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National Virtual Translation Center Different Regions and Different Ways of Life

Kurds

The Kurds are a large ethnic minority group with a long history in this part of the world. Instead of being nomadic, the Kurds have been mostly pastoral and sedentary. They have kept close contact with tribes from which they receive both protection and direction. There is a wish among Kurdish tribes to confederate, but thus far, they have remained autonomous. Their language, though using Arabic script, is not related to Arabic. Their struggle to rectify their statelessness continues to this day.

Since the end of the First World War, the Kurds in Iraq have fought openly with non-Kurds, pausing mostly to regroup. Tribal allegiances have generally hobbled larger nationalistic Kurdish movements. One Iraqi government after another quashed these rebellions, but none as viciously as the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein. From 1987 to 1989, Saddam's forces committed genocide against the Kurdish people, using poison gas in Halabja, as well as conventional means, to murder the Kurds. In 1991, coincidental with a call from the US for an uprising, the Kurds rose up and were smashed, forcing as many as 450,000 of them to the border of Turkey, where they were refused admission, and over a million into Iran.

A large Kurdish tribal confederacy, called a shiret, is divideds into sub-tribes called tira. Membership in a tira is inherited patrilineally. Its leader, or raiz, inherits his position with the approval of the senior males. The tira will not generally camp in a unit, rather in tent camps called khel.

Nomads

The Bedouin, virtually the only nomads in the country, have mostly left the deserts of western Iraq for cities, lured by employment and government policy.

Marsh Arabs

The Ma'dan, or Marsh Arabs, live in 15,540 sq. km (6,000 sq. miles) of marsh at the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, in a triangle formed by Amara, Nasiriya, and Basra. They depend on fishing and raising water buffalo, and live in Quonset hut-shaped houses built on reeds to keep them above water. When the water levels are high, they get around in canoe-like boats. Urban Iraqis consider the Ma'dan backward. The Ma'dan return the consideration, labeling urban Iraqis as irreligious and untrustworthy. Many of the Ma'dan have been devastated by the draining of the swamps, which was ordered by

Saddam Hussein in retaliation for an attempted revolt against him during the 1990s.



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