

The Weight of a Mustard Seed by Wendell Steavenson.  
Atlantic Books 2009.

Among the many books about Iraq that I have read over the last ten years, and it is now a long list, *The Weight of a Mustard Seed* now ranks as the most powerful, most endearingly quirky in its literary style, and most poignant of them all.

*The Weight of a Mustard Seed* tells the story of one of Saddam Hussein's soldiers, General Karem Sachet, from childhood to untimely death, and in so doing retells the saga of Saddamite Iraq and the evils of the regime which Sachet supported and at the hands of which he died.

Wendell Steavenson traces Kamel Sachet's life from its humble beginnings, through a variety of events that include the Iran-Iraq war, and the Gulf conflicts, by talking to a wide number of people who knew him; military colleagues with whom he worked and fought, family members, doctors and others, and through their recollections, which include piercing insights into the way life was in Iraq under Saddam, she pieces together his life and death.

Sachet emerges as a quite sympathetic figure, an Iraqi patriot rather than a convinced Baathist, a career soldier who did his duty as he saw it, and came to be increasingly troubled by it, seeking solace and renewal in the Islam which he had ignored for much of his adult life.

Steavenson lays bare much of the structure of Iraqi life: the ways in which tribal connections could save individuals, or condemn them, the arbitrary cruelty of Saddam and the dramatic changes of his moods which meant life or death.

*The Weight of a Mustard Seed* has to be one of **the** books to read about modern Iraq, and is eloquent testimony to the bravery, tenacity and intuitiveness of its author.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh