

Who Owns Kerkuk? Examination of the Basic Dimensions

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The purpose of the Iraqi Turkmen Human Rights Research Foundation was to begin a discussion, initiated by Open Democracy in 2007, about ethnic issues surrounding the city of Kerkuk. In particular, Open democracy proposed a discussion regarding the differences that have arisen between Turkmen and Kurdish communities. In our first article, entitled "The fate of a city",¹ We attempted to present aspects of a Turkmen perspective of these issues.

Mr. Xulam, a Kurdish writer, replied in an article titled "Attacking the victims".² The core of his argument included criticisms of little relevance to the current problems in Kerkuk. His article detailed Kurdish tragedies and was designed to exploit the compassion of the reader.

The title of Xulam's article confirms a concern which SOITM expressed in its early reports. For more than a century, the West has reported extensively on the Kurds in the media, and in academic and political discourse. Numerous books and articles chronicling Kurdish sufferings have also been published. While most of these publications are misleading in their conclusions, most of them remain free of criticism. This lack of critical analysis has contributed to the development of exaggerated sympathy for the Kurdish case in the western world. Kurdish political actors and intellectual community are aware of this pattern and continue to exploit it. Therefore, the majority of the Kurdish intellectuals and politicians continue to concentrate on Kurdish sufferings in their articles or speeches even if those issues do not relate to the subject of the discussion.^{3,4}

With the overstating of the Kurdish case, Western perspectives of realities in Northern Iraq have become distorted due to media saturation. As an example, human rights violations against the Kurds have been overstated while violations committed against other communities in the region have largely been ignored. As a result, international authorities have supported the implantation of Kurdish policies in all of Iraq, particularly in the so-called disputed areas and Kerkuk province without understanding the full socio-political landscape of north of Iraq. Despite historical documentation to the contrary, the Kurds are now considered the original inhabitants of Northern Iraq and Turkmen and Chaldo-Assyrian cities are deemed to be historically Kurdish cities.

As a foundation, we recommend that the approach to this discussion should be crafted in the context of ethnicity, geography and history, administration, and demography.

Ethnic nature of Kerkuk region

Before the 20th century

As a result of the Ottoman failure to record ethnicity in its census statistics, it is difficult to find exact and reliable information about the population size of different ethnic communities in Kerkuk before the 20th century. Additionally, statistics later released by successive nationalist Iraqi governments severely minimized population sizes of Iraqi non-Arab communities. Traveller narratives and publications of independent writers thus serve as the only source of information regarding ethnic composition of the region. Accounts that comment on this information confirm that the Kerkuk region during this period was largely inhabited by Turkmen.⁵

In 1810, Giuseppe Campanile found that the inhabitants of Kerkuk were not Kurdish.⁶ In 1816, James S. Buckingham further confirmed Campanile's findings, portraying the south-eastern region (Kifri and Kara Tepe) of the Kerkuk province⁷ as ethnically and linguistically Turkish. Buckingham adds that Kerkuk is located a four days distance from Kurdish lands.⁸ Nearly eighteen years later, J. Baillie Fraser described almost the same landscape as Buckingham.⁹

¹⁰ In 1836, Shiel's account described the ethnic composition of Kerkuk city as follows: "The inhabitants are Arabs and Osmànliis, with some Christians and Jews, but no Kurds."¹¹ Between 1817 and 1820, Robert Ker Porter characterized the ethnic composition of Kerkuk city as "chiefly composed of Turks, Armenians, Gourds, Arabs, and a few Jews."¹² Just one year later, Claudius J. Rich confirmed that the Kerkuk's inhabitants were not Kurds and that all the inhabitants in the south, east and north regions adjacent to Kerkuk were populated by Turkmen.¹³⁻¹⁵ In his publication, "Dictionary of Erudition and Historical Church of St. Peter's", published in 1846, Gaetano Moron classified the Kerkuk population as Turkish, Armenians Nestorians and Kurdish.¹⁶ Toward the end of the 19th century Vital Cuinet, estimated the total population of Kerkuk and its annexed sub-districts and villages as 30.000 with Turkmen comprising almost 95% of the population (28.000).

The aforementioned data refers to the insignificant presence of Kurds in the region before the 20th century.

Twentieth century

Interest in the ethnic composition of the Kerkuk region greatly increased during the eight year conflict between Turkey and the United Kingdom for the oil-rich Ottoman province of Mosul after World War I. Because the Iraqi Turkmen population was not essential in the achievement of British objectives for the region, the early Iraqi censuses organized by British mandate underestimated the number of Turkmen in Iraq, particularly in the Mosul province.¹⁸ It was fixed at 2%, a figure repeated by successive Iraqi governments.

In 1909, Ely B. Soane considered Kerkuk famous for Turkmen.¹⁹ In 1945, Cecil J. Edmonds estimated that a great majority of Kerkuk city was of Turkmen heritage.²⁰ He described the ethnic composition of Tuz Khurmatu and the villages surrounding it as primarily Turkmen²¹ Furthermore, Stephen H. Longrigg described Kara Tepe as a Turkmen region,²² and in 1918, William R. Hay stressed that Turkmen were the main inhabitants of Kerkuk city and surrounding villages.²³⁻²⁵

In the first half of the 20th century, Wallace A. Lyon concluded that, "the country between Kifri and Kerkuk and onwards to Arbil and numerous villages is inhabited by people of Turkish origin speaking the Turkish tongue."^{26, 27} He also stressed the Turkmen nature of the Kerkuk city: "Kerkuk city was not without its culture - Turkish and proud of it."²⁸

The *commission of the league of the nations*, which conducted a comprehensive study on the demography of Kerkuk region in 1924, reported that²⁹

- the basis stock of the population of Kerkuk is Turkish
- Altun Kopru is definitely Turkish
- The population of Tuz Khurmatu is, except for a few Jewish families, entirely Turkish or Turkmen.
- 75 per cent of population of Kara Tepe is Turkish,
- Taze Khormatu and Daquq are also mainly Turkish.

Razzuq Isa in his book "Mukhtasar Gugrafiyat, al-Irak" considered almost all the districts of Kerkuk province to have a Turkmen majority: Kerkuk city, Malha district at the West, Tawuk at the south, Kifri district and Kara Tepe at the south-eastern and Tuz Khurmatu at the south-western.³⁰ The Iraqi Historian Taha B. al-Hashimi approximated the majority in the province to be Turkmen.³¹ Mohammed H. al-Daftari estimated the Turkmen as the first inhabitants of Kerkuk city.³² The English Air minister Christopher B. Thomson referred to "Kerkuk [as] a Turcoman city".³³ The English peerage Samuel JG Hoare asserted that "Kerkuk [is] a place that is mainly Turcoman"³⁴

William Warfield described the Kerkuk of the early 20th century as distinctly Turkish.³⁵ Gordon in the 1930s mentioned that Kerkuk is a Turkish speaking city.³⁷ In 1913 and 1936, the Encyclopedia of Islam highlighted³⁸ that "Turkmen are the predominant element in the city". The Encyclopedia considers the city to be a "bulwark of the Ottoman Empire and a center of its culture". Liara Lukitz's account also confirmed the Turkmen nature of Kerkuk city.³⁹ In 1959 Hanna Batatu considered Kerkuk city to be predominately Turkish until very recently.⁴⁰ He said

that even the Melha region which was exposed to Arabification was owned by Turkmen.⁴¹ David McDowall in his book titled "A Modern History of the Kurds" presents valuable information on the Turkmen regions in Kerkuk province.⁴²⁻⁴⁵ Phebe Marr considers Turkmen the leading family of Kerkuk city and she says that many Kurds migrated into Kerkuk city.⁴⁶ Prof. Edward Y. Odisho, a Christian native of Kerkuk, writes "Turkmen's largest population concentration is in the city of Kerkuk whose linguistics, cultural and ethnic identity is distinctly coloured by their presence"⁴⁷

Until the end of the 19th century, there is almost no source which describes the Kerkuk province of 1976, before administrative alteration, as a Kurdish inhabited region. The politically oriented British military officers, who published many studies on the region, began to impose the Kurdish culture on the north of Iraq as a whole, particularly Kerkuk region, despite continuing to consider Kerkuk as Turkmen city.

Cecil J. Edmonds was the first to increase abnormally the Kurdish population in Kerkuk province to 53% in his estimation of Kerkuk's ethnic breakdown.⁴⁸

Early results of the 1957 Iraqi census underestimated the total number of the Turkmen in Iraq putting them into 136,200. The reviewed results of the same census increased this figure to 567,000, which made 9% of total Iraqi population. According to the new results, the total number of the Iraqi Turkmen was increased five folds. The reviewed results did not applied to the census figures of the Kerkuk province, which accounted the Turkmen as the largest population of Kerkuk city by 37.7% and the Kurds as the largest population of the province by 48%. Therefore, the results of the 1957 census of Kerkuk province as whole, which made the Kurds the majority, should be considered unreliable. Noting worth that the same census figures accounted the total number of the Kurds in Iraq as 819,000, making 13% of total Iraqi population.^{49, 50}

Geography and History

Kerkuk province is located in a non-mountainous plain region, while the traditional homeland of the Kurds has always been documented as mountainous regions.⁵¹ They have only in recent history started to migrate towards the plains.^{51, 53} Encyclopaedia Britannica dates Kurdish abandonment of their traditional lifestyle in the highlands and mountains to after World War I.⁵⁴

In order to correctly analyse the Kurdish claim to Kerkuk, the terms Kurd and Kurdistan should be analysed.

The Term Kurd

The socio-economic meaning of the term Kurd was first applied to Seleucid or Parthian mercenaries dwelling in the Zagros in the second century BCE.⁵⁶⁻⁵⁹ It is unclear when the term *Kurd* acquired the meaning *Persian nomad*.⁵¹ However, the socio-economic meaning of the term can be found in the 36 volumes of the history of celebrated Arabic Historian al-Tabari.⁶⁰ This definition was confirmed and used by celebrated Islamic historians, Masudi and Hamawi. Many historians and travellers, including many westerners, of the 19th century used the term Kurds for brigandage.⁶¹ Marco Polo's definition of the term in the 13th century supports the idea that the term *Kurds* was not used as an ethnic term.⁶² In the 16th century, Leonhard Rauwolf considered the Kurds to be Nestorians that spoke no Persian, which implies that the term Kurd during that period had no relation with the Kurds of today.

The Term Kurdistan

Kurdistan has never referred to a state with an independent administrative system. When used in the administrative context, the term referred to a mixed population.⁶⁴ It was used for the first time by Sultan Sanjar of the Seljuk in the middle of the 12th century to describe the western part of the Jibal Province in Iran. Turkmen and Kurds formed the majority of this Kurdistan.⁶⁶ The Mongol sultan Oljay built a new capital for the province and called it Chamchamal (the derivation of which may be Mongol).⁶⁵ At that time, the north eastern mountainous region of what now constitutes north of Iraq was shared between al-Jazira in the west and Azerbaijan in

the east, separated by a frontier line just east of the Amadiya and Erbil.^{5, 67} Tawuk and Kerkuk were located in al-Jazira province.⁶⁸ Ali of Yazd, who used the word Kerkuk for the first time in the early 15th century, placed Kerkuk and Tawuk in Mesopotamia.⁵⁵ The word Kurdistan only started to appear in the registers of the Ottoman Empire in the third decade of the 16th century, describing an area below the lake of Van.⁶⁹ Rauwalf in 16th century also used the original Turkmen name of the town Tauk and Altun Kopri of the Kerkuk province.

Sharafname of Sharaf al-Din of Bitlis, which was published in 1597, and Seyahatname of Evliya Celebi, written in mid 17th century, both incorrectly depicted expanded frontiers for the term Kurdistan. A map published by Evliya, who succeeded Bitlisi by several decades and possibly read his texts, is almost a copy of the map of Sharafname. The Kurdistan of these two authors includes Malatya and extends to Baghdad and then to Basra, inclusions which invalidate these maps.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Çelebi took the road along the Tigris in his travels in Iraq³⁸ which was a considerable distance from the Kurdish region.

In the 18th century, Maurizio Garzoni and Carsten Niebuhr⁶² described the region presenting inclusive descriptions of the term Kurdistan. Garzoni divided the region called Kurdistan into five principalities: Bitlis, Giulamerk, Amadia, Djezira and Kara Djiolan. Erbil was excluded and Shahrizur and Kerkuk were considered two independent principalities governed by Mutasellims.⁷¹ Niebuhr's account of his travels in Iraq included Mardin and Diyarbakir in Mesopotamia. He described Kurdistan as forming "the northern part of the ancient Assyria a mountainous region to the east of the Tigris, and immediately at the back of Mosul, Nisibin, and Mardin. The inhabitants for the most part speak a corrupt dialect of Persian."⁶²

In the early 19th century, Claudius J. Rich gave valuable information on the boundaries of so called Kurdistan and the Kurdish regions. He determined Derband, Sagirma and Ibrahim Kanja as the western boundaries.^{72, 5} He recorded the distance to Kifri as 27 mile and nine hours on horse.

During the 1830s, William F. Ainsworth, gave the clearest view on the boundaries of imaginary Kurdistan. He wrote "In the present day, Kerkuk and Arbil are considered as towns attached to the Pashalik of Baghdad, and the ancient Adiabene forms part of the Pashalik of Mosul. It is not customary, although quite arbitrary, to consider the country of the plains W. of the outlying ranges of hills in either of these Pashaliks as forming part of Kurdistan. Jezireh Zakho and Koi Sanjak, like 'Amadiyah and 'Suleimaniyeh', are in the hills"⁷⁴

In 1856, M. A. Clement further displaced the boundaries of Kurdistan toward Kerkuk city, but excluded it from the boundaries of what is called Kurdistan: "Kerkout, chef-lieu du pachalik de Chehrèzour, est situé à l'extrême limite orientale du désert sur le versant Sud de la première colline qu'on doit franchir pour pénétrer dans le Kourdistan"^{75, 76}

Clement unknowingly contradicted almost all the other travellers of the same period when he recorded three quarters of the city's population as Kurdish.⁷⁷ However, the same estimation was given by Şemseddin Sami in his book "Kamus iil-Alam" without referring to Clement.

According to these traveller accounts, it is clear that the boundaries of Kurdistan steadily moved towards the west. This evidence implies that Kurds moved constantly for centuries toward the interior of Iraq expanding their boundaries by migration and not by historical claim.

Kurdish presence in Kerkuk

Leonhard Rauwolf was the first European traveler to visit Kerkuk in the second half of the 16th century and considered Kerkuk as part of a Curters province. According to Rauwolf's accounts, Curters were Nestorians and spoke no Persian (of which Kurdish is a dialect) sharing no linguistic links with present day Kurds.⁶³

Despite meeting no Kurds and visiting no Kurdish dwellings during his journey through Iraq, Thomas Howell in 1787 named Kerkuk the capital of so-called Turkish Kurdistan. By the word Kurds, he was referring to a Yazidi population, few of which actually lived in the cities at the time.⁷⁸ John Jackson in 1799 referred to the town Altun Kopri, about 50 km north west of Kerkuk,

as the capital of Turkish Kurdistan. Like Howel, Jackson met no Kurds and visited no Kurdish dwellings in Kerkuk region during his travels.⁷⁹ It seems that both of Howell and Jackson had been influenced by Bitlisi and Celebi, remembering that the Ottoman administration had never named these regions by the name Kurdistan.

In 1818, Claudius J. Rich described only Chamchamal and Shuwan regions of Kerkuk province as inhabited by the Kurds, but he excluded both regions from Kurdistan.^{80, 81} He recorded that the northern region of Kerkuk was neither inhabited with Kurds nor a part of Kurdish land.⁸¹ Rich did not consider the natives of Kerkuk to be Kurdish.⁸² His data held the Kerkuk province of before 1976, when the administrative boundaries were altered by the Ba'ath regime, out of the term Kurdistan. This argument supports the statement by H. Batatu regarding increased Kurdish immigration into Kerkuk in the 20th century.⁸³ During the same period, James B. Fraser regarded Sagirma as a pass into the Kurdistan region as well.^{5, 84}

Abu Talib Khan, James S. Buckingham, Robert Ker Porter and Claudius J. Rich passed through Kerkuk province during the first 3 decades of 19th century without meeting any Kurdish elements or confronting robbers. After a decade the travelers started writing about scattered Kurdish robbers on the High Way (Baghdad – Tuz Hurmatu - Kerkuk – Erbil).

In 1818, Rich placed Kifri about 27 km away from the Kurdish boundaries. A decade later, Mignan placed the same border near Kifri.⁸⁵ In 1834, Fraser showed that the road between Kifri and Kara Tepe had become unsafe, which suggest an influx of Kurdish robbers.⁸⁶ In 1878, the road between Tuz Khurmatu and Tawuk region was overwhelmed by Kurdish robbers.⁸⁷⁻⁹⁰

In 1924, a mission commissioned by the League of Nations confirmed the Kurdification of the Turkmen lands on the High Way, which included Kerkuk province.^{91, 92}

Following the precedent set by Bitlis and Evliya, the British were responsible for inaccurately expanding the borders of Kurdistan to include Kerkuk.

Administration

From the Seljuk era to the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Kerkuk was administered by the Turkmen. Shortly after the annexation of the Kerkuk region to the Ottoman Empire by Suleyman the Magnificent in 1534, the area became the headquarters of the Ottoman sub-district of Shahrizur which had been administratively annexed to Baghdad. This region was comprised of the modern provinces of Kerkuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniya. Its status as a Ottoman's territory was confirmed by the treaties of 1550 and 1554.^{93, 94} Despite Kerkuk's intermittent annexation to Mosul or Baghdad, it remained an important part of the Shahrizur province during the following three centuries. Midhat Pasha (1869-1872) excluded Sulaymaniya from Shahrizur. In 1879, Kerkuk (including Erbil) was incorporated into the Mosul province.

It should be noted that the Shahrizur region, which was described by Arab historians Maqdisi and Tabari as a Kurdish region, was the Sasanian Shahrizur and not Ottomans Shahrizur. The latter Shahrizur has never been seen as Kurdish region by travellers or historians.⁹⁵

The majority of governors and mayors of the Kerkuk province during Ottoman and Iraqi Kingdom rule were Turkmen.^{96, 97} Habib Talabani, the first Kurdish mayor of Kerkuk City, was appointed – not elected - in the late 1930s. The other two Kurdish mayors of Kerkuk City were Fadhil Talabani and Maruf al-Barzanci. The latter who held the position for only six months was appointed by leaders of a coup in 1958.⁹⁸ Until American occupation in 2003, the higher administration of the city, and most of its districts have never been predominantly Kurdish.⁹⁹

Despite the fact that Kurds controlled all the legal and political apparatus of the Kerkuk province in late 1950s,¹⁰⁰ the Turkmen won overwhelmingly majorities in all syndicate and civil society organizations between 1958 and 1959:¹⁰¹⁻¹⁰³

- The election of Chamber of Lawyers in September 1958,
- The Student Union lists in all the schools of the governorate at 22 November 1958.
- The administrative committee of the Al-Thawra Club in November 1959.

- The Teachers Syndicate at 23 January 1959,
- The administrative committee of the Children protection Association in January 1959
- The administrative committee of the Teachers Club in January 1959
- The administrative committee of the Red Crescent at 13 February 1959.

Table 1, Administrative regions (districts) of Kerkuk in the 20th century

1912 - Kerkuk Salname	1922 Razuq Isa	1929 - T. B. alHashimi	1947 Edmonds	1954 M. H. al-Daftra	before 1976	1989
Kerkuk	Kerkuk	Kerkuk	Kerkuk	Kerkuk	Kerkuk	Kerkuk
Rawanduz	Rawanduz	Chamchamal	Chamchamal	Chamchamal	Chamchamal	
Koysancak	Koysancak				Hawija	Hawija
Raniya	Raniya		Daquq	Tuz Khurmatu	Tuz Khurmatu	
Salahiya (Kifri)	Salahiya (Kifri)	Kifri	Kifri	Kifri	Kifri	
Erbil						

Demography

By the early 20th century, Kerkuk region has been exposed to different kinds of demographic changes. While an economic boom due to the oil production was the main catalyst for earlier immigrations, later geopolitical factors motivated further aggressive and systematic demographic changes in the province. The resource wealth of Kerkuk and its status as a multi-ethnic region have served as the primary source of unrest for the Kerkuk inhabitants. Recognizing the economic value of Kerkuk as a resource depot, which facilitates their independency, the Kurds expanded the boundaries of their region to include the city.

The demographic changes in Kerkuk province can be categorized as follows:

Kurdish Immigration,

In the last century, several factors have increased the movement of the Kurds to the plains. This movement can be divided into four stages:

1. The early stage (Until 1910s).

Kerkuk province had received the lion share of the Kurdish immigration into the Iraq for centuries, which was gradual, and due to the socio-economic factors. During this stage, the Kurds left their traditional life in the mountains toward inside Iraq and spread at the eastern part of the Kerkuk province, too.^{104, 105}

2. The intermediate stage (1920 – 1960) which characterized with an increase in immigration and was a result of socioeconomic and geopolitical reasons.

Industrialization of Kerkuk's oil in the 1920s flourished greatly the economy of the province. This brought large numbers of poor Kurds from the eastern villages of the province and from the provinces of Erbil and Sulaymaniya. The Kurdish immigration steadily increased during this stage with constant development of the province's economy.

A large number of Kurds established themselves in the Imam Kasim Neighbourhood of Kerkuk at the eastern north of the city during this period.¹⁰⁶ A second Kurdish neighbourhood of Kerkuk which is called Shorja started to appear on the eastern border of the city in 1940s. Two other Kurdish neighbourhoods called Iskan and al-Jumhuriya were built inside Kerkuk city toward of the end of this stage,^{83, 107}

It is worth noting that the Kerkuk massacre of 14 July 1959,⁸³ during which the Turkmen were massacred by Communists and Kurdish militias, led to emigration of hundreds of Turkmen families from the region. Many of these families settled in Baghdad.

3. The late stage (1960 - 2003),

The Kurdish immigration further increased in this stage and was mainly due to political reasons. It started with the Kurdish armed uprising in 1961, which further intensified ethnic conflict in the region. Hundreds of Kurdish villages in between the mountains were emptied and the inhabitants poured into the cities of neighbouring provinces, including Kerkuk.

4. The current stage (after occupation in 2003),

This stage has seen the greatest influx of Kurds into the Kerkuk province, which is exposed to a politically oriented systematic Kurdification.

The geopolitical environment created by occupation of Iraq in 2003, granted Kurdish militia parties the opportunity to realize their dream and invade the Kerkuk province. They changed the demography of Kerkuk province at such a pace that not even the Ba'ath regime achieved in 35 years. Kurdish parties during this stage settled about 600.000 Kurds in Kerkuk.

Several Kurdish neighbourhoods estimated at several kilometres width was built along the eastern border of Kerkuk city during this stage.⁷³ Thousands of houses were taken by Kurdish families and huge Iraqi military complexes were taken by the Kurds. The population of small sub-districts, for example, Kara Injir and Shiwan unusually increased.

The population of Kerkuk province was around 870,000 on the day of occupation, but in 2007 it was estimated to be 1,368,860.¹⁰⁸ Approximately 150,000 Arabs have fled or left the city since that point.

Arabic Emigration

The emergence of the Israeli state and escalation of the Arab-Israeli problem amplified Arab nationalism in the region and brought nationalist powers to rule in certain Arab countries. This tide of Arab nationalism had great influence on the political situation in Iraq.

The multiethnic nature of the population, the resource wealth of the region and Kurdish demands for independence have all contributed to the Iraqi government's concerns regarding the stability of Kerkuk.

This has played an important role in the exposure of the non-Arabs to aggressive assimilation policies seen before occupation.

The politically oriented Arabic emigration can be divided into 2 stages:

1. The monarchical stage (1920 – 1958) was gradual and mainly due to the social and political factors.

Settlement of nomadic Arabs in the western plains of Kerkuk started in the early kingdom period.

2. The republican stage (1958 – 2003) was characterized by intense and systematic establishment and due to the political factors.

The second stage of Arabization policy of Kerkuk began with the establishment of the Republic. Appointment of Turkmen to governmental offices decreased and many Turkmen were discharged. Many other officials were later expelled from Kerkuk.

The comprehensive demographic changes of Kerkuk region in this stage were initiated by Ba'ath regime in early 1970s. Hundreds of thousands of Arabs immigrated mainly from the south, while non-Arabs, mainly Turkmen, were deported from the province.¹⁰⁹ The Arabs enjoyed special incentives and rights, while the non-Arabs were deprived of governmental facilities and work opportunities.

In January 1976, two large administrative Turkmen districts and one Kurdish district were detached from Kerkuk, leaving only the Arabic district of al-Hawija within the province. The names of tens villages and districts in Kerkuk governorate were officially given Arabic names. The non-Arab families were forced to change their nationality to Arab.

Assyrian Emigration

The Christians of Kerkuk City can be divided into two groups. The first group, called the Christians of Kerkuk Citadel, are the original natives of the city. They are of Turkmen origin. They continue to conduct religious rituals in Turkmen language. The Petroleum Company, which was completely administrated by the British in 1920s, brought Christian workers from the other governorates. They mainly settled in the neighbourhoods around the Company: New Kerkuk, Almaz and Gavur Bagi.

Cultural Characteristics

The folk song of Kerkuk, which is called 'Kerkuk Türküsü', is well known in the Turkish world, and played almost daily on radio and television, whereas there are no Kurdish folk song of Kerkuk. There are almost no Kurdish singers born in Kerkuk city other than those in the last several decades. Additionally, architecture of historical houses and monuments in the major cities of Kerkuk province all reflect Turkish influence. The names of neighbourhoods and most towns in the Kerkuk region are Turkmen. Almost all the poets of Kerkuk region are of Turkmen origin, and the publications of Kerkuk region are historically Turkmen. However, The number of Turkmen publications has decreased gradually since the establishment of the Iraqi state in 1921. Kurdish publications in Kerkuk have on the other hand appeared only recently.

Conclusions

The Kurds exploit the exaggerated sympathy of the western community.

At least since the early decades of the 15th century, the districts of Kerkuk had Turkmen names. Traveller accounts of the latter half millennium considered Turkmen the first component of Kerkuk region. The independent sources of the first half of the 20th century also prove the Turkmen nature of Kerkuk city. It is also clear that Kerkuk had never been part of so-called Kurdistan. Culture, literature, demography and publications of Kerkuk were Turkmen until the recent past.

The region was exposed to aggressive Arabification. Kurdish immigration to Kerkuk region continued for centuries and greatly increased in the 20th century and systematic establishment of Kurds takes place after occupation of 2003 the systemic Kurdification processes started. It is also clear that the wealth of the province and being inhabited mainly with Turkmen has constituted the main cause of the demographical changes of Kerkuk province.

Approach to the Kerkuk problem

The historical and geopolitical facts do not support the argument that the Kerkuk region has ever been a Kurdish land. In fact, the region has always been inhabited by a multi-ethnic mosaic. Separating the region from Iraq will deepen the already serious religious and ethnic sectarianism.

Whilst the national and the regional situation requires stability, linking Kerkuk province to the Kurdish region will only further motivate the Kurdish fight for independence and will make relations with the other communities in the region -- Turkey, Iran, Iraqi Arabs and Turkmen -- increasingly tense.

To maintain the confidence of the region's citizens -- who have pledged support to Iraq's democratic development -- the international community should help rebuild Iraq. Stabilization in the region and preservation of the unity of Iraq will no doubt facilitate reconciliation and accelerate the development and prosperity of the entire region.

The solution for the Kerkuk problem outlined by the Iraqi constitution does not correctly define the complexity of the challenges faced in the city and should therefore be amended to include a more complete version of the city's socio-political landscape.

The Iraqi people as a whole are in favor of keeping Kerkuk as a part of the central government rather than annexing it to the Kurdish region. This idea is also supported by the Assyrians, the fourth largest indigenous population in Iraq.

Equally sharing the power in the province attached to Baghdad should remain the most appropriate solution for Kerkuk province.

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1920s: Fattah Aga, Majid Yakubi and Sadik Sarraf.
1930s: Abd al-Rahman Bakr and Baki Aga Gedik.
1940s: Habib Talabani.
1950s: Shamil Yakubi, Nur al-Din al-Waidh, Fadhil Talabani and Maruf Al-Barzanci
1960s and 1970s: Hisam al-Din Salihi, Mazhar Tikriti, Nadhim Salihi and Ibrahim Ahmad
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