The great swamp of Lower Mesopotamia is formed: by the flood waters drawn off from the Tigris about and below the latitude of Amara town by six principal canals, Musharrah, Chahala and Michariyya on the left bank (eastern marsh)—Butayra, Majarr as-Saghir and Majarr al-Kabir on the right bank (central marsh); and to the east of Suq ash-Shuyukh by the overflow from the Euphrates (southern marsh). The eastern and central marshes are situated for the most part in the liwa of Amara, the southern in Muntafik; all three overlap into Basra; the eastern marsh extends over the border into Persia and receives, in addition, the flood waters of the Tib, Duwayrij and Karkha (Saymarra) rivers of Luristan. At the time of our occupation it was reckoned that the Musharrah, Chahala and Butayra were drawing off at least three-fifths of the Tigris water, so leaving less than two-fifths for the other three, a number of smaller canals, and the main navigable stream through the Narrows.

On the banks of the river and of the great canals near their heads there are belts of terra firma suitable for palm-groves and gardens, or for the winter crops of wheat and barley. The lower lands towards the tails are submerged by the spring floods, and it is here that rice, giant millet and other summer crops are cultivated as the waters recede. Beyond these is the area of permanent inundation (*hawr*), where the economy is based on the buffalo, the giant reed (*qasab*) which may grow to a height of twenty feet out of the water, and the bulrush (*bardī*). There is also a sedge called *gawlān* which has certain uses but is said to give sores to anyone bathing in the water where it grows.

The rice-growers and the marshmen proper, the Ma’dan, live on the whole very much the same kind of life. Internal communication is

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1 In this chapter I have spelt many proper names and other local words as pronounced by the marshmen, and not necessarily according to the rules for classical Arabic. Since my journeys through the marshes were at that time in the nature of original exploration through unknown country I have recorded them in greater detail than might be thought necessary for the general reader. But all place names mentioned are shown in the sketch map, and I hope that the detail will add to the interest of my narrative for later travellers.
almost entirely by *mashhuf*, the generic term for various types of canoe coated with bitumen, ranging from the superb, graceful, high-prowed, strongly built *tarrāda* or war-canoe to the tiny one-man contraption of reeds called *challabiyya*; for transport on the larger waterways there is a heavier bitumen-coated craft called *danak*, capable of carrying a load up to about ten tons. The reeds, and mats woven from split reeds, constitute the principal building materials. The reeds too, supplemented by rushes and sedge, provide the means of holding the materials together and securing them in position for their various functions, whether pillars, arches, beams, roofs, walls, floors or fences, and for the different types of domestic architecture, some tunnel-shaped, some ridge-roofed with caves, from the great, imposing barrel-vaulted guest-house (*maḍif*) of a rich rice-shaykh to the primitive cabin of the humblest Ma‘dan with its adjoining buffalo-byre (*sitra*). The same materials, combined with earth, are fused for the construction of dams and dykes. Reeds, rushes and sedge also provide fodder and fuel. In spring women collect the flowers of the reeds to make with the yellow pollen called *kharayt*, a kind of friable fudge, which is esteemed a great delicacy but is said to cause constipation.

*A mashhuf*. From the collection of Claud and Marion Rebbeck