

CITY OF KIRKUK:  
NO HISTORICAL AUTHENTICITY WITHOUT MULTIETHNICITY

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As for the Turkomans, according to Edmonds, they have been in Iraq, in general, for the duration of at least half a millennium to one millennium. This duration is long enough to render them genuine natives of the land. Some of their early settlements were and still are along the highway from Baghdad to Kirkuk and then to Mosul including Qara Tapa, Kifri, Tuz Khurmatu, Tauq, Kirkuk, Altun Kopru, Arbil, Tell Afar. Their largest population concentration is in the city of Kirkuk whose linguistics, cultural and ethnic identity is distinctly colored by their presence.

Kirkuk, throughout its long history, has never been an Arab city or even with a sizeable Arab population until the beginning of the 1970s when Ba'th government began to systematically try to alter the demographic structure of the city, in particular, and the governorate or state (El-Muhafaza) of Kirkuk, in general, by encouraging and financially enticing the Arabs to move into the city, while encouraging the non-Arabs to move out of it. Historically, the nearest the Arabs have come to Kirkuk has been the few settlements they had in Hawijah to the southwest of Kirkuk the home of the Ubaid tribe.

The main feature of the multilingualism in Kirkuk was that the smaller the size of the ethnic nationality, the more multilingual it became. For instance, the Armenians and Assyrians were smaller in size compared to the Turkomans, this they spoke at least three, four or even five languages including combinations of Arabic, Turkomani, Kurdish, Assyrian, and Armenian. The Turkomans, as a larger native community, rarely acquired the languages of the smaller ethnic groups such as Assyrians and Armenians except in certain isolated cases when certain Turkomani families or individuals lived among or settled adjacent to the Assyrian and Armenian settlements or socialized with them through employment or friendship. Many of the Turkomans knew Kurdish for several reasons of historical admixture, intermarriages and residential adjacency. Interestingly, most of the members of all the non-Arab ethnic groups spoke Arabic not because of the large size of the Arab community in Kirkuk, but rather because of Arabic being the official language of the educational system and governmental communication. Personally, in my pre-school childhood I was exposed so much to Assyrian and Turkomani that the latter was like my native language in terms of fluency and proficiency, although Assyrians was my home and historical native language. On different occasions in the elementary school, class presentations were conducted in Turkomani. I would never ever forget one of my 4<sup>th</sup> grade oral examinations that was conducted by Yousif Efandi in Turkomani. I recall that one of the questions I was asked was: "Tawihgin necha ayaghi war?" (How many legs does a chicken have?). My answer was: "Efendi, tawighin ikke ayaghi war." (Sir, a chicken has two legs). Still relevant to this multilingual scenario, I vividly remember two of my Turkomani friends who grew up with Assyrian friends [ Abdul Razzaq Aswad and Zubair Al-Bayati] in the IPC Technical Training Center and intermingled with them socially and athletically spoke Assyrian so fluently and authentically that one would never know they were not native Assyrians. In fact, in one instance Zubair and I wanted to fool the Assyrian mother of one of our friends into believing that Zubair was an Assyrian. To authenticate this whole untrue claim, Zubair [who obviously was a Moslem] began to swear by invoking the name of Jesus saying: 'b'Msheekha ana Suraywein.' ( [I Swear] By Jesus, I am Assyrian). This encounter with Zubair is one of the most memorable instances in my life, which I always cite as a demonstration of the genuine authenticity of the multilingualism and multiculturalism of a native Kirkukli.

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