell within its newly assigned identity or rebel against its imposition, beginning the cycle anew. While new regimes endeavored to outclass previous administrations, they were beholden to parameters established in the preceding years. Hence, its successor regimes were typically

handcuffed by iconographic standards unforeseen during the revolutionary period. As the Iraqi public bonded with heraldic and vexillographic representation throughout the decades they became less likely to abandon them. The Shi'i troops which clashed with Islamic State fighters into 2017 did so under a flag bearing Saddam Hussein's innovation, their sacrifice making a removal of the *takbir* much more difficult for successor governments.



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