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ABSTRACT

Iraqi refugees are coming to the United States after years of war and internal conflict, and they bring with them an ancient history. This booklet gives an overview of the land, the people, and the history of Iraq, with a description of the circumstances that compel these refugees to leave their native land. The people who live in Iraq represent a number of ethnic groups, physical types, and languages. Approximately 77 percent of the population are Arabs, about 19 percent are Kurds, and the rest are a variety of different groups. Nearly all follow Islam, and all speak at least a few words of Arabic, the state language. Regardless of social class, the most powerful unit in Arab society is the extended family or tribe. Iraq has never been a region of harmony, and the traditional tensions between ethnic groups have worsened due to recent political events and the embargo against Iraq. Everyday behavior among Arabs reflects much of Islamic beliefs and culture; and many of these cultural traditions are brought to this country by refugees. Cultural traditions common to many Iraqis are outlined, and a discussion of the Arabic language is presented. An annotated bibliography lists 37 books and articles about Iraq. (SLD)

Iraqis

Their History And Culture

Refugee Fact Sheet Series No...11

CAL

CAL Refugee Fact Sheet Series No. 11

The Iraqis

THEIR HISTORY AND CULTURE

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with
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Preface

This booklet is a basic introduction to the people, history, and cultures of Iraq. It is designed primarily for service providers and others assisting the Iraqi refugees in their new communities in the United States.

The principal writer is Barbara Robson, a linguist and writer with many years of experience teaching, working, and traveling in the Middle East and in the field of refugee and immigrant education. She has taught Turkish in the United States and English in Turkey, written textbooks on the Pashto language spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and designed and implemented ESL and native language literacy projects in refugee camps in Thailand. Margaret Kleffner Nydell, the author of the section on the Arabic language, is a linguist who has written several books on Arabic and Arabic culture and has directed Arabic language training at the Foreign Service Institute of the U.S. Department of State.

We would like to thank our colleagues at CAL for their valuable contributions to this booklet: Grace Stovall Burkart for researching the history section and Dora Johnson for her bicultural insights and suggestions tnroughout the development of the manuscript.

Many people have read and commented on drafts of the manuscript. In particular, we would like to thank Mohamad Hanon, a refugee from Iraq who is organizing the first Iraqi Mutual Assistance Association; Chris Meléndez, Refugee Processing Supervisor, Immigration and Refugee Services of America, formerly Joint Voluntary Agency representative for refugee processing in Saudi Arabia; Melineh Kano, Program Coordinator for Interchurch Refugee and Immigration Ministries in Chicago, Illinois; Paul Jericho, Executive Director, and Akeel Abbas, Case Manager for Iraqi resettlement, at the International Institute of Erie, Pennsylvania; and Michael Metrinko, Director of Europe, Near East, and South Asia Humanitarian Assistance, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, U.S. Department of State.

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Donald A. Ranard, Editor

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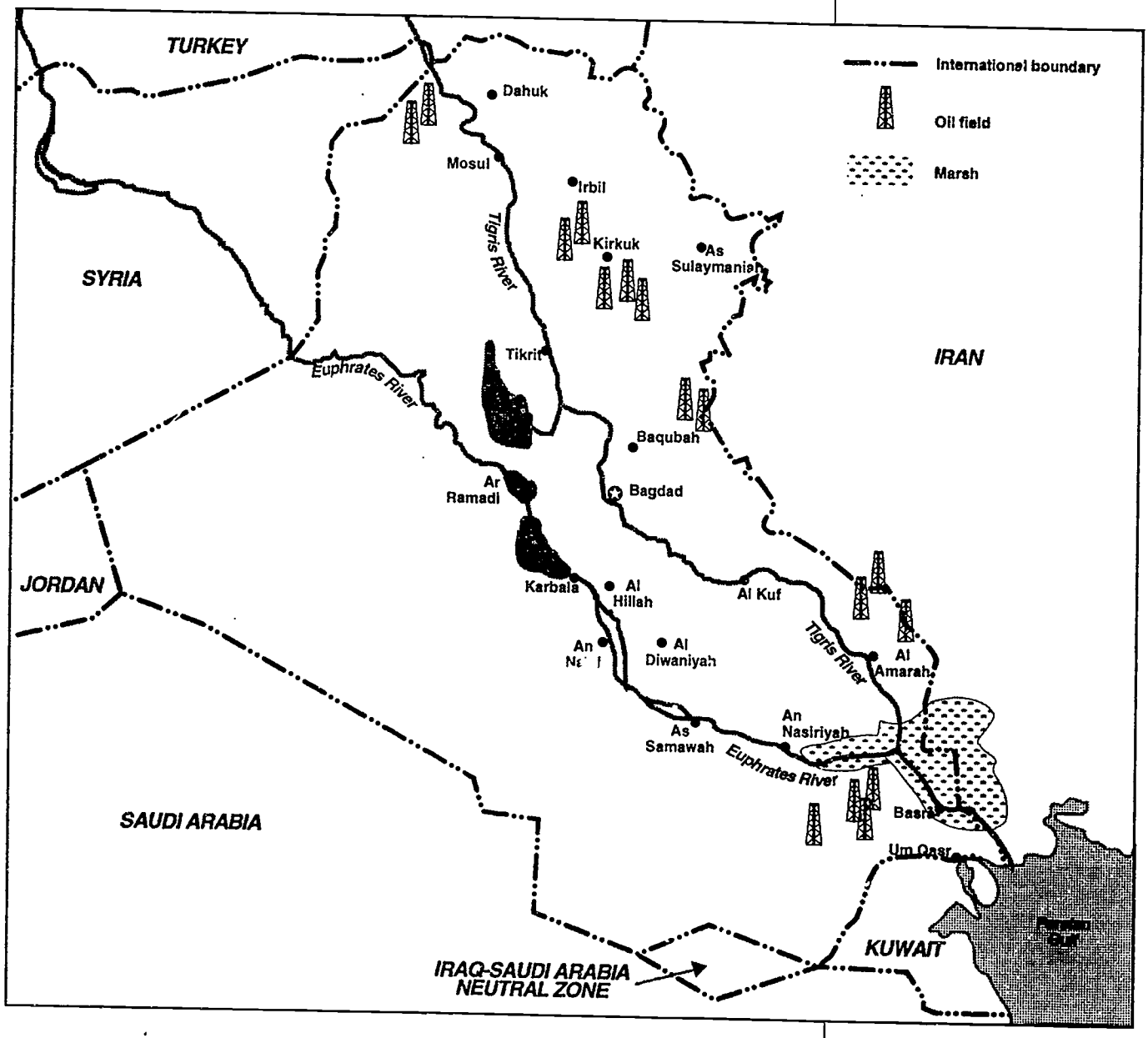

Introduction

The Iraqi refugees come to America out of the hardship of fourteen years of war and internal conflict. They also bring with them eight thousand years of history. In this fact sheet, you will be given an overview of the land, the people, and the history, including the circumstances that impelled the refugees to leave their native land. You will also be given information on the Iraqi language and culture, and a discussion of aspects of American culture and English that are likely to be puzzling or problematical to the newly-arrived Iraqi.

We hope that the information contained in this fact sheet will provide you with some insights into the behavior and attitudes of the Iraqi refugees. It is unwise, usually, to give lists of do's and don'ts in dealing with people whose culture differs from ours. We find, instead, that an understanding as to why people behave the way they do will in itself suggest solutions to intercultural problems. We urge you to read further on Iraq and the Iraqis and have included some useful, readily available, and above all readable sources in the bibliography at the end.

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The Land

Iraq is about the size of California, 171,000 square miles. Surrounded by Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Kuwait, it is essentially a landlocked country, although large ships can sail up to Basra from the Persian Gulf. Iraq can be divided geographically into four zones: the Syrian Desert area in the west and southwest, the upland between the upper Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the mountainous areas in the north and northeast, and the river valleys of the central and southeast areas.

The Climate

In general, the climate of Iraq is much like the climate of Texas: hot and dry in the summers, and cool and a bit rainier in the winters. In most of the country, temperatures average in the 80°s during the summer (although they can soar well into the 100°s), and in the 40°s and 50°s during the winter; in the mountains they are correspondingly cooler.

Except for the mountainous areas, the rainfall in Iraq qualifies it

as a desert. The usual definition of desert is an area that has an average of under ten inches of rain a year, and Iraq's average rainfall is between about four and six and a half inches a year. Ninety percent of this rain falls between November and April. In the mountainous areas, the rainfall is higher, between about twelve and a half and twenty-two and a half inches per year, enough water to support crops. The high areas may receive as much as twenty-five inches per year.

The impact of these rainfall patterns can be seen in the 1991 estimates of land use: Only 12.5% of the land is under permanent cultivation, another 9.1% is meadows and pasturelands, an additional 4.3% is forested, and 74% is wasteland.

Water

Despite the lack of rain, there is water for irrigation, thanks to the mighty Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which have dominated the history and politics of the area. In fact, the name for the area up until the end of World War I was Mesopotamia, its ancient Greek name, which translates as "land between rivers."

The name for the area up until the end of World War One was Mesopotamia, its ancient Greek name, which translates as "land between rivers."

Both the Tigris and Euphrates have their headwaters in the highlands of eastern Turkey. The Euphrates flows into Iraq through Syria in the northwest while the Tigris flows directly from Turkey in the northeast. They flow across the country to the southeast, joining north of Basra. There, they form the Shatt-al-'Arab, which flows for 68 miles through southern Iraq and empties into the Persian Gulf, and which is deep enough (with engineering) to allow for the passage of ocean-going vessels.

The flow of the Euphrates is augmented by the rainfall in the desert areas to the west. This rainfall is carried east across the plains by wadis, which flow into small rivers which eventually flow into the Euphrates. (*Wadi* is the Arabic word for "arroyo" or "wash," i.e., a river bed that is dry except when flooded by seasonal rains.) These wadis are permanent fixtures in the landscape—one of them is 200 miles long—and for centuries supported nomads and their livestock.

The Tigris, also, is augmented by smaller rivers flowing from the high Zagros Mountains in the northeastern part of the country: The Great Zab, the Little Zab, and the Dyuala carry melting snow down into the river valleys.

The land along and between the rivers is watered and fertilized and each year disrupted by spring flooding. This relatively constant water supply and resultant rich soil allowed for the earliest development of agriculture in the Western world, and the area has played an important part in history ever since. For eight thousand years, there have been continual attempts to control and channel the flooding of

the rivers, as they can carry as much as forty times as much water during the spring flood season as during the low-level periods in the fall. Since the development of modern states, there has also been much international diplomacy and antagonism over the utilization of the water of the rivers as they flow through Turkey and Syria, and over the precise location of the boundary between Iraq and Iran along the Shatt-al-'Arab.

Oil

The rivers continue to dominate modern Iraqi agriculture, and farming is still the occupation of the majority of Iraqis. However, massive oil fields in the desert around Basra in the southeast, and those near Mosul and Kirkuk in the northeast, have provided the country with a much greater source of income than farming. A huge well was discovered in Kirkuk in 1927, and after much international negotiating and the building of several pipelines, by 1952 almost 20 million barrels of oil per year were being exported from Iraqi fields. In 1980, before the Iran–Iraq war, Iraq was the world's second largest oil exporter after Saudi Arabia.

In 1980, Iraq was the world's second largest oil exporter.

The People

For centuries, the population of Iraq consisted almost entirely of settled farmers in the river areas; Bedouin nomads who raised their flocks in the western plains and desert; Arabs who fished and raised water buffalo in the marshy areas around where the two rivers joined; and Kurdish farmers and herdsmen living in the mountains.

These traditional ways of life have all been altered in the last century by several factors, including the gradual filtering into the society of Western thought and politics, the influx of foreigners in connection with the discovery and processing of oil, and the migration of segments of the population from rural to urban centers. More recently, there have been the changes in government and society brought about by the Ba'ath Party and Saddam Hussein, the effects of the long Iran–Iraq war and, of course, the effects of the invasion of Kuwait, Desert Storm, and the associated embargoes.

The people who live in Iraq include a number of ethnic groups, physical types, and languages. According to 1993 estimates, the total population of Iraq is about 19,435,000, of whom about 77% are Arabs, about 19% are Kurds, and the rest are a variety of different groups, including Turkmens, Assyrians, and Armenians. Nearly all Iraqis follow Islam, and all speak at least a few words oi Arabic, the state language.

The Iraqi Arabs

The Iraqi Arabs share most of the values and practices of other Arabs, which is to say that their life is greatly dominated by religion, but is also affected by the same secular pressures and benefits that affect the other oil-producing Arab countries. Most Iraqi Arabs were traditionally farmers, but these days an Iraqi is as likely to be a city-dweller. The proud Bedouin nomads, with their unsurpassed knowledge of the desert, have been lured away from their difficult traditional life by government policy and by the possibility of more lucrative employment; there are very, very few of them left.

The Ma'dan

There is a distinct sub-group of Iraqi Arabs, called the Ma'dan or Marsh Arabs, who inhabit 6,000 square miles of marshy area just above the point at which the Tigris and Euphrates flow together, in a rough triangle formed by Amara, Nasiriya, and Basra. This area is truly marshland, and during high water times much of the land is submerged.

The Ma'dan have a very different life from other Iraqis. They do very little farming, depending instead on fishing and the raising of water buffalo. Their quonset-hut-shaped houses, built of reeds resting on piles to keep them above water, are architecturally unique. The Ma'dan get around in canoe-like boats when the water levels are high and in other ways have a unique lifestyle in the area. As you will read below, this lifestyle is in grave danger, if it has not already disappeared, as a result of actions on the part of the Iraqi government.

The people who live in Iraq include a number of ethnic groups, physical types, and languages.

The Kurds

More than three and a half million Kurds, about 19% of the population, live in northeast Iraq. Mosul, Irbil, and As-Sulaymaniyah, the third, fourth, and fifth largest cities in Iraq, are all Kurdish towns. The most valuable oil fields in Iraq are in the areas where the Kurds live.

The Kurds are an Iranian ethnic group who for centuries have inhabited an area that stretches from Syria and Turkey through Iraq and Iran into Azerbaijan. The Kurds have their own language, an Indo-European language most closely related to Pashto and Baluchi, spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and less closely related to Iranian Persian. These days many if not most of the Iraqi Kurds also speak Arabic.

The Assyrians

One of the most interesting minority groups in Iraq are the Christian Assyrians, descendents of an ancient sect—the Nestorians—who are often called "the first Iraqis" because their presence in the area

predates the Muslim Arabs. The Assyrians have a long history of persecution, and as a result there are few of them left—only about 170,000 scattered throughout the area. There are old communities around the oil fields of Iraq, however, and the Assyrians constitute a disproportionate percentage of the Iraqi refugees. Some Assyrians still speak Syriac, and most use it as a liturgical language.

Social Structure and Relationships

In Iraqi society, there are effectively three classes: the higher class, composed of well-known, influential families; the middle class, composed of government employees, prosperous merchants, the military, and so on; and the lower class, comprising the peasants and laborers.

Whatever the class, the most powerful unit in Arab (and Kurdish) society is the extended family or tribe. Throughout the history of the area, tribal leaders have wielded immense power; federations of tribal sheikhs who have the popular support of their families have proved, time and time again, to have more local, practical power than urban or government forces.

The most powerful unit in Arab (and Kurdish) society is the extended family or tribe.

Arabs and Kurds

Enmity and distrust between the Arabs and the Kurds in Iraq have existed for centuries, despite the fact that they are by and large Muslim and have many other points in common. This ill will has traditionally been between the various ruling governments and the Kurdish communities and has been increased by frequent alliances between the Kurds and the southern Iraqi (Shi'ite) Arabs.

After World War I, the Western countries divided up the Ottoman Empire into the countries we know today, and at one point considered consolidating the area in which the Kurds have always lived into a separate Kurdish state. The demands of the neighboring states overrode the desires of the Kurds, however, and the Kurdish homeland now constitutes parts of Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and the newly-independent state of Azerbaijan.

The Kurds—especially those in Iraq—have a very strong sense of national unity, and from time to time have pushed for an independent Kurdistan. This has made the countries housing them extremely uneasy. Iraq has been particularly nervous about Kurdish desires for independence, mostly because the land on which the Kurds have always lived includes Iraq's most productive oil fields. Since Desert Storm, the enmity between the Iraqi government and the Kurds has been exacerbated, and the government's treatment of the Kurds has received attention in the international press.

Sunnites and Shi'ites

Another source of conflict in Iraq has been the tension between the Sunni and Shi'ite sects of Islam. (The basis for the difference between these sects is discussed in the section on religion.) The Shi'ites are a decided minority in the Islamic world as a whole, comprising maybe one-twelfth of the total Islamic population, but Iraq, along with Iran, is the center of the sect, and over half of the Iraqis are Shi'ites. Throughout modern times, however, the ruling classes in Iraq have been Sunni, and so there was always the rub that the less advantaged sect constituted the majority of the population. The antagonism between the sects lessened considerably during the Iran–Iraq war, when the Iraqi Shi'ites remained loyal to Iraq despite the fact that there is a sizable percentage of Shi'ites in Iran (many Iraqi Shi'ites have relatives in Iran) and the Iranian government is Shi'ite. Since Desert Storm, however, the antagonism has risen again.

Urban Iraqis and the Ma'dan

There has also been no love lost between the Shi'ite Marsh Arabs and the urban Sunni Iraqis. The urban Iraqis consider the Ma'dan to be backward and primitive, while the Ma'dan in turn consider the urban Iraqis untrustworthy and irreligious.

The Government and the Assyrians

As a minority, the Assyrians have had their share of problems with the various governments in Iraq. In the '30s, for example, the Iraqi army killed hundreds of them and caused several thousand of them to relocate to an area in Syria sponsored by the League of Nations. Assyrians have frequently called on international bodies and other governments to help them redress their wrongs. These attempts have not endeared the Assyrians to the powers in Iraq.

In short, Iraq has never been a region of harmony. Traditional tensions are now made worse by the effects of the worldwide embargo against Iraq, which has generated great hardships throughout the country. The Sunni–Shi'ite schism, which appeared to lessen during the Iran–Iraq war, has escalated since Desert Storm, as the Shi'ite families in the south have taken advantage of the disarray of the Iraqi army to rebel against the regime, and the regime has retaliated with wholesale destruction of their lands. The embargoes have hurt the emerging urban middle class and given rise to a (still largely hidden) resentment among them against the current regime, whose policies caused the embargoes.

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History

Early History

The mention above of the word Mesopotamia undoubtedly brings to mind social studies classes in elementary school. We all seem to have studied the Fertile Crescent and the "Cradle of Civilization" and the Sumerians who lived in it. The Sumerians have an honored place in social studies for developing a sophisticated irrigation system to control the flooding of the Tigris and Euphrates. To facilitate pottery-making they invented the wheel, then modified it for use over land, thereby revolutionizing land transportation and providing all future mankind with something to reinvent. They combined tin with copper to produce bronze, a metal that was both easier to work with and more durable than tin or copper alone. They began the study of astronomy and mathematics. And finally, they developed the writing system called cuneiform ("wedges"), to which the alphabet you are reading in can ultimately be traced. Here is a sample of cuneiform writing, in which symbols for the words *ha* 'fish' + *am* 'wild bull' + *mu* 'year' + *ra* [question word] + *bi* 'innkeeper' are written together to represent the name *Hammurabi*.

The history of Mesopotamia for the three thousand years or so after the Sumerians rings with names that bring exotic pictures to the Western mind: the Akkadian, Assyrian, Babylonian, and Chaldean peoples; the cities of Babylon (now Hila) and Nineveh (now Mosul); the rulers Hammurabi, King Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, and Trajan; the civilizations of the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Christian Byzantines.

It should be noted that as far back as 3000 B.C., a liquid substance seeped through cracks in the earth that could be used, as is, as caulking in walls, arks (as in Noah's, probably), or baskets (as in Moses', probably). Set on fire, it became a frightening weapon.

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The Islamic Empire

Muslim Arabs poured into Mesopotamia in the seventh century A.D., soon after the death of the prophet Muhammad. Within a hundred years, the Arab Islamic empire, ruled by caliphs, extended from Spain across Central Asia to parts of India; now, fourteen hundred years later, these regions are still Islamic.

The Abbasid caliphs established the city of Baghdad as their capital in the eighth century. As the western end of the Silk Road, a

trade route that stretched all the way to China, it became one of the largest cities in the world and a center of arts, libraries, mathematics, science, medicine, and other hallmarks of civilization. It was in Baghdad that the Abbasid caliph Harun ar-Rashid (who ruled between 786 and 809) listened to Sheherezade's fairy tales for a thousand and one nights.

Over the next few centuries, the centralized power of the caliphate waned, and the empire fragmented into autonomous regions called emirates, ruled by emirs. (Some emirates still exist: the small kingdoms on the Persian Gulf are called the United Arab Emirates.) With the fragmentation, Baghdad and the regions between the rivers played a far less important role in the Islamic empire, as most of the true power was held by the emirs. Both Baghdad and the Abbasid caliphate were destroyed by the Mongols in 1258. Under the Mongols, the Mesopotamian region became a neglected frontier province nominally under the control of central authority. For practical purposes, however, power in the area rested in the hands of the tribal sheikhs.

In the latter days of Ottoman rule, several events occurred that laid the foundation for the recent events in Iraq.

Ottoman Rule, 1534–1917

The Ottoman Turks annexed Mesopotamia in the sixteenth century, consolidating their hold on all the lands that had belonged to the Islamic caliphate. Mesopotamia formed the easternmost lands of the Ottoman Empire, and was divided administratively into the three provinces of Mosul (where mostly Kurds lived), Baghdad, and Basra (both mostly Iraqi Arab).

The Turkish-speaking Ottomans had continual difficulties with the area. As we mentioned before, Iraq is, and was, a center of the Shi'ite sect of Islam. The Ottomans were Sunnis, and so, in effect, the majority Shi'ites in Iraq were under the rule of a minority Sunni government imposed from a long way afar, a state of affairs that led to numerous uprisings. In addition, Iran immediately to the east was Shi'ite, and the Ottomans and Persians squabbled frequently over the Shi'ite area of Iraq. To complicate matters, there were frequent uprisings by the Kurds in the north. As a result of these difficulties, the Ottomans ceded most of the practical power to local governors, especially during the latter days of Ottoman rule.

In those latter days, several events occurred that laid the foundation for the recent events in Iraq. One of these was the reform of the Janissaries, the elite Ottoman military force, in the early nineteenth century. As part of the reform, the Iraqi Janissary regiments were reorganized and ultimately formed the Ottoman Sixth Army. The Ottoman military, with its education and other benefits, attracted a large number of Iraqis; by the end of the 19th century, there were

more Iraqi officers in the Ottoman army than any other Arabs. These Iraqi officers were mostly Sunnis; they formed a relatively sophisticated, politically powerful force that would come into its own after the dissolution of the Ottomans.

Another event that had modern repercussions was an action taken by Midhat Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Baghdad between 1869 and 1872. In 1871, Midhat Pasha and the sheikh who ruled Kuwait sent a joint expedition to occupy Al-Hasa, an area south of Kuwait on the coast of the Persian Gulf. In recognition of the sheikh's cooperation, Midhat Pasha appointed him a sub-governor and attached Kuwait to the Ottoman province of Basra. Subsequent treaties and acts undid Midhat Pasha's annexation of Kuwait to Basra, but Saddam Hussein used this temporary annexation as the rationale behind his claim that Kuwait was historically a part of Iraq.

Interested parties were sure that there was oil in Iraq as well.

A third set of events with modern repercussions was the developing use for oil (first for kerosene for light, and then for fuel oil for different kinds of internal combustion engines), the concomitant great demand on the part of Western powers for oil, and the discovery of oil in the Middle East.

Oil was first discovered in the region at Baku, in what is now Azerbaijan. Immediately after that, Western groups began negotiating for concessions to explore for oil in the neighboring areas. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company (now British Petroleum) was granted a concession in Iran and discovered oil in 1908. Interested parties were sure that there was oil in Iraq as well (as we mentioned before, it had been oozing out of the ground for several thousand years), and there was much negotiating with the Ottoman Empire for rights to explore in the area in the years before World War I broke out.

World War One

During World War I, the Ottoman Turks sided with Germany and Austria–Hungary against the Allies. Turkish forces fought the British in Iraq and Egypt (where the British were joined by Arabs organized by T. E. Lawrence, the famed Lawrence of Arabia). In the meantime, Iraqis in the north and the mid-Euphrates area began to agitate for Iraqi independence, and by 1920, the nationalist movement had spread throughout the area.

One of the outcomes of the war was that the Ottoman Empire was finally dismantled. The Turkish-speaking area of the Empire became the modern state of Turkey, and the Arabic-speaking areas were parceled out to France (the area now Syria and Lebanon) and Britain (the area now roughly Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, and Iraq). As we mentioned before, the Kurds lost out at this point on their bid for an independent state.

The British Protectorate

In 1921, the British established a protectorate over Iraq, and for eleven years attempted to counterbalance the interests of the Iraqi nationalists with their own. They established a monarchy, an odd thing to do in retrospect, as the Iraqis had never had a ruling family and were unfamiliar with the concept. The first Iraqi king was Faysal, who had led the Arab revolt in Syria and had been appointed king of Syria, but who was expelled from Syria by the French.

The British also negotiated a treaty that was intended to define the relationship between themselves and Iraq and to further Iraqi independence. The treaty met with great resistance on the part of the Iraqis, and several political parties were organized, all focused on the goal of ending the protectorate and achieving true independence. The pressure from these political parties, which included challenges from the powerful Shi'ite families, was effective; in 1929, Britain announced that the protectorate would end in 1932.

In 1932, Iraq gained its independence and was admitted to the League of Nations.

In the meantime, the British dealt with the question of boundaries. Originally, Mosul province was to have been part of the autonomous Kurdish state so desired by the Kurds, but when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk came to power in Turkey and gained control of the Kurdish areas in Turkey, the British decided to include the Mosul province as part of Iraq. It was known by then that the Mosul province included what were probably extensive oil fields.

There was much negotiation between the Iraqis and the British over oil concessions, but eventually the Iraqis traded control over oil for British support in keeping Mosul province as part of Iraq, rather than letting it go to Turkey. In 1925, the League of Nations established Mosul as part of Iraq, and legislated that the Kurds were to be protected. This act guaranteed that the Mosul oil fields would belong to Iraq, and also guaranteed that the Kurds would constitute a continuing political problem.

Independent Iraq

In 1932, Iraq gained its independence and was admitted to the League of Nations. There were immediate problems and power struggles. In 1933, King Faysal died, to be succeeded by his son, King Ghazi, who was young and inexperienced; elements antagonistic to the government took advantage of this and instigated a series of assassinations and tribal uprisings. In 1936, the military pulled off a coup d'etat, and effectively dominated the political scene until 1941.

Despite the instability of the government, the country improved in the early years after independence. Irrigation projects were completed, railroads and oil pipelines were built, border disputes were

settled, including an agreement in 1937 with Iran as to the exact water border on the Shatt-al-'Arab. According to that agreement, the border was set at the low-water mark on the Iranian side, which gave Iraq valuable control over the shipping channel between Basra and the Persian Gulf.

World War Two and the Fifties

At the beginning of World War II, Iraq refused to support Britain, and a very brief local war ensued when Iraqi troops resisted British attempts to station troops in the country. Britain prevailed, and was given the use of transportation and communication facilities and a declaration of war against the Axis powers on the part of Iraq.

After the war, the various political factions and parties in Iraq continued to struggle for power. Many of the struggles centered around the desire for more representative government on the part of younger politicians and resistance to them on the part of the older, established regimes. Finally, in 1958, a group of young military officers succeeded in obtaining support for a revolution, and on July 14th Baghdad was captured. Most of the members of the royal family were executed—thereby ending the brief Iraqi monarchy—and the revolutionists proclaimed Iraq a republic. A provisional constitution declared that Iraq formed an integral part of the "Arab nation," and that Arabs and Kurds were considered partners. All power was placed in the hands of the Sovereignty Council and the Cabinet.

The Ba'ath ("Renaissance" or "Revival") Party began as a group of young activists in the government who supported Arab nationalism and socialism.

Rise of the Ba'ath Party

Conflict among the officers soon arose, and five years later, in 1963, the revolutionary regime collapsed and its leader was executed. The military faction that brought about the collapse then established the Ba'ath ("Renaissance" or "Revival") Party, a group of young activists in the government who supported Arab nationalism and socialism. Soon the activists were in dissension, and in November of 1963 the president rallied the military to his side, arrested the leaders of the Ba'ath Party, and assumed real control.

The Ba'ath Party went underground and reorganized itself in preparation for regaining power. One of those who assisted in the reorganization was Saddam Hussein. The Ba'ath Party gained the cooperation of four officers in the military and in 1968 overthrew the government. After a bloodless coup in which the four officers were stripped of power (their lives were spared but they were sent abroad), the Ba'ath Party gained total control. Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr became president and premier, and most Cabinet posts went to other Ba'ath leaders.

The Ba'ath regime immediately had to contend with the Kurds. The latter, with arms from Iran, were able to pose a serious threat, and

negotiations got underway. The government agreed to recognize the Kurds as a national group entitled to a form of autonomous status called self-rule. There was also to be a census to determine the frontiers of the area in which the Kurds formed the majority of the population.

By 1973 the negotiations broke down. The census had not been taken, and the Kurds did not accept the Iraqi government's declaration that the area in which Kurds formed the majority did not include Kirkuk, which of course contained the massive oil fields. War started in March 1974, with the Shah of Iran supporting the Kurds. The Shah was in the meantime anxious to renegotiate the water border in the Shatt al-'Arab, so in 1975 when the Ba'ath regime arrived at an agreement with him that the boundary would be the *thalweg*, or median line of the river, he withdrew his support from the Kurds and the war was soon over.

The Ba'ath regime instituted a number of plans for national reconstruction and development. Immediate objectives were to increase production and the standard of living, but the ultimate objective was to establish a secular socialist society. The regime's biggest successes were the nationalization of oil production, completed in 1975, and the implementation of irrigation projects, which included the building of dams on several of the rivers.

In 1979 President al-Bakr resigned, and Saddam Hussein immediately succeeded him.

The Iran–Iraq war, also called the Gulf War, started in 1980.

The Iran–Iraq War

Meanwhile, relations with Iran were worsening. The Shah was overthrown in 1979 by the Ayatollah Khomeini, who established a Shi'ite Islamic government, and made no secret of his plans to "export the Islamic revolution" and to overthrow secular governments, one of which was Iraq's.

The Iran–Iraq war, also called the Gulf War, started in 1980, and battles raged back and forth across the border for several years. At one point the Iraqi Kurds supported the Iranians, and the Iraqi army conducted a planned campaign against them. Chemical weapons were used, inflicting heavy casualties and causing an international humanitarian uproar. Whole villages were destroyed, and Kurds were forcibly relocated to the war front or out of the Kurdish area.

In 1987 the scales were tipped toward Iraq, which had received help from the Soviet Union and Western countries including the United States. In July 1987 the United Nations passed a resolution urging the two countries to accept a ceasefire, withdraw their forces, and settle their border disputes via negotiations held under the auspices of the United Nations. Iraq agreed, but Iran refused until the

Ayatollah was convinced by advisers that his regime would collapse if he lost the war. Finally, in 1990, Iran and Iraq agreed to settle their differences on the basis of the 1975 agreement.

The Invasion of Kuwait

Iraq went heavily into debt with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia during the Iran–Iraq war. Saddam Hussein apparently felt that these debts would be forgiven, and was unpleasantly surprised to find that neither Kuwait nor Saudi Arabia would forgive Iraq the debt.

He resurrected the old argument that Kuwait was a part of Iraq (its "Fifteenth Province") and reopened questions as to the ownership of Warbah and Bubiyan, strategically-located islands at the head of the Gulf. Kuwait declined to negotiate, and Iraq invaded in August of 1990.

Desert Shield and Desert Storm were played out on a daily basis on American television.

The subsequent sanctions, Desert Shield, and Desert Storm were played out on a daily basis on American television. When diplomatic tactics failed to persuade Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait, a coalition of twenty-eight countries assembled military forces to enforce the United Nations sanctions. Air strikes began in January 1991 and were followed by the land attack on February 24th. In early April, Iraq agreed to withdraw from Kuwait and accept the UN Security Council resolutions.

Aftermath

Both the Iraqi army and the civilian superstructure were devastated by the war, and the continuing sanctions imposed severe hardships on the entire society.

The Kurds in the northeast rebelled, and the Iraqi army committed such excesses in putting down the revolt that thousands of Kurds felt compelled to flee into Turkey. They were persuaded to return only with international intervention and a great deal of publicity.

Less publicized have been Shi'ite rebels in the south, who fled to the marsh areas and from there have continually harassed the Iraqi army. In retaliation, the government has taken steps to drain the marshes (the waters of the Euphrates are reported to have been completely diverted from the marsh areas into a "third river"), depriving the Shi'ites of their cover and disrupting, perhaps permanently, the lives and unique culture of the Ma'dan.

Saudi Arabia set up a camp at Rafha, just over the border from Iraq, which has provided a haven for the Shi'ite participants in the post-Desert Storm uprisings and their families. As of this writing (March 1995), there are some 17,000 Iraqis in that camp. Many of these refugees are urban Iraqi Arabs from Basra, Najaf, Karbala, and Semawa, who are highly educated professionals and skilled workers. There are also a number of Assyrians. There are no Kurds in the

Rafha camp: the Kurdish refugee camps were along the border between Turkey and Iraq.

It is important to note that Rafha is a closed camp: The refugees in it have been there since it was set up, and there has not been the continuing arrival of new refugees that characterizes most refugee camps.

Religion

Ninety-five percent of Iraqis are Muslims ('Muslim' is the term for one who practices the religion of Islam), and, while an individual Iraqi might or might not adhere to all the beliefs and practices of Islam, it is a very powerful social force.

Islam is a very powerful social force.

Islam is the most recent of the three world religions to have arisen in the Middle East. It was founded by the prophet Muhammad, who was born in Mecca in the 6th century A.D. His flight from Mecca to Medina in 622 to escape persecution marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. This calendar is a lunar calendar rather than a solar calendar, and the Islamic year is, correspondingly, eleven days shorter than the Western year. Muslim holidays therefore "rotate" around the Western calendar, as will be discussed below, and the years have over the centuries been slowly catching up to the Western ones. Western 1995, for example, is Islamic 1414 and 1415, only 581 years fewer instead of 622.

Muhammad's revelations from God have been compiled in the Koran, and this, along with his noninspirational statements and records of his personal conduct—the Hadith—form the basis for a code of behavior that is relatively standard across the Muslim world, despite local variations. Besides the Koran and Hadith, the Pentateuch and Psalms from the Old Testament and the Christian Gospels from the New Testament are recognized, although they are considered to have been altered and not to represent exactly the words of God.

Muslims believe that religion, law, commerce, and social policies are inseparable, and have dealt with a fundamental, continuing dualism since the discovery of oil plunged them into the secular Western world. These days, almost all the countries in the Muslim world (Saudi Arabia and Iran are notable exceptions) have adapted Western legal codes, but private matters are usually still handled in Islamic courts of law. The Ba'ath government of Iraq is a resolutely secular one, and as such has been at odds with traditional Islamic tenets.

The difference between the Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims, which has played such a part in Iraqi history, has to do with the early history of the religion. After Muhammad's death, the entire Muslim community

recognized the legitimacy of the next three successors, or caliphs. The fourth caliph was Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. His legitimacy was challenged by Mu'awiyah, the governor of Syria, and after the Battle of Siffin in 657, Ali was forced to withdraw. He moved his capital to Iraq, and was murdered shortly thereafter. His followers refused to recognize the legitimacy of Mu'awiyah's caliphate, and established the Shi'a sect. The fundamental difference between the sects, then, is an argument about authority, not doctrine: the Shi'as believe that Ali was the legitimate successor to Muhammad, and the Sunnis believe that the successor should be elected and therefore that Mu'awiyah and his successors were legitimate. Because of their numerical superiority, the Sunnis refer to themselves as the "orthodox" sect.

Everyday behavior of individuals reflects the five basic teachings of Islam.

The everyday behavior of individuals belonging to both sects reflects the five basic teachings of Islam, commonly referred to as the Five Pillars.

The first Pillar is the declaration of the oneness of God, encapsulated in the phrase, "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the prophet of God." This is the basic affirmation of Islamic belief: saying and firmly believing it qualifies one as a Muslim.

The second Pillar is prayer: Five times a day, Muslims are required to pray, facing Mecca, in a series of prayers said first from a standing and then from a kneeling position. People are encouraged to pray in the mosque; the bigger mosques have special, separate areas for women. Prayer times are announced by *muezzins* who chant from the minarets of mosques at the appropriate times each day (although now, most of the calls to prayer are recorded). One of the most touching reminders that one is in an Islamic country is the frequent sight of a simple laborer praying by himself in the middle of a city, oblivious to the traffic and bustle around him. Another reminder is a sign in each hotel room showing the direction of Mecca. Yet another in many Muslim countries is that shops close at prayer times. And there are the echoing calls to prayer from different mosques in one's neighborhood, heard most clearly in the silences of late night and early morning.

The third Pillar is fasting: the ninth month of the Islamic year is Ramadan, and Muslims are expected throughout the month to refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and "other worldly pleasures" all day long. Certain exceptions—the sick, soldiers, travelers, children, the elderly, pregnant and menstruating women—are allowed. The day is carefully measured: It begins when there is enough light to distinguish a black thread from a white thread, and ends when the last light has left the sky. The main meal of the day is after sunset, and special care is taken that poor people are adequately fed.

Ramadan rotates through the year, as we mentioned, occurring eleven days earlier each year (in 1995 it coincided with the month of February). Ramadan is always hard on those who fast, but especially so when it falls during the summer months. Work slows down considerably during Ramadan: Westerners who work in Islamic countries are accustomed not to expect to get much done during the month.

The extent to which Ramadan is observed varies from individual to individual and from society to society. In recent years, with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, more Muslims are fasting. There have always been many Muslim individuals and communities in the United States who observe Ramadan.

There have always been many Muslim individuals and communities in the United States who observe Ramadan.

The fourth Pillar of Islam is the giving of alms. Traditionally, it was expected that one would automatically give a fortieth of one's income to those in need. Now, the religious requirement of almsgiving is recognized, but the exact contribution is left up to the individual conscience. Many people contribute 2 1/2% of their net income after basic family expenses are met.

The fifth Pillar of Islam is the pilgrimage to Mecca, called the Hajj, the high point of a devout Muslim's religious experience. The trip is not required of people too poor to pay their own way, but many villagers will scrimp and save their whole lives to make the journey. There are restrictions on one's behavior while on the pilgrimage, including what one wears and what one does on reaching Mecca. Shi'ites can hire someone to go to Mecca as substitutes, or visit, instead of Mecca, the Shi'ite holy places: An-Najaf in Iraq, where Ali is buried, or Karbala in Iraq or Meshed in Iran, tombs of Shi'ite saints.

There are two other minor pillars, one of them the requirement to do good works and to avoid evil thoughts, words, and deeds. The other minor pillar is the continuing effort to protect Islamic lands, beliefs, and institutions and to live every day as God has prescribed. The word for this pillar, *jihad* (effort) has become politicized, and is frequently used now to refer to the Muslim side of a conflict. The resistance on the part of the Muslim Afghans against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was routinely referred to as a *jihad;* the terrorist plans for attacks on the city of New York are also considered by the terrorists to be part of a *jihad*, in that they are in opposition to non-Muslim secular governments.

It should be emphasized that, just as religious customs and fashions come and go in the Western world, they do in the Islamic world as well. For the past few years, Islamic fundamentalism has been on the upswing. Along with the downfall of the Shah of Iran and the establishment of the fundamentalist Islamic government there, the fundamentalist movement has made itself felt throughout the

Islamic world, even in such secular countries as Turkey. Many young Muslims are more devout than their parents. Westerners have been surprised to hear that female university students in many Islamic countries have returned to the practice of covering their hair in public, and many areas that had loosened up with regard to Islamic strictures at odds with Western practice—for example the availability of alcohol—have tightened up again.

Everyday Life

Everyday behavior among Arabs reflects much of Islamic belief and custom. You will of course find great differences in individual behavior depending on educational background and general sophistication, but some generalizations are valid for most Iraqis, if not for most Arabs.

Marriage is expected of everyone.

The Extended Family

The extended Arab family has been mentioned above several times, and families have been political and social forces throughout Arab history in general and Iraq's history in particular. Loyalty to the family or tribe can be counted on, and it forms the basis for many behaviors and acts that to us might seem arbitrary or inappropriate: nepotism, for example, would be viewed by an Iraqi as a positive act, one that ensures good work and honesty in an employee. The social position of one's extended family is viewed as a constant. Whereas in Western society an individual can rise in society through education or attainment of wealth or sometimes just sheer good looks, one's status in Arab society is determined by the place of one's extended family, and that status is unchangeable. Individual behavior is very much constrained by the desire not to bring shame upon one's family.

Marriage is expected of everyone. Children belong to their father's family, and in the case of divorce the father is automatically awarded custody. Women do not join their husband's family (unless they are already in it; marriages among first cousins is quite common). A family can be located in a particular area, or can have branches in several geographically distinct locations. Many Arab countries have ruling families, for example the Al-Sabahs in Kuwait, and the Sauds in Saudi Arabia (which is why it is called Saudi Arabia). Saddam Hussein belongs to the Talfah family of Tikrit.

The Household

Traditional Arab homes are very private by our standards, especially in Iraq and the Arabian peninsula. Older individual houses are behind high walls, totally sheltered from the street and from passers-by. Even in urban apartment buildings, family privacy is maintained.

Inside the home, there is usually a room, like a formal parlor, in which the men of the family can receive male visitors without violating the privacy of the family.

The traditional household of a typical man in his forties consists of himself, his wife, their unmarried sons and daughters, their married sons with their wives and children, the man's mother if she is still alive, and frequently his unmarried sisters if he has any. Very probably, the most powerful force in the household is the man's mother, whose sons revere her, and whose daughters-in-law pretty much have to follow her bidding (there are lots of mother-in-law jokes in Arab society).

Young children are adored and indulged. Older boys are allowed to attend the gatherings of the men, and by listening absorb many of the cultural values and attitudes that will shape their public behavior. Older girls are very carefully protected, sometimes to their own chagrin. They learn the domestic skills through participation.

Young children are adored and indulged.

The Ba'ath Party has done much in Iraq to improve the availability of education. Primary education has been compulsory for both boys and girls, and there are some co-educational secondary schools, as well as separate secondary schools. A relatively high percentage of Iraqi young people are well educated.

Polygamy

Polygamy is allowed in Islam (up to four wives are permitted), but it has long been dying out in the Arab world, to the point that these days most educated middle- and upper-class Arabs find the subject somewhat embarrassing, and most of the Arab countries have laws outlawing polygamy from a secular perspective. In any event, it has always been a possibility available only to the wealthier members of society. There are advantages to having more than one wife: It expands the numbers of families one can count on for support, and provides a man with many children. There are hardships as well, the greatest of which is economic: Islamic law is clear that each wife must be treated absolutely equally.

Treatment of Women

There is much written in the Western press about Arab women, who from a Western point of view appear to be very much dominated and repressed. The status of women is a controversial issue in Arab society today—possibly because it has gotten so much negative press from the West—and there are movements among educated Arab women for equal rights. In the more progressive countries, including Iraq, women from the upper-class families have always had access to education, and have been able to pursue careers and

combine career and family. Recently, many of these women have been attempting to extend their rights to all Arab women.

The most obvious and famous symbol of the status of Arab women is their public dress. Iraqi women have always been somewhat freer than women in the Arabian peninsula, but there are still many Iraqi women who cover their hair in public. The hair covering can range from a gauzy veil draped attractively around the head and neck to a thick kerchief folded so that the front lies low on the forehead and the rest of the head is securely swathed. There are also women who wear the *'abaya* (a long-sleeved, long cloak- or coat-like overgarment that covers one from neck to ankles) whenever they go out. This is most common in rural areas and among older, less educated women, although more women are now covering up as a result of the impact of the fundamentalist movement and new pressures. Underneath the *'abaya* and veil, Arab women in general dress more conservatively than Western women, although upper-class women are very aware and appreciative of European fashions.

Women have a great deal of power at home and over their children.

The structure of Arab society is such that financial power is in the hands of the man. This is not to say, however, that his wife is completely without influence. Women have a great deal of power at home and over their children, including their grown sons, whom they count on for support in family disputes. Women also have families who are very sensitive to their welfare, and their fathers and brothers will interfere if they feel that their daughter or sister is being abused, or if they think she is unhappy.

Much is made of the right of an Arab man to divorce his wife simply by saying "I divorce you" three times. Mention, however, is rarely made of the fact that in doing so he must then contend with his wife's family who among other things has the right to demand immediate "divorce payment," a stipulated part of the woman's dowry. Divorce is, in fact, a last resort, and a source of sadness and regret for both families involved.

Personal and Family Honor

At the heart of treatment toward women are the very basic belief in a man's honor and that of his family, and the equally basic belief that men and women left to their own devices are unable or unwilling to control their physical urges. (This is not a uniquely Arab belief: The whole notion of the chaperone is based on the same belief.) For this reason, protection of women is a central tenet of Islamic society, and both men and women believe it to be necessary. What seems to us like repression, and causes the feminists among us to wonder at the docility of Arab women, is likely to be viewed by those women as evidence that they are loved and valued. Our Western feminine

freedom is quite capable of being interpreted by Arab women as evidence of neglect or even immorality. Furthermore, men and women are believed to be different in their very natures, and women's role is centered around the home and family.

The Arab concept of honor explains, in part, a woman's covering up in public, which can be seen as a means of shielding her from the view, not to mention the attentions, of strange men.

The point is that, however brutal or restricted the treatment of Arab women might seem to us, there is a rational basis for it, and the treatment and reasons behind it are accepted by many Arab women as well as Arab men. In short, changes in the treatment of women are a sensitive issue; it is best not to "preach" or criticize too insistently.

Many Iraqi marriages are arranged.

Love and Marriage

As we mentioned before, in Arab society it is expected that everyone marries. Many Iraqi marriages are still arranged, although often young people are placed in situations where they can meet one another. A girl and boy might be attracted to each other at one of these meetings, and after a clandestine telephone courtship (the telephone has been a great blessing to young Arabs) they might confide their attachment to their respective families, which then follow up with the traditional arrangements—if they approve of the match. If the family is not so indulgent, marriage arrangements are entirely in the hands of the parents—often just the mothers—who match eligible boys with eligible girls after thoroughly checking the potential mate and family. Many people believe that since marriage has social and economic dimensions, these concerns are more important than mere emotions.

Public and Private Behavior

In Islamic society, there is a much greater difference between public and private behavior than in Western societies. It is an invasion of privacy, for example, for a man to ask another man how his wife is; one asks instead how his family in general is, or how his children are. Arab men and women do not express affection of any sort in public, including holding hands. Contrarily, affection is often publicly expressed among friends of the same sex, including hugs and repeated kisses. Arab women are usually deferential to their fathers, brothers, or husbands in public.

Some Cultural Differences

Names

Arabs traditionally do not have last names parallel to our family names. Each extended family has a name, of course, and in recent times that name has come to be used as a last name, especially in Western circles where last names are an absolute requirement.

An Arab woman does not take her husband's family name, but in formal situations gives her own and her father's names. Nawal, who is married to Hussein, is formally Nawal Ali Nasser, Nawal the daughter of Ali of the Nasser family. For Western purposes Hussein uses the name Hussein Al-Jamil, Hussein of the Al-Jamil family. Their son Nizar is Nizar Hussein Al-Jamil. Their daughter Amira is Amira Hussein Al-Jamal.

Many Arab men have what seem to be double names, like Abdel-Rahman and Abdel-Hakim. These are described in detail in the section on language.

Many Arab names are taken from the Old Testament, and have parallels with our Old Testament names. For example, Ibrahim = Abraham, Yahya = John, Dawud = David, Yusuf = Joseph. Issa or Eisa is parallel to Jesus, and is a very common name among Muslim men. Miriam, or Maryam, is parallel to Mary, and can be a Muslim feminine name.

Arabs traditionally do not have last names parallel to our family names.

Alcohol

Alcohol is forbidden by Islam, although a good many Arabs drink, just as a good many Mormons or Baptists drink. In some Arab countries, the possession of alcohol is strictly forbidden to everyone. In other countries, like Iraq, it is legal and available to foreigners. Fundamentalist Muslims shun alcohol.

Food

Arab food is very good, with a preponderance of lamb and a heavy use of oil and and spices; it is pleasantly spicy, without being hot, and has much in common with Greek, Turkish, and Persian food. Rice combined with vegetables and meat is quite common. Arabs, like their fellow Semites the Jews, do not eat pork; they should be warned that hot dogs might contain pork and that some of the options available at fast food places might contain bacon.

Many Arabs prefer to buy meat from *halal* butchers, i.e., butchers who sell meat only from animals that have been slaughtered according to Koranic ritual. Any area that has a Muslim community, whether Pakistani, Afghan, or Arab, is likely to have at least one *halal* butcher. Kosher meat is also acceptable to Muslims, as it is slaughtered in approximately the same way.

Cross-gender Behavior

It has long been known in university circles that young Arab men have to be overtly taught that although American women have much more freedom than Arab women do, it does not mean that an American woman is automatically loose or immoral. This is, understandably, a hard lesson for them to learn, especially for those from rural backgrounds, mainly because cross-gender platonic friendships almost never occur in Iraqi society: Just about any friendly overture on the part of an American woman to an Iraqi man will be interpreted as a sexual or romantic advance. The situation is further confusing as the young men observe American couples expressing affection in public, which, as we mentioned earlier, is never done in Arab society.

The differences between American and Iraqi society with regard to cross-gender friendships is frequently frightening to young Iraqi women (and sometimes older ones as well). You might find them to be very shy and hesitant to go out alone, speak up in class, or make friends.

Hospitality is a cherished Islamic tradition.

Hospitality

Hospitality is a cherished Islamic tradition, and anyone who has lived in an Islamic country for any length of time has a store of personal experiences of hospitality extended freely and lovingly, without any expectation of return. Your Arab refugees might be puzzled at our American customs involving the necessity of invitations and giving notice before we visit. An Iraqi family might issue a general invitation, not realizing that they must pin down a specific time and place, then sit at home socially isolated and lonely, wondering why Americans are so unsociable.

They might also insist on paying in restaurants and on other occasions, to the point of spending more than they can afford. You might overtly explain how Americans tend to keep informal track of whose turn it is to pick up the check. You might also explain the many ways that friends with less can "repay" friends with more, for example by hosting an inexpensive picnic rather than an expensive restaurant meal, or by exchanging a handmade gift for a store-bought one.

Religion

As we mentioned above, religion plays a very important part in the lives of Arabs, and the existence of God and the necessity for religion is taken for granted. Some of the refugees—particularly those from rural areas—might be confused by the number of Americans who do not follow a religion and are vocal about not believing in God, yet are well-behaved, accepted members of society.

Friday

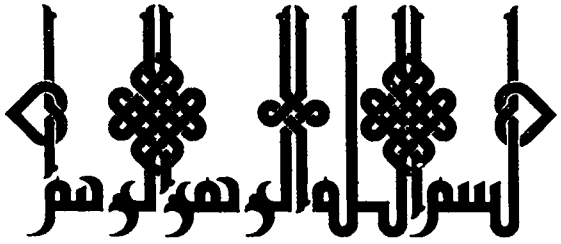
In Islam, Friday is parallel to our Sunday in that Arabs are expected to go to the mosque on Fridays to pray and to hear a sermon. The weekend in many Arab countries consists of Thursday and Friday; in Iraq it is just one day, Friday.

Dress

Most Iraqis are familiar with Western dress and will have no trouble adapting, although they might be scandalized at the amount of flesh we bare in the summer. Even older women accustomed to appearing in public in an *'abaya* and hair cover will probably adapt quickly. Young adults might shock their parents by dressing less modestly than their parents would like, but the dress habits of one's children appear to be a universal problem.

Knowledge of English

Because of Iraq's connections with Britain over the last century, English has for some time been the Western language of choice among Iraqis. Most educated Iraqis will have at least a limited ability to speak English, although it might turn out that they read much more than they can say or understand. Those who have studied English in Iraq will gain conversational English relatively quickly if they are given opportunities to use the English they have learned.



English has for some time been the Western language of choice among Iraqis.

Iraqi Arabic

Iraqis speak a dialect of Arabic, a Semitic language (along with Hebrew) that is spoken by about two hundred million people in a wide geographical area from Morocco in the west to the Persian (Arabian) Gulf in the east. The Arabic language originated in the Arabian Peninsula (now Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states) and was spread throughout the area as a result of conquests by Islamic armies, which began in the seventh century and ultimately resulted in the formation of the Islamic Empire.

There are more than fifteen dialects of spoken Arabic, defined by geographical areas and rural–urban differences, and they have varying degrees of mutual intelligibility. Speakers of Arabic can understand people in the neighboring countries, and television has ensured that Egyptian Arabic is pretty well understood by all Arabic speakers. Dialects spoken by those in the far west and the far east of the Arab World, however, are no longer mutually intelligible.

There are more than fifteen dialects of spoken Arabic. . . . Interpreters might not understand the Arabic of the clients they are supposed to interpret for.

You might encounter trouble on this point in hiring interpreters, who might not understand the Arabic of the clients they are supposed to interpret for!

Written Arabic is quite different from the spoken dialects. The written form is called Classical Arabic, or, for today's literature and press, Modern Standard Arabic. It is the same for all literate Arabs, regardless how different their spoken forms are.

To help you understand the difference between written and spoken Arabic, consider the following: If for some reason the English-speaking world had decided that Middle English—the English spoken in Chaucer's time—would forever constitute the written form of English, we would now speak English as we speak it, but whenever we wrote it we would write in the Middle English of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. There would be great differences in what we say and what we write, but everyone in the entire English-speaking world would be able to understand what we wrote.

Modern Standard Arabic (often abbreviated MSA) is effectively classical Arabic, the language in which the Koran was revealed. The vocabulary of Modern Standard Arabic has been expanded, of course, to include words for modern concepts, but even so, efforts are made to keep the new vocabulary within the "rules" of word formation of classical Arabic.

Learning to read and write Arabic, therefore, is more difficult for Arab children than it is for children speaking other languages: they have to learn an older form of their language along with the sound–symbol correspondences.

In general, the dialects of Arabic spoken now are grammatically

simpler than MSA, just as modern English is grammatically simpler than Middle English. For example, Arabic dialects have fewer categories of verb types than MSA, and no case endings on words.

Pronunciation

The most notable feature of Arabic pronunciation is the presence of some "back" and "heavy" consonants for which there are no equivalents in English. There are not many of these consonants, but they occur frequently. Here are tables of the "back" and "heavy" consonants. If you want to know exactly how they sound, ask an Iraqi to pronounce the letters for you.

If you want to know exactly how these sound, ask an Iraqi to pronounce the letters for you.

"Back" consonants

Letter	*Sound*	*Description*
خ	[kh]	a scrape made with the back of the tongue and the soft palate; same sound as in German *Bach* or Scottish *loch*
غ	[gh]	like [Kh] but with the vocal cords vibrating; much like a French *r*
ق	[q]	like [k], but pronounced at the very back of the mouth; in Iraq, it is often pronounced like [g] as in *go*
ح	[H]	a harsh [h], pronounced by constricting the throat
ع	[']	no close equivalent in English; pronounced in the pharynx like [H], but with voicing; sounds like strangling!

"Heavy" consonants

Letter	*Sound*	*Description*
ص	[S]	like [s], but with tongue raised at the back
ض	[D]	like [d], but with tongue raised at the back
ط	[T]	like [t], but with tongue raised at the back
ظ	[TH]	like the [th] in *this*, but with tongue raised at the back

The other consonants are close enough to English to be easily recognized. Note, however, that consonants can be doubled (or lengthened), an important feature because it affects meaning.

Iraqi Arabic has fewer vowels than English, but they can be short or long, i.e., held for a longer time. Here is a list (as will be explained below, the Arabic alphabet does not represent the short

vowels at all, and has symbols for only the three vowels, [aa], [ii], and [uu], that occur in Modern Standard Arabic):

Letter	*Sound*	*Description*
-	[a]	varies from the [a] in English *cat* to the [a] in *car*
ا	[aa]	the long variety of [a]
-	[i]	the same sound as in English *bit*
ي	[ii]	long [i], the same sound as in English *beet*
-	[u]	the same sound as in English [put]
و	[uu]	long [u], the same sound as in English *boot*
-	[oo]	a long vowel (the short counterpart is rare), the same sound as in English *bone* or *boat*
-	[ee]	a long vowel (no short!), the same sound as in English *bait* or *day*

The most interesting and famous aspect of the grammar of Arabic is the three-letter root system.

Word Structure

Tri-literal Root System

The most interesting and famous aspect of the grammar of Arabic is the three-letter root system, best described by an example. The three letters k-t-b, for example, carry the basic meaning "write." Various combinations of the letters—always, however, in the k-t-b order—with vowels and other consonants produce words that are variants on the basic meaning "write." For example (note that these and the other examples in this section are given in the Iraqi dialect):

'book'	[kitaab] كتاب	'desk', 'office'	[maktab] مكتب
'books'	[kutub] كتب	'scribe', 'writer'	[kaatib] كاتب
'he wrote'	[kataba] كتبَ	'written'	[maktuub] مكتوب

Most educated Arabs can readily list many words from one root. If you haven't worn through your Iraqi friend's patience in getting him or her to recite the alphabet, ask for other examples, for example words from d-r-s 'study'.

The Arabic Article

Another aspect of Arabic grammar that is interesting because it shows up in English is [al] (or [il] in some dialects), which is the definite article, the Arabic word for "the." It is prefixed to the following word, and, depending on what consonant that word starts with, the [l] may be dropped and the first consonant doubled. Here are some examples:

'house'	[beet] بيت
'the house'	[il-beet] البيت

'food'	[akil] أكل
'the food'	[il-akil] الاكل
'car'	[sayyaara] سيارة
'the car'	[is-sayyaara] السيارة
'shop', 'store'	[dukkaan] دكان
'the shop', 'the store'	[id-dukkaan] الدكان

Many English words that have been borrowed from Arabic still have the definite article attached—for example, *alkali, alcohol, alchemy, algorithm, algebra,* and *almanac.*

Many Arabic masculine names also include the definite article. A common way to name a boy is to call him "servant of" followed by one of the many hundred names for God. The Arabic word for "servant" is ['abd]; ['abd] plus the [al] plus whatever word for God is chosen constitutes the full name. (Our rendition of an Arab name as Abdul or Abdel is actually the word for servant, plus the definite article, but minus the rest of the phrase!) Here are some examples:

['abdil-'aziiz] عبدالعزيز

Abdel-Aziz ('Servant of the Almighty')

['abdil-Hakiim] عبدالحكيم

Abdel-Hakim ('Servant of the Wise')

['abdil-kariim] عبدالكريم

Abdel-Karim ('Servant of the Generous')

['abdil-raHmaan] عبدالرحمن

Abdel-Rahman ('Servant of the Merciful')

['abdullaah] عبدالله

Abdullah ('Servant of God')

Many English words borrowed from Arabic still have the definite article attached—for example, alkali, alcohol, alchemy, algorithm, algebra, and almanac.

Nouns and Adjectives

All Arabic nouns (including those which denote inanimate objects) are masculine or feminine, with the feminine nouns usually ending in [-a] ـة-.

The plural marker for masculine nouns is the suffix [-iin] ـين-

The plural for feminine nouns is the suffix [-aat] ـات- .

There are also many irregular plurals in Arabic, which have to be memorized individually, like the irregular plurals in English ('child–children', 'mouse–mice', etc.)

Arabic also has suffixes that mark the dual—i.e., two of something; the dual suffixes are

[-een] ـين- for masculine

[-teen] ـتين- for feminine

For example:

'day'	[yoom] يوم	'hour'	[saa'a] ساعه
'two days'	[yoomeen] يومين	'two hours'	[saa'ateen] ساعتين

Adjectives are also masculine or feminine, singular or plural (but not dual in the spoken language) and must match the words they describe. Some adjectives are irregular, with plurals that have to be memorized. Here are examples of all this:

'(male) teacher'	[mudarris] مدرّس
'(male) teachers'	[mudarrisiin] مدرّسين
'a good teacher (male)'	[mudarris zeen] مدرّس زين
'good teachers (male)'	[mudarrisiin zeeniin] مدرّسين زينين
'(female) teacher'	[mudarrisa] مدرّسة
'(female) teachers'	[mudarrisaat] مدرّسات
'a good teacher (female)'	[mudarrisa zeena] مدرّسة زينة
'good teachers (female)'	[mudarrisaat zeenaat] مدرّسات زينات

Another interesting characteristic of Arabic nouns and adjectives is that adjectives have the definite article too:

'the good teacher (male)' [il-mudarris iz-zeen] المدرّس الزين

The basic grammar of the spoken language differs considerably from English.

Prepositions and Connecting Words

These are used much as they are in English. Some common words include:

'and'	[wa] و	'to', 'toward'	[il], [li] ل الى
'from'	[min] من	'after'	[ba'ad] بعد
'with'	[wiyya] ويّه	'before'	[gabul] قبل

Verbs

Verbs are in the present tense (person and number are shown mostly by prefixes) and the past tense (with person and number shown by suffixes). The future is expressed with the word [raaH] راح before a present-tense verb.

Here is an example using the verb "write," from the three-letter root k-t-b described above:

'he wrote'	[kataba] كتبَ
'he is writing'	[da-yiktib] د يكتب
'she wrote'	[kitbat] كتبت
'she is writing'	[da-tiktib] د تكتب
'I wrote'	[kitabit] كتبت
'they are writing'	[da-yikitbuun] د يكتبون

Sentence Structure

Word Order

In the written language, the usual word order is verb-subject-object. The basic word order in the spoken language is subject-verb-object, just as it is in English.

The basic grammar of the spoken language differs considerably from English. Most noticeable are the differences in word order. For example, adjectives come after nouns, instead of before: "the teacher good" instead of "the good teacher."

Besides the shapes of the letters, the most important difference is that the letters and words are written or printed from right to left.

The Arabic Alphabet

The Arabic alphabet is not as difficult as it looks at first. It is *not* an endless list of characters—just twenty-eight, with each letter standing for a single, particular sound. Once you learn these, you can sound out and begin to write words. There are no capital letters, but there is some difference between printing and handwriting, as there is in English. As we mentioned before, short vowels are usually not written (the name Muhammad is spelled, in Arabic,

م ح م د = محمد

or m-h-m-d reading from right to left). Otherwise, words are spelled very close to the way they are pronounced.

Here is a list of all the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet, with their sounds—also called transcriptions—in square brackets, and their Arabic names in italics. Ask an Iraqi to say the alphabet for you, and read along.

Letter	Sound	Name	Letter	Sound	Name
ا	[a]	*alif*	ض	[D]	*DaaD*
ب	[b]	*ba*	ط	[T]	*Ta*
ت	[t]	*ta*	ظ	[TH]	*THa*
ث	[th]	*tha*	ع	[']	*'ayn*
ج	[j]	*jiim*	غ	[gh]	*ghayn*
ح	[H]	*Ha*	ف	[f]	*fa*
خ	[kh]	*kha*	ق	[q]	*qaaf*
د	[d]	*daal*	ك	[k]	*kaaf*
ذ	[dh]	*dhaal*	ل	[l]	*laam*
ر	[r]	*ra*	م	[m]	*miim*
ز	[z]	*zaay* or *zayn*	ن	[n]	*nuun*
س	[s]	*siin*	ه	[h]	*haa*
ش	[sh]	*shiin*	و	[w]	*waaw*
ص	[S]	*Saad*	ي	[y]	*ya*

Besides the shapes of the letters, the most important difference between the Arabic alphabet and the roman alphabet, in which English is written, is that the letters and words are written or printed from right to left.

A less noticeable feature of the alphabet is that when the letters are combined into words, their shapes change slightly when they are connected to other letters. To illustrate the last point, the letter ب *baa* has the following shapes:

ب

when it appears independently (as in the line just above this one), or at the end of a word after a "non-connecting" letter, e.g., باب

بـ

when it appears at the beginning of a word, e.g., باب

ـبـ

when it appears after a "connecting" letter, e.g., عبد

ـب

when it appears at the end of a word after a "connecting" letter, e.g., كتب

A final difference between the Arabic and roman alphabets is that there is no capital/small letter distinction.

Throughout Islamic times, the Arabic alphabet has been used not only as the written form of Arabic, but also as an

The Arabic alphabet has long been used as an object of beauty. The calligraphy above reads "And say: 'My Lord, increase me in knowledge.' "

object of beauty in the highly elaborated art of Arabic calligraphy. There are several styles of Arabic writing, parallel to type fonts in English except that they have traditionally been handwritten. These styles have been easily adaptable into computer fonts. The Arabic alphabet font used for the examples in this section, for example, is adapted from the Naskh style of script. Other styles are illustrated in the calligraphy we have used to decorate the pages of this Fact Sheet: another example of Naskh on page 1, an example of the square Kufi style on page 23, and an example of Thuluth in a circle on the cover. These examples all say the *Basmalah*, the prayer said at the beginning of a project or journey:

[bism illah irraHman irraHim] بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

'In the name of God, the merciful and compassionate'

The square Kufi star adorning the pullout quote on each page reads "And say: 'My Lord, increase me in knowledge.' " The example of calligraphy on page 32 is in a modern style and reads "God is beautiful and loves beauty."

Manuscripts in Arabic and other languages that use the alphabet are on display in museums around the world and are comparable to the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages in beauty and detail. In addition to texts, phrases—particularly short prayers like the *Basmalah*—are painted, sculpted, drawn, or embroidered in such a way as to become works of art in themselves, decorating walls, brass and inlaid artwork, clothing, and the outsides of buildings.

Iraqis will have difficulty writing legibly, pronouncing English vowels, and mastering the change in word order required by English questions.

Problems in Learning English

Speakers of Iraqi Arabic will have most of the same problems in learning English that all Arabs do.

Writing

First, they will have difficulty with legible handwriting. In Arabic handwriting, it is not necessary for the letters to be written on the line, as English letters are. Arabs therefore have to be given a lot of practice in writing so that their letters are all the same size and all written more or less on the line. Arabs also have great difficulty with capitalization and punctuation, a predictable result of the lack of capitalization in the Arabic alphabet and the very different punctuation conventions.

Pronunciation

The most famous pronunciation problem Arabs have in pronouncing English—the confusion of *p* and *b*—is not a problem for Iraqis, who have a *p* in their dialect.

A feature you will probably notice when you hear Arabs (including Iraqis) speaking English is their pronunciation of *r*. The Arabic *r* is made with the tip of the tongue, and the double *rr* is a strong trill, as in Spanish or Italian. As Arabs tend to use their tongue-tip *r* in speaking English, the effect may be striking, although it probably will not impede understanding.

Arabs have difficulty with many of the vowel sounds, for several reasons. There are relatively few vowels in Arabic and relatively many vowels in English (fourteen of them!). Also, the English spelling system is inconsistent and at best gives only subtle clues as to how a vowel is pronounced. Arabs will probably have difficulty hearing and pronouncing the different vowels of "sit" and "seat," "bet" and "bat," "shut" and "shot," "boat" and "boot," and "bait" and "beet."

Grammar

Questions in English will cause problems, as they do for most learners of English, because they involve changes in word order—for example, "He is studying" vs. "Is he studying?" In Arabic, the difference between a sentence and its parallel question is carried only by the tone of voice, as it is in English with "He's studying" vs. "He's studying?"

Another potential problem are the words *should* and *would*, often used in English. Arabic sentences that express the ideas conveyed by *should* and *would* have very different structures.

A third problem is the *be* verb in present-tense sentences. In Arabic, there are no parallels to *is* and *are*, and so the Arab learner of Englisn is likely to say, "I Iraqi" or "He from Iraq" or "What your name?" instead of "I am Iraqi," "He is from Iraq," or "What is your name?"

Questions in English will cause problems, as they do for most learners of English, because they involve changes in word order.

Some Iraqi Expressions

Greeting and blessings are *very* important in Arab culture. Ask an Iraqi friend to read the following phrases for you, so that you will recognize them when you hear them used, and maybe even use them yourself:

Formal greeting:	
'Peace be upon you.'	السلام عليكم. [is-salaamu 'aleekum]
Response:	
'And upon you peace.'	وعليكم السلام. [wa 'aleekum is-salaam]
Informal greeting:	
'Hello'. 'Hi.'	مرحبا. [marHaba]
Morning greeting:	
'Good morning.'	صباح الخير. [SabaaH il-kheer]
Response:	
'Good morning.'	صباح النور. [SabaaH in-nuur]
How-are-you's:	
'How are you?' (to a man)	شلونك؟ [shloonak?]
'How are you?' (to a woman)	شلونچ؟ / شلونتش؟ [shloonitsh?]
Responses:	
'Fine, thank God.' (from a man)	زين، الحمد الله. [zeen, il-Hamdillaah]
'Fine, thank God.' (from a woman)	زينة، الحمد الله. [zeena, il-Hamdillaah]
'Thank God.' (from either)	الحمد الله. [il-Hamdillaah]
Goodbye:	
'With safety'	مع السلامة. [ma'a s-salaama]
Responses:	
'God make you safe' (to a man)	الله يسلمك. [allaah ysallmak]
'God make you safe' (to a woman)	الله يسلمچ / يسلمتش. [allaah ysallmitsh]
General phrases:	
'Wonderful!' (literally 'What God has willed')	ما شاء الله. [maa shaalla]
'in the name of God.'	بسم الله. [bismillah]
'God willing.'	ان شاء الله. [inshaalla]

Bibliography

References on the People in Iraq

Center for Applied Linguistics

1981 *The Kurds* (Refugee Fact Sheet Series, No. 4). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

A fact sheet on the Kurds, parallel to this one on the Iraqis.

Nydell, Margaret K.

1987 *Understanding Arabs: A Guide for Westerners*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press. 148 pp. Appendices on the language and the different Arab countries, Bibliography and Index.

An excellent, very readable book describing aspects of Arab culture and behavior, especially those aspects which differ markedly from Western behavior. Sample topics: Arab views of the family, attitudes towards religion, social formalities and etiquette, etc. The book was written for Westerners living in Arab countries, but will be very useful in giving insights into the ideas and values of the Iraqi refugees in the United States.

Merz, Helen Chapin (Ed.)

1990 *Iraq: A Country Study* (Area Handbook Series). Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Federal Research Division.

A good reference book, with bibliography, glossary and index, this is one of the standard Area Handbooks now published by the Library of Congress. Research on the book was completed in May, 1988, and so there is nothing on events leading up to the Gulf War. There are chapters on the history of the area, the society, the environment, the economy, government and politics, and national security and the army. The chapter on history is particularly interesting: it covers the area from ancient Mesopotamian times to the Iran-Iraq war.

Yergin, Daniel

1992 *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power*. New York: Simon and Schuster. (paperback)

Huge, detailed, absorbing history of oil around the world, including the discovery of oil in Iraq and subsequent developments. A long read, but when you finish you have an enormous amount of modern history under your belt.

National Geographic

The picture magazine *National Geographic* has featured Iraq in articles almost from its very first issue, and an afternoon in your public library reading through them in chronological order will give you a remarkably thorough picture of the country from its days as an outpost of the Ottoman Empire (the first article appears in 1900) to the aftermath of Desert Storm. Each article is effectively an eyewitness account of history, and is of course accompanied by a number of illustrative photographs of the consistently high *National Geographic* quality. (Some of the best portraits of the people are in black and white, in the earlier articles.) Here is a complete list:

1992

August Struggle of the Kurds, 32-63.

Description of the Kurds in Iraq and Turkey, with a very clear map and pictures.

February Persian Gulf Pollution: Assessing the Damage One Year Later, 122-134.

A followup to the August 1991 article, showing cleanup efforts.

1991

August After the Storm, 2-35.

Description of Kuwait after the war, with grim pictures.

May Iraq: Crucible of Civilization, 103-115.

Article on Iraq's ancient history, with wonderful photographs of artifacts.

1988

May The Persian Gulf: Living in Harm's Way, 648-671.

Overview of the Persian Gulf countries, and the impact of the Iran–Iraq war. Includes a diagram and description of the strategic damming of the rivers.

1985

January The New Face of Baghdad, 80-109.

Description of the city and a discussion of the Iran–Iraq war, including information on the Ba'ath party.

1976

April Water Dwellers in a Desert World, 502-523.

Description and stunning photographs of the Ma'dan.

1975

March We Who Face Death, 364-387.

An account of the Kurds' bid for autonomy/independence in the early '70s.

1966

December Abraham, the Friend of God, 739-789.

Description of the area from the point of view of the prophet Abraham, with interesting maps and discussion of contrasts with modern life.

1959

January Station Wagon Odyssey: Baghdad to Istanbul, 48-87.

Account of a difficult trip that includes information and pictures of the oil fields around Kirkuk.

1958

October Iraq, Where Oil and Water Mix, 443-489.

Long, detailed portrait of the country in the late '50s, just after the revolution. Includes a picture of a "fiery furnace"—an area where oil seeps onto the surface and has been set on fire—and a dam on the Tigris.

February Marsh Dwellers of Southern Iraq, 205-239.

Another article on the Ma'dan, more detailed than the April 1976 article, but with equally wonderful photographs.

1953

April Report from the Locust Wars, 545-562.

A fascinating account of the multinational, multiethnic effort to combat the swarms of locusts in the desert before they reached the agricultural regions in Iraq.

1951
December Around the World in Eighty Days, 705-750.

Travel article that includes descriptions of Baghdad, Basra, and the Tigris.

January Ancient Mesopotamia: A Light That Did Not Fail, 41-105.

Description of ancient Iraq that includes beautiful paintings by H. M. Herget.

1947
March Beside the Persian Gulf, 341-356.

Description of a port near Basra, in an article about the Gulf countries.

1942
September Forty Years Among the Arabs, 385-420.

Sprightly, sophisticated, opinionated essay describing the author's life in Iraq as a resident foreigner between 1902 and 1942. Includes delightful anecdotes and a photo essay on camels.

1941
August Bombs over Bible Lands, 141-180.

Description of the Middle East in World War II, with pictures of the oil fields in Iraq.

1938
December Change Comes to Bible Lands, 695-750.

An article contrasting ancient and modern life in the area of the Bible. Includes a brief description and photos of the Assyrians.

1930
January New Light on Ancient Ur: Excavations at the Site of the City of Abraham Reveal Geographical Evidence of the Biblical Story of the Flood, 95-130.

An account of a joint British/American archaeological project.

1928
August Archeology, the Mirror of the Ages: Our Debt to the Humble Delvers in the Ruins at Carchemish and at Ur, 207-226.

A thoughtful essay on the local people (Kurd, Ma'dan, Iraqi) who do the actual digging at an archaelogical excavation.

1923
May A Visit to Three Arab Kingdoms: Transjordania, Iraq, and the Hedjaz Present Many Problems to European Powers, 535-568.

A discussion of the people in the Middle East after World War I, and France's and Britain's problems in establishing new governments there.

1922
April Modern Life in the Cradle of Civilization, 390-407.

Discussion of the contrast between ancient and modern life in the Tigris-Euphrates area.

1918
July — Under the Heel of the Turk: A Land with a Glorious Past, a Present of Abused Opportunities, and a Future of Golden Possibilities, 51-69.

Delightful although opinionated article about the Ottoman Empire, with references throughout to the Kurds and Iraqis.

1916
February — The Cradle of Civilization: The Historic Lands Along the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers Where Briton Is Fighting Turk, 127-162.

Pushing Back History's Horizon: How the Pick and Shovel Are Revealing Civilizations That Were Ancient When Israel Was Young, 162-216.

Two long articles on the ancient history of Mesopotamia, accompanied by fascinating photographs of artifacts, including cuneiform tablets, and of Iraqi life during World War One.

1914
December — Where Adam and Eve Lived, 546-588.

Account of a journey (by boat, camel, donkey, etc.!) to Baghdad, with descriptions of life in the city and in the southern Ma'dan area.

Mystic Nedjef, the Shia Mecca, 589-598.

Account of a journey to the Shi'a shrine.

1909
February — The Mountaineers of the Euphrates, 142-156.

1904
April — Travels in Arabia and Along the Persian Gulf, 139-151.

These two articles are listed in the *National Geographic*'s index, but our public library's collection didn't go back before 1910. Maybe your library will have these early issues.

Books on Iraqi Arabic

Clarity, B.E., Stowasser, Karl, & Wolfe, Ronald G. (Eds.)
1964 — *A Dictionary of Iraqi Arabic: English–Arabic.* Georgetown Arabic Series #6. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Dictionary focusing on the spoken language, with the Iraqi Arabic listed in roman letters rather than Arabic script.

Erwin, Wallace M.
1963 — *A Short Reference Grammar of Iraqi Arabic.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

This is the standard description of Iraqi Arabic, for specialists interested in details.

Woodhead, Daniel R., & Beene, Wayne (Eds.)
1967 — *A Dictionary of Iraqi Arabic: Arabic-English.* Georgetown Arabic Series #10. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

The companion volume to the dictionary listed above.