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IRAQI FAMILIARIZATION TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Country Profile

Introduction

Iraq, the home of one of the world's most ancient civilizations, is on its way to becoming the first free democracy in the Arab world. The new government will have to grapple with a population that is ethnically divided between Arabs, Kurds, and others. The Iraqis are also split along religious lines between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, and a small minority of Christians.



© Dana Smiler Gault Aramco WorldSPEDIA
Iraqi boy

Geography

Area

Iraq's total border is 3,650 km (2,268 miles), shared with Iran, 1,458 km (906 miles); Kuwait, 240 km (149 miles); Saudi Arabia, 814 km (506 miles); Jordan, 181 km (112 miles); Syria, 605 km (376 miles); and Turkey, 352 km (219 miles). It has a 58-km (36-mile) coastline on the Persian Gulf, its only access to the world's oceans, and the basis for a 12-nautical-mile (22.2-km) territorial claim. In total area, Iraq is approximately twice the size of Idaho or about the size of California.¹ It can be divided into roughly four major regions: stony and sandy mixed desert in the west and southwest; a rolling upland between the upper Euphrates and Tigris Rivers, starting about 120 km (75 miles) north of Baghdad; mountainous highlands in the north and northeast; and an alluvial plain in the central and southeast sections.¹

Climate

Iraq has a desert climate with mild winters, dry and hot summers, and sandstorms. The northeastern areas have cold winters with heavy snowfalls. Western desert and northeastern foothill temperatures range from an average winter low of 0° to 15° C (32° to 59°F) and average summer temperatures of 22° to 43° C (71.6° to 109°F). In the marshy areas south of Baghdad, temperatures range from 4°-17° C (39° to 63° F) in the winter to a summer range from 29° to 43° C (8° to 109° F).

The country has a Mediterranean rainfall pattern, receiving 90% of its rain between November and April. Average annual rainfall is 100-170 mm (4-7 inches), but in the uplands, the range is from 320-570 mm (12.6 - 22 inches). In the mountains the annual total may be as much as 1,000 mm (40 inches). The rain that falls in the uplands usually works its way slowly downriver to the Persian Gulf.²

¹ Library of Congress. Country Study. Iraq. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

² Library of Congress. Country Study. Iraq. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

Dust and sandstorms occur because of the easterly *sharqi* winds from the south and southeast. The storms can occur at any time of year, but the peak of the sandstorm season is July.³

Rivers

It is Iraq's great rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, that have made agriculture so rewarding in Mesopotamia. The elevation drop from Baghdad to the Persian Gulf is only about 9 m (30 ft) over 500 km (310 miles). The flow is very slow, and both rivers deposit much silt along the journey. Spring floods over millennia have also deposited this rich silt on farms along the way, producing some of the most fertile land in the world. However, that same silt carries salt which reduces some of the productivity of the land.⁴ Maximum flow periods for the Tigris are from March to May, with two fifths of the annual flow occurring then.⁵ So much silt was deposited in the alluvial plain at the rivers' mouth that it is today several miles further out than during Babylonian times.



© Dana Smiller Saudi Aramco WorldSPADIA
Marsh Arab

Both rivers begin elsewhere—the Euphrates in Turkey, reinforced by the Nahr al-Khabur of Syria, and the Tigris in Turkish Armenia. They enter from the northwest, both fed by melting winter snows. The Euphrates flows through a number of deep gorges, and then enters the plain at Ar-Ramadi. The Tigris flows along the edge of the Zagros Mountains and has a number of important tributaries: the Great Zab, Little Zab, and Diyala. Just north of Basra, the Tigris and Euphrates join to form the Shatt al-Arab waterway that flows into the Persian Gulf at Basra.

Significant dams have been built for flood control and for irrigation, and canals were constructed to move water to places where it is most needed. One canal connects the Tigris near Samarra with Lake Al-Tharthar. A second canal connects the lake to the Euphrates at Al-Habbaniyyah. Syria and Iraq both agreed to share the waters of the Euphrates equitably, and Turkey has promised an annual minimum flow at its border with Syria. There is no three-party agreement.⁶

One of the projects begun by Saddam Hussein after the Persian Gulf War was the construction of two canals in the south. The massive projects were supposedly designed to improve irrigation, but one was intended to drain the homes of the Marsh Arabs who had attacked Iraqi government forces during the war. Over 90% of the southern marshes were drained. As a result, the area rapidly turned into arid salt flats. Some parts of that

3 "Iraq." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2006. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service.
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-22930>

4 Stephen Pelletiere. Library of Congress. Country Studies. Iraq. Major Geographical Features.
<http://leweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/iqtoc.html#iq0027>

5 "Iraq." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2006. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service.
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-232256>

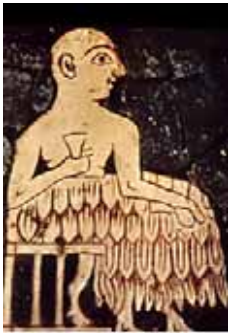
6 "Iraq." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2006. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service.
<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-232257>

irrigation system have been dismantled, but rehabilitation of what was once the largest wetlands system in the Middle East will require extensive efforts and resources.⁷

Biodiversity

Drought is the major influence on the vegetation of Iraq. Open oak forests have largely disappeared. Hawthorns, junipers, wild pears grow here alongside *terebinth*, from which a turpentine is made that is used in manufacturing violins.⁸ The *terebinth* grow on lower mountain slopes. Much of the rest is steppes, open and treeless, with a multitude of herbs, grasses, and shrubs. In the lowlands one finds willows, tamarisks, poplars, licorice plants, and bulrushes on the banks of the rivers. Throughout southern Iraq, the date palm dominates.⁹

Birds are the most frequently seen form of wildlife. Animals that once roamed wild, e.g., the lion and oryx, have disappeared from Iraq, and others are endangered. Wolves, foxes, jackals, hyenas, wild pigs, and wildcats exist, feeding on smaller mammals such as martens, badgers, otters, porcupines, and muskrats. Rivers, streams, and lakes are filled with fish such as carp, barbus, catfish, and loach.



© UNESCO.org
Detail of wall relief in Ur

A Brief History

Some 7,000 years ago, the Sumerian civilization got its start in Mesopotamia, the fertile land between the Rivers Tigris and Euphrates. The Akkadians conquered the region, followed by the Babylonians, Hittites, Assyrians, Aramaeans, Persians, and Greeks.

It was in the city of Ur during the reign of the Babylonians, some 4,000 years ago, that Abraham, patriarch to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, first realized and preached the oneness of God.

The Arab armies marched into Baghdad in the mid-7th century CE, bringing the religion of Islam. While the first Arab-Muslim empire, the Umayyad Dynasty, emanated from Damascus, the second and much longer lasting one, the Abbasid Dynasty, had its center in Baghdad. The Abbasids ruled the Middle East for half a millennium, until the Mongols swept in during the 13th century and destroyed everything in their wake.

It was also in Iraq that the Shi'a branch of Islam was founded (in the late 7th century), a religious breakaway from the more mainstream Sunni Islam.

The Ottoman Empire ruled Iraq for almost four centuries until 1920. Independence, which finally came in 1932, brought neither stability nor tranquility to Iraq. In fact, Iraq

7 "Iraq." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2006. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-232257>.

8 Canadian Violin Manufacturing <http://www.violins.on.ca/vargloss.html#tere>

9 Iraq." Encyclopædia Britannica. 2006. Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. Aug. 2006 <<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-22931>

has been chronically plagued with coups and wars since the beginning of its establishment as a sovereign republic.

The most recent troubles have their genesis in the events of 1979, when Saddam Hussein took power as head of the socialist Baath Party and unelected president. In 1980, Hussein attacked Iran, starting a costly war that went on for eight years and resulted in little gain and much loss in terms of human life and resources. Later in the same decade, he used poison gas to wipe out whole Kurdish towns and villages as the Kurds were pressing for autonomy.

In 1990, Hussein attacked and occupied Kuwait, but was forced out by an international coalition including the U.S. and several Arab countries. Hussein refused to cooperate with UN inspectors investigating a possible program of weapons of mass destruction. As a result, Iraq languished under UN sanctions throughout the 1990s.



DoD photo
Saddam Hussein

Operation Iraqi Freedom

In March of 2003, the U.S. led a second coalition of nations in “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” which toppled Saddam’s Baathist regime and is now leading Iraq to a new destiny of democracy. Saddam Hussein was captured by U.S. forces in December 2003.

Post-Saddam Iraq

In January 2005, Iraq held the first democratic elections in its history. The first freely elected parliament proposed a draft constitution in October 2005, which was narrowly approved by the Iraqi people in a popular referendum. Many details of the draft will be finalized after the election of a permanent National Assembly in December 2005. A Constitutional Review Committee was constituted by the Iraqi Parliament in September 2006.

Saddam Hussein was put on trial after his capture and convicted of crimes against humanity by the Iraq Special Tribunal. In November 2006, he was sentenced to death by hanging—a verdict that he vowed to appeal.

Economy

Overview

Iraq qualifies as a failed state, unable to consistently provide basic services, with large numbers of internal and emigrant refugees, insufficient security, and a declining economy. It has been that way for 25 years.¹⁰

10 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Failed State Index.
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3100

Iraq has vast petroleum reserves. Extraction and sale on the international market account for 95% of Iraq's foreign exchange.¹¹ Oil fields are located in the south and in the north along a line drawn from Mosul to Kirkuk. Pre-war production was 2.093 million barrels/day (bbl/day or bpd). Currently, production is not consistent due to insurgent sabotage. However, income has generally been high because of high crude oil prices. Oil income goes to a central fund used to pay war costs and reconstruction. There are 112.5 billion barrels (2005 est.) of proven reserves.¹² 74 fields are known, but only 15 were operating as of May 2003. Agreements are being negotiated with European and U.S. companies for the development of other fields, and the Ministry of Oil in Iraq maintains daily production at 2.5 million bbl/day with plans to rise to 4.5 million bbl/day by 2010.¹³

Generally, Iraq depends on crude oil sales for its revenue, rather than refining, although it has a refining capacity of 700,000 bbl/day. Only half of that capacity is being produced, and Iraq spends more than USD200 million/month to import various refined petroleum products. New refineries are being built.¹⁴ Considerable work has gone into the main refineries at Baiji, Basra, and Daura, and the oil tanker terminals in Basra.¹⁵

Industries

Petroleum-based industry accounted for 66.6% of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2004. Primary products, in order of quantity, were: petroleum, chemicals, textiles, leather, construction materials, food processing, fertilizer, and metal fabrication or processing. Agriculture accounted for only 7.3% of the GDP in 2004. These products were wheat, barley, rice, vegetables, dates, cotton, cattle, sheep, and poultry.¹⁶



The services sector of the GDP for Iraq constituted 26.1% of the overall numbers.¹⁷ A substantial 29% is employed by the government.

Interestingly, one of the most prosperous sectors has been personal and institutional protection, surveillance, and other forms of security, with at least 26 companies providing those services. Iraqi tourism, almost totally closed down because of conditions in Iraq, still employed 2,500 in 14 regional offices of the Iraqi Tourism Board.¹⁸

Infrastructure

All communications systems were severely damaged during the 2003 war, and sabotage has continued to be a serious problem. Cellular service has developed, with service centered on three regional networks. Work is being overseen by the U.S. Agency for

11 CIA World Factbook. Iraq. <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/iz.html>

12 CIA World Factbook. Iraq. <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/iz.html>

13 Dow Jones. Market Watch. "Iraqi oil minister tells Iran paper production back at 2.5 million barrels a day." August 14, 2006. <http://www.marketwatch.com/>

14 Cisco, Inc. Press Release. CICSCO, Inc. Expected to Build a New Refinery in Iraq. July 31, 2006. <http://biz.yahoo.com/prnews/060731/lam124.html?.v=51>

15 Library of Congress. Country Studies. "Iraq." August 2006. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

16 CIA World Factbook. GDP by sector. <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/iz.html>

17 CIA World Factbook. GDP by sector. <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/iz.html>

18 Library of Congress. Country Profile: Iraq. April 2005. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

International Development. There were an estimated 80 radio stations on air in Iraq, as of 2004, with 21 television broadcast stations and four internet hosts (2005).¹⁹

Iraq is connected to Turkey and Europe by rail with connections through Syria. There are perhaps 1,450 miles of track, most of it standard gauge. Its 28,300 miles of roads are 84% paved. International airports serve the country in Baghdad and Basra and another is being developed in Mosul. Basra and the newer port of Umm Qasr are also the main ports serving ocean-going ships, and river boats navigate the Tigris River from Basra to Baghdad. All facilities were damaged during the 1991 Persian Gulf War.²⁰ Umm Qasr is the only deep-water port in Iraq, and it has serious silting problems that require almost constant dredging. Additionally, during the war with Iran and during the Persian Gulf War, ships were sunk in the harbor to preclude its use for shipping. There is considerable dock and warehouse storage space available.²¹



DoD photo
Iraqi girl

Ethnic Groups

Individual identity tends to matter very little in Iraq. For Arabs, tribal identity, ethnicity, and Islam have become the principal defining qualities in Iraq.²² The tribal group takes precedence, with group loyalty valued highly, and responsibility devolving on the entire group rather than an individual. The importance of tribal affiliation has increased, rather than decreased in Iraq, for several reasons; Saddam Hussein manipulated the tribal structure to encourage support for the Iran-Iraq War. Economic sanctions sent people to their tribes for economic support, and the regime change in 2003 dislocated large numbers of the population.²³

The formerly nomadic Arabs constitute 75-80% of the population of Iraq, further subdivided into Sunni at 20% and Shi'a at 80%. The Kurds, who make up 15-20%, are non-Arab Sunni Muslims and are concentrated above a line drawn from Mosul to Kirkuk or in the northeastern Zagros Mountains. Turkmen account for 3 to 5% of the population and live in the northeast. Some Yazidis live in the Sinjar Mountains and a few Assyrians and Armenians live principally in the northeastern cities and rural areas.²⁴

In the south, an original population of perhaps 500,000 *Ma'dan*, or Marsh Arabs, has been greatly reduced by the draining of the swamps in which they lived. They lived on islands that were either natural or man-made, subsisted on fishing and raising water buffalo, lived in reed houses, and traveled in reed boats. Many have either gone deeper into the remaining marshes or have fled into Iran

19 CIA Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/iz.html>

20 2001-2003 World Almanac Education Group, Inc. Nations. Iraq. <http://www.worldalmanacforkids.com/explore/nations/iraq.html>

21 University of Military Intelligence. Iraq. Infrastructure.

http://www.universityofmilitaryintelligence.us/tcc/cultural/iraq/economy_infrastructure.asp

22 Global Security. Societal Framework. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/society.htm>

23 Global Security. Societal Framework. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/society.htm>

24 Encyclopedia of the Nations: Asia and Oceania: Iraq. Ethnic Groups. <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/>

Religion



Courtesy of wikipedia.org
Muslim men praying in a mosque

Introduction

Most people in Iraq are Muslim. Only about three percent of the population is Christian. Another one percent members of a religion called Yazidism that seeks to combine elements of Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Islam. Despite the country's 95 percent Muslim majority, sectarian dissension is extensive, fueled by ethnic divisions and a history of political oppression. Sunni Muslims claim to be the orthodox followers of Mohammed and represent about 20 percent of Iraq's 26,000,000 people. Sunni Kurds add another 15-20 percent. The Shi'a represent 60 percent of the Muslim population.²⁵

History of Islam

The origins of Islam date to the 6th century CE, when Mohammed was born in Mecca, part of present-day Saudi Arabia. Mohammed claimed that while he was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a period of 23 years, revealing the Koran (*Quran*) to him. Muslims believe Mohammed was the messenger of God.

Mohammed died without naming a successor. This proved to be a very important factor in the separation between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims in the Islamic world.

In a traditional Arab tribe, the surviving male leaders of the tribe would have met in council and selected a member of their own to lead. Competent leadership was more important than a blood lineage. After Mohammed's death, four of his close companions, called the "rightfully-guided Caliphs," or "representatives," successively ruled the new Islamic community. The first Caliph was Mohammed's father-in-law, Abu Bakr, followed by Umar and Uthman. Their followers became the Sunni Muslims.

The fourth Caliph was Mohammed's son-in-law, Ali ibn Abu Talib. Ali's adherents, who felt that he should have been the first Caliph, followed by his son Hassan and his son Husayn and so on, became the *Shia-t-Ali*. This means "Party of Ali," and they are the ancestors of the Shi'a of today. Ali's son, Hasan, renounced a claim to rule, but Husayn, Ali's second son, led a Shi'a revolt against Sunni Yazid I, ruling Iraq from Damascus. At the Battle of Karbala, 10 October 680, Yazid's vastly superior force cut down Husayn's force of 200 followers. Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala became a model for modern Shi'as, who see themselves as oppressed fighters against privilege and power. Successive Shi'a leaders like Yazid and Husayn became known as Great Imams to the Shi'a world. Great importance is attached to the appearance of a 12th Imam who will be the final Great Imam.

²⁵ Keith Jackson, Maj., DLIFLC and POM, ATZP-CH, 2006



Sunnis & Shi'as

Over the years, Sunni Islam emerged as the “conservative” branch of Islam. Sunnis did not require their leaders to have any family connection to Mohammad or his descendents. Sunni Islam also emerged as the majority branch of Islam and has retained that status, currently claiming 80% of the Muslim community worldwide. It has been the dominant religious and ideological influence where it was the majority religion. In such countries, Sunni Islam has had a decentralized leadership and has contributed greatly to the legal, political, and economic systems.

It is important to Muslims to conduct their daily life according to correct religious practices. To measure the rightness of the practices, all Muslims adhere to religious law, or *sharia*, which uses first the words of the Koran, then the *sunna* or practices of the prophet, and lastly, the *hadith*, consisting of stories or narratives about the prophet Mohammed, collected by his followers. All Muslims agree this far. In Islamic law, the consensus of society and prior judgments is added later.²⁶

Historically, among Iraqi Sunnis, ethnic identity rather than theological conviction has been a more potent factor of social unity or discord. Sunnis are closely tied to Arab culture, and many Iraqi Sunnis like to highlight an Islamic heritage that links them to the Golden Age of Islamic civilization. This was during the Abbasid caliphate that lasted from the 8th to 13th centuries and was centered in Baghdad.

Iraqi Kurds adopted Sunni Islam later than the Arab world did. Kurdish leaders have learned to leverage the authority that Islam allows them. They wield this authority across divisions of tribal loyalty, but have been less accepting of the more conservative forms of Islam. This is partly true in modern times because they saw Saddam Hussein repeatedly manipulating religious symbolism and values in his campaigns of persecution against the Kurds. This undermined the link between strict Sunni Islam and the Kurdish identity in the minds of many Kurds. Additionally, not all Kurds are Sunni. Some are Shi'a.

While Sunni Islam was developing as the orthodox branch of the faith, Shi'a Islam emerged as a separate and distinct sect within the Islamic world. Shi'a Muslims have always been characterized by their devotion to the bloodline of Mohammad, their rejection of the first three Caliphs that preceded Ali, and their feeling that the leadership of the Muslim movement had been usurped. Shi'a developed as a persecuted minority sect. The Shi'a leaders stayed far away from the seat of the government. As Shi'a did, it emphasized the invisible, spiritual, and supernatural dimensions of Islam and elevated the spiritual authority of its founders, heroes, and leaders. This caused Shi'a Islam to develop a highly spiritualized and centralized hierarchy of authority.

26 Knut S. Vikør, Bergen University. “The Shari’a and the Nation State.” <http://www.hf.uib.no/smi/pao/vikor.html>

Sunni Muslims believe that a Caliph was a political leader and an Imam simply leads prayers in the mosque.²⁷ Shi'a Islam stressed that the Imam, or spiritual leader of the faith, is from the bloodline of Mohammad, giving a special place of prominence to Ali and Husayn. It venerates both men as brilliant leaders and martyrs, dedicated to retaining the purity of Islam at a time when they believed corrupting political ambitions were threatening the integrity of the faith.

Shi'a Islam identified holy sites and built shrines at the tombs of celebrated Shi'a heroes. It revered the teachings and pronouncements of key leaders as nearly infallible. Over the years, there were many variations of Shi'a, but today almost all Shiites are Twelvers (*ithna 'ashariyah*). They believe in twelve consecutive Imams and the occultation of the twelfth. In other words, the twelfth disappeared from our view, but will someday reappear.

Today, Shi'a Islam within Iraq has a strong Persian influence and affiliation. This is due in part to the geographic proximity of Iraq to Iran. Shi'a Muslims have long moved back and forth between Iraq and Iran, where Shi'a Islam historically prospered and emerged as the dominant voice of authority in the 20th century. At the beginning of the 21st century, Shi'a Islam is beginning to demonstrate that it can emerge from behind the shadow of Sunni Islam in other countries as well.

In Iraq, Shi'a Islam has long had a numeric majority, but has been subdued by the strong authority of minority leaders. Shi'a leaders in Iraq not only have a sectarian affiliation with their Iranian neighbors, they also have recent examples of a Shi'a's rise to political power (current Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki). Moreover, Iran's religious government has begun to demonstrate that it is ready to contribute to the success of the political ambitions of Iraq's Shi'a leaders.

Sufism

As Sunni Islam developed politically and legally, it addressed external concerns like community, law, military power, and governance. The leaders of Islam came from scholars and jurists, politicians and commanders. Sunni Islam became more legalistic, with little emphasis on individual relationships with God. Sufi Muslims, the mystics of Islam, countered that trend by seeking direct communion with God. Their name, Sufi, is said to come from either one of two sources: the Arabic word *suf* meaning 'wool' (for the garments they wore) or *falsuf*, the word for philosopher. The Sufi looked for a closer personal relationship with God through special personal, often mystical, discipline, in one group using meditation with singing and dancing.²⁸

During the 8th and 9th centuries, Baghdad became a center for Islam's Sufi mystics. Within this city, Sufism offered an attractive alternative to the academic rigors of the Sunni Muslim scholars and the divisive authority of Islamic politicians.

27 Lexicorient. Iraq. <http://lexicorient.com/e.o/imam.htm>

28 Introduction to Islam. Sufi Islam. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-sufi.htm>

Sufi Islam continues in Iraq despite occasional periods of persecution. It has remained particularly popular among Sunni Kurds in northern Iraq. A Sufi shrine in Baghdad attracts pilgrims from around the world. Although Sufi Islam is widely accepted in Iraq, conservative Sunni theologians who dislike its mystical dimensions often label Sufism as heretical.

The Pillars of Islam

One becomes a Muslim by reciting the *shahadah*, the Islamic testament of faith. It is the first of five pillars of Islam. Newcomers to an Islamic country should beware of one critical danger: the *shahadah* should never be repeated aloud by non-Muslims in the presence of strict Muslims as this means a conversion to the Islamic faith. Once a Muslim, one is forbidden to leave Islam. The following is the *shahadah*:

ash-hadu anna la ilaha illa allah, muhammad rasoul allah.

I testify that there is no God but God, Mohammed is the messenger of God.

Other pillars of Islam are: prayer five times daily, called *salat*; a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in one's lifetime, called *hajj*; concern for and the giving of alms to the poor, called *zakat*; and the purification of one's body by fasting, called *sawm*. Note that it is incorrect and insulting to call someone who has not made the pilgrimage a *hajji*.²⁹ Many Shi'a maintain that a visit to Ali's burial site at An-Najaf southwest of Baghdad, and Husayn's shrine at Karbala are the same as a pilgrimage to Mecca.

There are some minor outward differences between Sunni and Shi'a. The practices of prayer differ only slightly in form.

When **Sunnis** pray, they begin by standing up straight and placing their two hands on their abdomen. When **Shi'as** pray, they begin by standing up straight and keeping their two arms and hands straight down against their sides.



DLIFLC photo
Sunni prayer stance



DLIFLC photo
Shia prayer stance

Converting others

Renouncing Islam to join a different faith can lead to the community denouncing the converted as a heretic, for which he may be sentenced to death. Muslims treat heresy seriously. Do not try to convert a Muslim to another faith. It is best to avoid the subject of religion altogether. However, some Iraqis will be curious and will ask about your

²⁹ Traditions/Beliefs of Islam. Diversiton. <http://www.diversiton.com/religion/main/islam/traditions-beliefs.asp>.

religion. It is best to answer politely and humbly. Atheism or agnosticism are not well accepted in the Muslim world.

Other Religions



Courtesy of wikipedia.org
Syrian, Syriac Saint

Christianity

The Christian community in Iraq predates Islam in the region. Iraqi Christianity is perhaps more diverse than Christianity anywhere else in the world. Iraqi Christians represent all five of Christianity's five major divisions: Assyrian, Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant.

The first split among Christians occurred when the Assyrian church split from the rest of Christianity in 431 C.E. This division of Christianity continues in Iraq as the Church of the East. Members of this church are also called Nestorian Christians. They remain distinct from all other Christian churches and are led by their own Patriarch.

The second split occurred in 451 C.E. following the Council of Chalcedon when the Oriental Orthodox churches split from the rest of the church over the wording of a theological disagreement. Iraq is the home of a few Oriental Orthodox congregations that belong to the Armenian Apostolic Patriarchate.

The third split occurred in 1054 C.E. when the Roman Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople mutually excommunicated each other resulting in a Western, Roman Catholic Church, and an Eastern Orthodox Church. Like the Oriental Orthodox Churches, Patriarchs that have a similar kind of authority and span of influence also lead the Eastern Orthodox churches.

The fourth split was the combination of multiple splits that occurred between 1520 and 1550 called the Protestant Reformation. Today many Iraqis are Roman Catholic Christians, with others theologically affiliated with a variety of western Protestant denominations.

Baathism

Baathism, or Pan-Arabism, though not a religion, became an important political philosophy with religious overtones. It started as a nationalist revolution in Saudi Arabia against the Ottoman Turks, with a vision of a super-Arab State from Persia to North Africa. Such a state would exclude Iran and its Shi'a population as non-Arabs. The Baath party was formed in 1943 to promote Pan-Arabism, and became the state party in both Iraq and Syria.³⁰

30 Britannica Concise Encyclopedia. Copyright © 1994-2006 Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.

Wahhabi

In the 1700s, Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahab, a tribal cleric in the Nejd Province of present-day Saudi Arabia, ruled that all doctrine in Islam after 950 CE. was misguided and needed to be corrected. Unhappy with what he saw as ostentatious worship, he preached a return to the earlier, purer days of Islam to escape the wickedness of modernity. His primary intent was to purify Sunni Islam and his agitations led to a series of conflicts within Islam that resulted in the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the early 1900s. Although current law in Iraq prohibits the practice of Wahhabism, the law remains untested. The new government's legal provisions for religious freedom would likely supersede older religious prohibitions.



Role of Religion in the Government

The Iraqi constitution is still very young. As adopted in 2005, it specifies that Islamic law, *sharia*, is a source of civil law, and no law can be enacted that contradicts *sharia*. Questions remain as to how this will play out in practice.

The government of Iraq is in transition, and many of the current tensions occurring relate to the question of the role of religion in government. This makes it difficult to identify with certainty what role religion is having or ultimately will have in Iraq's emerging government.

The current government does not restrict the formation of political parties based on a particular faith, religious beliefs, or interpretations of religious doctrine. Although political coalitions have been based on religion and ethnicity, neither religion nor ethnicity is required for any position in government. For example, the majority Shi'a coalition, which consists mostly of Shi'a Islamists, also includes religious and ethnic minorities, such as Sunnis, Yazidi, Kurds, Turkmen, Shabak, secular Shi'a, and political independents. Shi'a Islamist parties, such as the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and *Da'wa*, are dominant political forces. The Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party is another example of a primarily religious political party. Sunni Arabs have also held positions in the cabinet, including senior positions such as minister of defense, vice president, and deputy prime minister. Non-Muslim minorities seem to have greater difficulty finding representation in this current system.

While the Iraqi government is less involved in religious affairs than the governments of other Middle Eastern countries, it does track religious affiliation and impose some religious restrictions on its residents. For example, government employees are not required to take any religious oaths as a condition for employment, and they may even display elements of their religion in the government workplace, regardless of religious affiliation. National identity cards state the religious affiliation of their holders, but passports do not.

Another example of the government's oversight of religion is the requirement for all religious groups to register with the government. Foreign religious missionaries must obtain permits with the government. To qualify for a permit, the religious group sponsoring the missionary must have at least 500 followers within Iraq.



Courtesy of wikipedia.org
Ghazi Mashal Ajil al-Yawer,
President of Iraq

The government permits religious instruction in public schools, and in most of the country students study Islam for three hours daily. This is a requirement for graduation everywhere in Iraq, except the north. Non-Muslim students are not required to participate in Islamic studies. The curriculum provides alternative religious studies for non-Muslims.

Some local Iraqi governments have placed religious restrictions on females. Basra's Education Director instituted a policy requiring all females in the schools to cover their heads. All female university students in Mosul, even non-Muslims, are required to wear the *hijab*, or headscarf.

Officially, the Iraqi government maintains a policy of protecting the rights of all religious groups to gather and worship freely. In practice, however, the ongoing insurgency impedes the ability of many citizens to worship freely. The government respects the right of the individual to worship according to the dictates of conscience, but conservative and extremist Islamic elements often pressure groups to conform to radical interpretations of Islam. The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are not yet operating at full capability and are often unable to prevent or fix violations of the religious freedom rights of Iraqi citizens.

Religious Laws

Under the Ba'athists, civil courts did not enforce *sharia*. Instead, they furthered tribal and personal interests. Saddam Hussein created divisions and subdivisions in the courts, with courts reporting only to him, thus creating a system open to personal corruption where decisions could be concealed. In accidents, innocent parties would frequently be arrested while friends of justices would be released. The current constitution has established a court system that should make for an independent judiciary.³¹ It establishes a Supreme Court, a Court of Appeals, and a Central Criminal Court. A panel headed by one of the Supreme Court Justices will appoint new judges.³²

In addition to recognizing Islam as the official religion of the state, Article 7 of the Transitional Administrative Law mandated that Islam be considered a source of legislation. Unless the Iraqi government passes a specific law that supersedes Islamic law, courts could issue rulings based on *sharia* to decide cases. The *sharia* is typically more concerned with personal and family law than with criminal law, thus creating a problem for states in public prosecution.

31 Marcia Coyle. Toward an Iraqi Legal System. Law.com. <http://www.law.com/jsp/article.jsp?id=1050369446809>

32 Library of Congress. Country Studies, Iraq. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

Influence of Religion on Daily Life

In Islam, prayer is required five times daily--before dawn, mid-morning, mid-afternoon, at sundown, and after sundown. One can pray at a mosque, at home, or in a private place in an office. Before prayer, there is a ritual cleansing of the face, hands, feet, and head, called *wudu*, which is performed as a fixed ritual. Once *wudu* has been performed, no interruptions are permitted until after prayers are completed. If there is an interruption, the one praying must begin the entire process again, including *wudu*.

Influence of Religion on Male-Female Interactions

Women often worship in private at home so that they may care for their children. In a mosque, women worship separately, either on a balcony, in a special room, or in an area set aside for them that is blocked by a pierced wall. Generally, women are not required to go to a mosque on Friday, but may stay at home to pray. They are also excused from prayers during menstruation.

Buildings of Worship

Iraq has countless mosques, a few prominent Shi'a shrines, and a number of churches. The mosques generally fall into one of two categories: the smaller *masjid*, and the larger *jami*. A *jami* is usually identifiable by the presence of a prominent minaret tower. Shi'a and Sunni Muslims have both kinds of mosques, but only Shi'a Muslims have shrines. Over the centuries, the Shi'a have built their shrines to mark the location of historical Islamic events and to identify the tombs of prominent Shi'a personalities. Iraq's many Christian churches vary in shape and size. The physical features of the churches for each branch of Christianity are often distinct.



US Navy photo
The Imam Ali Holy Shrine in Najaf

Exchange #1: At a Mosque

Soldier:	Would you permit me to enter the mosque?	tismaH-li afout bil-masjid?
Sheikh:	No. It is only for Muslims.	la. bas lil-muslimeen.

Mosques

Mosques have an important function. They provide Muslims a place where they can perform their daily individual prayers, and they accommodate the weekly corporate noon prayers each Friday. Mosques can also function as religious community centers, youth centers, meeting halls, and training facilities. In addition to a main prayer hall called a *musalla*, some mosques have courtyards, classrooms, offices, and special washrooms for the ritual cleansing before prayer.

The *musalla* is always oriented toward Mecca. The back wall of the *musalla* hall is called the *qibla*. Centered on this wall is a small niche called a *miHrab* that worshippers face when they pray. Off to one side of the *miHrab* there is usually a pulpit called a *minbar* for the prayer leader to use during the service. The *musalla* usually has either a balcony or an adjoining prayer room where women pray, segregated from the men.

Mosque Etiquette

Dress codes for a visit to a mosque, or anywhere off base, require modesty and dignity. As a rule of thumb, the more rural the region, the more one should be covered. If you are a female, you must at the very least cover your head with a scarf and wear a long-sleeved shirt or blouse. While it is not necessary to cover your head if you're a male, it is a good idea to wear a long-sleeved shirt.

Once you are inside the mosque, there are certain things you must not touch. Do not touch any books. Do not touch the walls, especially the western corner, where people direct their prayers. Some mosques have a shrine in the center or in one corner. Do not touch it. Do not speak unless you are spoken to, and even then, speak in a whisper. Do not interrupt or walk in front of anyone who is praying. This invalidates his prayer and will upset him. These rules apply to prayer inside or outside the mosque. If you see a man handling what looks like rosary beads, this does not signify praying. Many Iraqi men of all religions enjoy carrying these beads.

Exchange #2: Into the Mosque

Soldier:	Would you permit me to enter the mosque?	tismaH-li afout bil-masjid?
Sheikh:	Yes, but you must remove your shoes.	eh, bas lazem tinza' Hida-ak.
Soldier	Thank you	shukran.

In a Shi'a mosque, you will see large banners printed on a black or green background. These banners may have messages of mourning or lamentations for a recently departed person. Do not remove these banners. You will also find flags in a Shi'a mosque. These flags will probably be green, perhaps with some kind of Arabic slogan. Leave these alone as well.

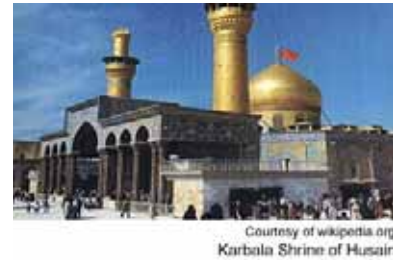
As you enter one of the major Shi'a mosques, a man may offer you a drink of water from a cup from which many others have already drunk. On the one hand, you do not want to catch hepatitis by putting your lips on this cup; on the other hand, you do not want to insult the man and this tradition of kindness. So you should accept the cup of water without drinking it, say "*shukran*" (thank you), and return the cup to the man. This shows respect.

Exchange #3: Remember Husayn

Water server:	Drink water and remember Husayn.	ishrab my wuDh-kur il-Husayn.
Soldier:	Thank you.	shukran.

Shrines

A Shi'a shrine can be as simple as a small stone marker, or it can be as elaborate as the golden-domed al-Askariya Shrine in Samarra that contains the tombs of the 10th and 11th Shi'a Imams and marks the location where the 12th Imam was last seen before he disappeared. Since Shi'a Islam traces its beginnings to the time of Ali when the seat of Islamic leadership was centered in Iraq, many of Shi'a's holiest cities are located here. In addition to Samarra, the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala are also important Shi'a holy sites. Najaf, located 190 km (120 miles) south of Baghdad, is the purported site of Imam Ali's tomb, and Karbala, 80 km (50 miles) south of Baghdad, is the site of Imam Husayn's tomb.



Shi'a Muslims make pilgrimages from all over the world to visit these sites. Historically they have been indicators of sectarian dissension within Islam. Shi'a Islam considers the sites to be holy places that should be identified, decorated, and celebrated; Sunnis consider such treatment of historic markers to border on idolatry. Throughout history, Shi'a shrines have been vulnerable to Sunni attack. These attacks have not typically been prompted by feuding Islamic theologians, but by the political agendas of rulers or would-be rulers who have wanted to expand and exploit a rift between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims for their own political gain. The regime of Saddam Hussein used Shi'a-Sunni divisions to manipulate and control the population, and since 2003, insurgency forces have employed sectarian-exploitation strategies to accomplish their political and military objectives.

Churches

Church buildings in Iraq vary in size and architecture depending on when they were built and which branch of Christianity built them. Roman Catholic and Orthodox church buildings tend to be the most complex and ornate.

Perhaps more than the other Christian branches, the interiors of Eastern Rite churches reflect the distinctive features of their theology. In most cases, the wall behind the altar of these churches faces east. The ceiling of the *nave*, the portion of the church that extends from the entry to the altar, is usually domed and features a large icon of Jesus called a *Pantokratoros*. There is often a circular chandelier, the *horos*, hanging from the dome and containing the images of the saints. A screen with three doors separates the altar and sanctuary area from the nave. The center door, called the Beautiful Gate, is the largest. The two side doors, each called the Deacons' Doors, are smaller.

Protestant churches in Iraq can be either large and expensive looking, or small and inconspicuous. In many cases, Protestant churches meet in functional multi-purpose buildings that don't always resemble churches.³³

33 The Protestant Church in Iraq <http://www.eklesia.co.uk/content/services/churchiniraq/who.shtml>

Iranians in Iraq

The Shi'a holy cities of Najaf, Karbala, Kufa, and Kadhamiya receive many pilgrims from Iran. These people speak Farsi, not Arabic. They may be dressed differently than Iraqi Arabs. Here is how to request ID from an Iranian in Farsi: *Kartey shena-sayey, lutfan.*

Religious Events

Because the Islamic calendar is based on phases of the moon, and the Western (Gregorian) calendar is based on solar cycles, the dates of Islamic holidays seem to shift yearly. The Koran mentions only two celebrations: *eid-al-fitr*, or the festival on the last night of *ramadan*; and *eid-al-adha*, the feast at the end of the pilgrimage, or *haji*, to Mecca. Both are celebrated all over the Muslim world, often as public holidays. Some devout Muslims will not allow any other celebrations than these two, as they are the only holidays specifically mentioned in the Koran. Observing other celebrations would constitute innovation, and innovation would indicate that the Koran was not complete in the form in which it was given to Mohammed.³⁴



Courtesy of wikipedia.org
Ramadan banquet

Ramadan

One of the five pillars of Islam, purifying the body by fasting, *sawm*, occurs during *ramadan*. This is a 30-day period of fasting from sunup until sundown, breaking each day's fast with a large and festive family meal, called *iftar*, or breakfast, in the evening. Not everyone fasts. Children, the elderly, and the infirm are exempt. During *ramadan*, Muslims can be more sensitive and irritable than at other times. During daylight hours, they may not eat, drink, smoke, nor engage in sexual activities. Nothing may be taken by mouth. It is considered rude and disrespectful for non-Muslims to eat and drink in public during fasting hours of the day. Such activities should be performed privately or in one of the few restaurants that would possibly be open for business (usually in the major hotels and cities).

The end of *ramadan* is celebrated with a huge feast called *eid-al-fitr*. *Eid* means "festival." The last ten days of *ramadan* commemorate Mohammed's first revelation from the Archangel Gabriel.³⁵ Once the fast is broken (normally following sunset), life goes back to normal and a person is free to eat and drink publicly.

Ashura

There is a Shi'a holiday called *ashura* that continues for several days during which many people mourn the martyrdom of Husayn. You might see some of them actually hitting themselves with chains and shedding their own blood. Do not laugh or show contempt. Just watch respectfully. Avoid the area unless you need to be there.

34 BBC. Religion and Ethics. Islam. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/holydays/index.shtml>

35 Traditions & Beliefs of Islam. Diversiton. <http://www.diversiton.com/religion/main/islam/traditions-beliefs.asp>

Exchange #4: Ashura

Soldier:	What is this procession all about?	shinu hal-mawkeb?
Iraqi Shiite:	Today is Ashura, the day of Imam Husayn's martyrdom.	el-yom ashura maqtel al-ImamHusayn.
Soldier:	Thank you.	shukran.

Traditions

Greeting and Interacting

It is customary to greet people with the words *al-salamu 'alaykum*, which means “Peace be upon you.” The proper answer to this greeting is *wa 'alaykum as-salam*, meaning “And upon you be peace.” When you greet a man, shake hands (always use the right hand), then touch your right hand to your heart. It indicates that the handshake is from the heart and not a test of strength. Remember to remove any gloves you might be wearing. Kissing on both cheeks, regardless of sex, is an informal tradition reserved for friends or acquaintances.



DVIC photo
You will see Iraqi men walking down
the street hand-in-hand.

Interaction between opposite sexes is restricted to a head nod accompanied by the phrase *al-salamu 'alaykum*. Though a handshake between opposite genders is acceptable in some situations, it is a good policy to adhere to the head nod and then to follow the female's lead. If she offers to shake hands, grasp only her fingertips.

Address other people in Iraq in a formal way if no prior introductions have taken place. Add *ostaath* (professor, teacher, or sir) in front of a male's first name or the word *ostaatha* in front of the female's first name. In rural areas and in the Iraqi countryside, address the males with the word *akhee*, (my brother) and females with the word *uKhtee*, (my sister). Using only a person's last name to address him or her is discouraged.

In American culture, we appreciate eye contact, as we believe it expresses sincerity. In Iraq, breaking eye contact does not imply rudeness, ill will, or concealment. It is just a cultural difference. The same goes for holding hands. You will also see Iraqi men hug or kiss one another in the air near the cheek. You will see Iraqi men walking down the street hand-in-hand. This shows friendship or kinship, not homosexuality. You will see Iraqi women exchanging these gestures of affection with one another. Again, these gestures show friendship or kinship only.

Hospitality

In America, we would simply offer a plate of food and allow our guest to serve himself. An Iraqi might offer you a piece of the food, using his right hand. Accept it with your right hand. In fact, whenever it comes to some sort of interaction with the use of the hands, use your right hand; the left hand is customarily unclean. Among most Arabs, the left hand is used only for hygiene after using the toilet.³⁶ This is true in both urban and rural areas. Also, do not cross your legs or stretch your legs out when sitting on the ground. Showing the soles of your feet to another is considered a terrible insult, so keep your feet on the ground at all times.

³⁶ University of Military Intelligence.
http://www.universityofmilitaryintelligence.us/tcc/cultural/iraq/culture_gestures.asp

If your hosts serve you tea or coffee, drink it as it is. It will probably be rather sweet. To signal that you do *not* want a second cup, put your right hand, palm down, over the top of the cup.

Exchange 5: Tea?

Iraqi:	Please, do drink tea.	tfaDhal ishrab chay.
Soldier:	Thank you.	shukran

Do not admire or compliment an Iraqi's possessions, he might try to give them to you! If you think he's well dressed and say so, and the Iraqi offers you the shirt off his back, thank him and politely refuse. He will probably offer it at least two more times. Refuse all three times, politely and graciously.

Exchange 6: The Shirt off his back

Soldier:	Your shirt is nice.	gameesak Holu.
Iraqi:	Please accept it, it's yours.	iqbal, bil-urDha.
Soldier:	No, thank you, it's yours.	la, shukran, mabrouk 'alayk.

Exchanging Gifts



Iraqis love to give and receive presents, so be prepared to give gifts since there's a good chance you will receive them. When an Iraqi gives you a gift, he expects a gift in return, though he will never actually say this. The gift really is the thing, not the expense. By custom, the recipient may or may not open the gift in front of you.

Exchange 7: Oh, you shouldn't have!

Iraqi	This is for you.	tfaDhal.
Soldier:	You shouldn't have!	shinu hazzaH-ma.
Iraqi:	It's just a little thing.	fad shee baSeet.
Soldier:	Thank you.	shukran.

Sharing

If you are on break, eating a snack or a meal, and there are Iraqi children or men close by, it would be a kind gesture to offer some of your food to the people. If you offer food only once, they will probably say no. So offer it a second or third time, and then they might smile and accept your offer. The three-time offer or rejection is uniform in the culture.

Exchange 8: You've got to eat!

Soldier:	Please have some.	tfaDhal!
Iraqi:	No thanks.	la, shukran.
Soldier:	Please have some, you have to eat some!	tfaDhal, lazem ta-kul!
Iraqi:	Thank you very much.	zayn shukran.

Sometimes you will work closely with Iraqi colleagues or counterparts. One day, they might bring food to the office, maybe some sweets, and offer it to you. It is best to accept a small amount graciously and with thanks. You should say *shukran*, "thank you."

Also, if you are going somewhere, it is acceptable to offer an Iraqi male acquaintance a ride in the front seat. He will appreciate that considerably.

Exchange 9: After you, please.

Soldier:	Please climb aboard.	tfaDhal iSad.
Iraqi:	No, please, after you.	la, tfaDhal inta al-awwal.

Honor

Honor deserves special mention because of the importance it has in an Arabic society and some of the ways it manifests itself. For instance, it is a violation of honor to embarrass someone, for example by forcing someone's head to the ground or asking an embarrassing question. (In this case, an interpreter might honor you by simply asking some other question in Arabic, rather than the question you want answered.) Offering your left hand to someone or using your left hand to give something to someone is a major offense. Another is getting directly down to business when in a meeting. Arabs prefer to get to know the person they are dealing with and precede business transactions with coffee or tea, questions about one's health, and the like. In very serious cases of violated honor, the only way to expunge shame, especially public shame, could be killing the offender.³⁷ Threatening to shame someone is also a way through which a family or tribe can exert control over the behavior of its members.

Vendettas and Honor Killings

There is an old Arab saying, "It's me against my brother; it's me and my brother against my cousin; it's me, my brother and my cousin against the world." A tribe may seek to avenge the death of one of their members by killing a member of the murderer's tribe. This is legal in the eyes of the community, both under *sharia* and secular law. Do not interfere in these disputes unless Command has issued a policy to stop them. Leave the matter to local authorities.

The same applies to "honor killings." Because of the perceived value of a family's honor, an individual can legally punish any affront against family, kin, or neighbor. This could include killing a female relative for violating family honor. It is best not to get involved. Do not interfere unless Command has issued a policy to stop it.



© USAID
Iraqi women

Male-Female Relationships

As mentioned earlier, Muslims revere honor. The quality and position of the male members of a Muslim in society are expressed by the esteem in which the family is held. The honor of that family is expressed in the quality and purity of its females. Therefore, females may not have

³⁷ John Tierney. "Baffled Occupiers." New York Times. Oct 22, 2003. <http://www.nytimes.com/>

contact with males outside their family. In homes, they care for children and the household, and have separate quarters.

Iraq has always been a more open society than many, but only to a point. Women still are generally segregated and secluded. Their educational opportunities are fewer, though now increasing, but females continue to bear primary responsibility for care of the family and home. Women's opportunities tend to be extensions of the family-care positions. In areas such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, women are still relegated to subordinate positions.³⁸



DVID photo
Khala or elderly women

Interaction with Iraqi Women

Address a woman older than 50 as *Khala*. This is even more respectful than “ma’am.” Call a younger woman *uKhtee*, which literally means “my sister,” but is taken to mean “miss” or “ma’am.” Another word is *sit*, meaning “ma’am,” used in the office environment.

Interaction between sexes is usually acceptable only in universities and in the workplace. Dating is not an Iraqi, or for that matter, a Muslim custom. Normally a couple does not appear alone in public unless legally engaged or married. It is preferable to marry a first cousin. If no first cousins are available, increasingly distant cousins will do. If no cousins are available, marriages outside of the family happen, but the family must be known.

Certain prohibitions narrow the pool of potential spouses even further: Muslim women do not marry non-Muslims. Iraqi women, Muslims or Christians, seldom marry foreigners. For this reason, foreign male visitors to Iraq and to the Arab world in general should not pursue romantic interests in Iraqi society. In fact, in this conservative society, men should not even approach or address women in the street unless they are first introduced. Females who are perceived to have dishonored their family may have to contend with the wrath of their relatives, which in some instances could mean death in an “honor killing.” Making a pass at or even staring at a female in Iraq could carry bad consequences for all involved. All of this applies equally to Kurdish families.³⁹

If you need to speak with a female, find a female soldier to do the talking. It protects honor and saves many problems. Otherwise, address questions to the accompanying male. Male soldiers should not speak to any Iraqi woman unless she is accompanied by a male member of her family.

If you are a male, do not ask an Iraqi man direct questions about the females in his family. Just ask, “How is your family?” Only a female is free to ask about the females in the family.

38 Haim Barakat. “The Arab Family and the Challenge of Change.” 1993. National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education. http://arabworld.nitle.org/texts.php?module_id=8&reading_id=13&sequence=4

39 Global Security. Kurds in Iraq. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/lifestyle.htm>

Exchange 10: How is your family?

Soldier:	How are you, how's the family?	shlonak, shlon al-ahel?
Iraqi:	Thanks to God, they are fine, thanks	al-Hamdu lillah, zayneen, shukran.
Soldier:	Thanks to God.	al-Hamdu lillah.

Other Traditions



Dress Codes

Western attire is well known and widely used in Iraq, but some limitations exist. For example, short pants are only worn by young children or athletes on the sports field. Men keep their shirts on regardless of the heat. Except for many areas of southern Iraq, women are not generally required to cover themselves from head to toe, as is the case in Yemen or Saudi Arabia. Although Baghdad has

always been more cosmopolitan in dress, nowadays almost all women are choosing to wear the head-covering *hijab*.⁴⁰ Conservative dress prevails: do not wear mini-skirts, sleeveless blouses, and low-cut sweaters.

Depending on command, short-sleeved shirts are OK. If in military uniform. In mosques, everyone removes footwear and females wear headscarves. Generally, do not attract attention to yourself.

Alcohol

In the West, many parties or celebrations—social events—involve alcoholic beverages. Until it was banned by the former regime in 1994, alcohol was openly consumed in taverns, bars, and cabarets in Baghdad and other large cities. Some Iraqis, however, still consume alcohol in the privacy of their own homes, but it would be safer not to discuss alcohol in public to avoid complications. Strict Muslims follow the doctrine of the Koran, which forbids the consumption of alcohol.

Photography

Photography is considered offensive unless prior permission is obtained from those being photographed. Generally refrain from photographing females, since this could lead to unnecessary problems.



Gestures

If you are in a heated discussion and you are trying to signal “patience” or “slow down!”, hold your right hand in front of you with the palm up and with fingertips touching. Move the hand up and down a bit and bend your head down a little. This means “just hang on for five seconds!”

40 Jim Garamone. “Observing Iraq.” American Forces Press Service. January 22, 2005. http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jan2005/n01222005_2005012203.html

Iraqis signal “yes” in the same way Americans do, by nodding. However, Iraqis have different signals for “no,” or “don’t,” to wit:

- Move your head back and make a clicking sound with the tongue as in “*tsk, tsk.*”
- Wave the open palm of your right hand from right to left while facing the person.
- Tilt the head slightly back and raise the eyebrows.

Firing Rifles in Celebration

Iraqis often celebrate a wide variety of events and occasions by firing rifles in the air. This could be the return from the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), a funeral, a wedding, the birth of a baby, or the arrival of a family member after a long absence. There could be many people firing their rifles in the air. You could hear these shots fired and think that there is trouble somewhere. First, ascertain that the rifle shots are not just some kind of celebration.

Exchange 11: Firing Rifles in Celebration

Soldier:	What is all this firing about?	shinu hal-Talqaat?
Iraqi:	We have a wedding going on.	‘eedna zaffa.

The Baathist Generation

A whole generation of Iraqis has grown up in fear of the Baathist regime. They have known war and violence since the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran War in 1980. Hussein and his circle ruled absolutely. The regime did not respect the law; they were the law. As a result, this generation of Iraqis has not developed a respect for the law: they respect and fear the one who is in charge. Those who had connections to the regime could commit crimes with impunity. This mentality has ruled for a generation and it will not disappear overnight.

Be careful about whom you hire as an interpreter. People might often be more loyal to their ethnic or religious group than to the stranger who hired them.

Non-religious Celebrations

New Year’s Day (January 1st) is also celebrated in Iraq. January 6th is Army Day. July 14th is National and Republic Day. August 8th celebrates the end of the Iran-Iraq War. On March 21st, the Kurds and many Iraqis celebrate *nau roy* (also *noruz*), also a Persian, Azeri, and Afghan holiday, as is the First Day of Spring. It is also the beginning of the Kurdish calendar year.⁴¹ Labor Day is celebrated May 1st. April 9th is celebrated as the end of the Saddam Hussein regime.⁴²

41 Canadian Citizenship and Immigration Service. Cultural Profile Project. Iraq. “Holidays” <http://www.cpc.ca/english/iraq/holidays.html>

42 AME Info. Public Holidays in Iraq. http://www.ameinfo.com/iraq_public_holidays/

Social Events

Engagement and Marriage

Most marriages in Iraq are contractual and are entered into to improve the position of the families. Most Iraqi parents still arrange their children's marriages according to traditional procedures. The parents of the marriage candidate contact their respective siblings or cousins to inquire about the availability of an eligible cousin of the opposite sex. Once a match is proposed, both young people have the right to turn down their counterpart. If a man turns down the lady, it is impolite for him to say he turned her down. Instead, in decency he claims he was refused. If the match comes from outside the family, the parents of the couple must have a chance to get to know one another. They sound each other out and determine whether a marriage between the two families might succeed.



DVIC photo
Iraqi couple

Note the use of the expression "marriage between the two families." This is an important concept, for in the Arab world as in much of the Eastern world, marriage is seen as a bond not just between two individuals, but between two families. While both sets of parents decide whether the marriage can go ahead, the last word belongs to the father. In the case of an arranged marriage, the father would ask his daughter before pronouncing the last word: Do you want to marry this man or not? Again, the daughter is free to refuse the proposed match.

If she accepts, the suitor and his father or other close male relative will discuss the proposal with the young lady's father and ask him for his daughter's hand in marriage. They negotiate the dowry, a certain amount of money or property that is delivered to the bride. During the engagement period, the dowry arrives. Also during this period, the couple has more freedom to spend time with each other, unchaperoned. There is no fixed length of time between engagement and marriage.

Islam permits polygamy for men, but the practice has become less common in contemporary Iraq. It requires judicial approval, and the judge must be satisfied that the prospective husband can treat both wives equally.⁴³ The Koran says, "Marry those women who are lawful for you, up to two, three, or four, but only if you can treat them all equally." Later in the same chapter, the Koran reads, "No matter how you try, you will never be able to treat your wives equally."⁴⁴

At the wedding, the bride and groom sit facing each other. The groom, in front of two male witnesses (or one male and two women), repeats his offer of marriage and his dowry gift, called a *sadaq*, to the bride. The bride's *wali*, or representative, accepts the

43 Global Security. Iraq. Lifestyle. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/lifestyle.htm>

44 Isobel Coleman. "Women, Islam, and the New Iraq." Council on Foreign Relations. Foreign Affairs. January/February 2006. <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/>

offer, and the wedding is complete. A big reception, called a *waleemah*, follows, with music, dancing, and a lot of food.⁴⁵

Funerals and Processions

Muslim custom requires the body of the dead to be ritually washed, wrapped in a plain white shroud, and buried, all within 24 hours. The prayers for the dead, *januzah*, are said over the body, either at the home, funeral home, or mosque, followed by a procession to the grave site. Muslims do not allow cremation. There is a usual mourning period of 40 days.

When you see a procession of faithful Shi'a Muslims on the street, either in a funeral procession or in some other religious gathering, do not interfere. Just stand aside and show respect. If you have no business in that area or district, just stay away.



© Thomas Hartwell
Iraqi woman grieving

Dos & Don'ts

Dos

- Do use your entire *right* hand only to summon a person. Keep your palm down and wave downward.
- Do keep your feet down and your soles on the ground.



DO

DLIFLC photo
Do sit this way



DO

DLIFLC photo
Do cross your legs

Don'ts

- Do not summon women if you are a male soldier! Let a female soldier do that.
- Do not use the Western way of beckoning with one finger. It is very offensive.
- Do not point to anybody with a finger; use the whole *right* hand instead.
- Do not make the “A-OK” signal (circle with index finger and thumb of one hand). Some Iraqis may misinterpret it as an obscene gesture.

45 Zawaj. Islamic Marriage. http://www.zawaj.com/articles/marriage_ceremony_basics.html



DLIFLC photo
Do not point



DLIFLC photo
Do not make the "A-OK" signal

- Do not point upward with the middle finger. It is obscene in the U.S. and equally so in Iraq.
- Do not stare at Iraqi women. The consequences for both could be terrible.
- Do not use obscene or indecent language within earshot of Iraqi citizens. Many Iraqis are familiar with American slang.
- Do not talk with an Iraqi with your hands in your pockets, not even one hand. This is seen as impolite.
- Do not cross your legs when sitting in a chair, or show the bottom of your feet to someone.

Urban Life

Introduction

Because of the unavailability of work in rural areas, the population of Iraq found reason to move to cities during the oil boom of the 1970s. Still, until the time of the Iran-Iraq War, much of Iraq was rural, but many fled the countryside to live in the perceived safety of cities. Particularly Baghdad and Basra began to grow rapidly. Rural, tribal families of peasant farmers, shopkeepers, small traders, and craftsmen began to immigrate to these and other main cities. Most congregated around others from their own villages or tribes setting up small shops to sell their handicrafts out of one-man stores. This migration created entire urban areas of people loyal only to a particular tribe or village.⁴⁶

Health Issues

Sanctions that followed the 1991 Gulf War, destruction of infrastructure by war, and the regime change in 2003 have all contributed to making Iraq a difficult place to live and work. Following 1991, Saddam Hussein reduced expenditures for health services by 90%. The armed conflict in 2003 destroyed 12% of the hospitals and both major medical laboratories.⁴⁷ Currently, there are major shortages in health personnel and medicines. Much of the medical equipment does not work, and hospitals and health clinics have been demolished. Medical professionals and medical-school teachers have left the country, and books and equipment have been damaged or destroyed. Corruption has redirected imported replacement equipment to the black market. Provision of health services has also been adversely affected by degraded or disrupted electrical supply, sanitation, and communications.⁴⁸



© Thomas Harwell
Iraqi nurse

The primary health care system in Iraq consists of 110 health districts, each serving on average 200,000 to 300,000 people. In each district, there are five to ten health care centers. The Iraqi Ministry of Health, with the support of the U.S. Mission to Iraq, runs the network of facilities⁴⁹. Almost all services provided by these clinics and hospitals are free, except for afternoon consultations at low-cost, semi-public health clinics. More well-off

Iraqis might pay out-of-pocket expenses. The state-owned pharmaceutical and medical appliance company, Kimadia, provides products heavily subsidized by the government to sell at a fixed, low rate. This is helpful, as there is no public or private health insurance; only a few small health insurance programs are provided for employees of specific companies. Generally, the pharmaceutical industry has been in decline for 20 years due to government policies, international sanctions, and wars.⁵⁰

46 Library of Congress. Country Studies. Iraq. "Urban Society." 1988. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+iq0042\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+iq0042))

47 Library of Congress. Country Studies. "Iraq." <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

48 United Nations Development Project. "Report on Iraq. Health Services." 2005.

<http://www.iq.undp.org/ILCS/healthstatus.htm>

49 World Health Organization. <http://www.emro.who.int/iraq/pdf/HealthSystemsProfile.pdf>, 2005, p.36

50 Sandra Basu. US Medicine. "Iraq Pharmacy Structure in Rebuilding Mode." May 2005.

http://www.directrelief.org/sections/information_center/articles/usmedicine_0504.html

The focus of U.S. and international aid agencies, in conjunction with the Iraqi Ministry of Health, has been on improving and rebuilding health care facilities, and addressing shortages of medical supplies, drugs, equipment, and fresh drinking water. While today 240 hospitals and more than 1,200 primary health centers are operating,⁵¹ the majority of hospitals in Iraq still require rehabilitation. To address these issues, nearly USD1 billion of the Iraqi budget was allocated to health care in 2005. Additionally, 30,000 tons of pharmaceuticals and healthcare supplies have been delivered to facilities across Iraq, and 30 million doses of children's vaccinations have been distributed since 2003.⁵² Now, with the help of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region South District (GRS) and the Project and Contracting Office (PCO), 150 new primary health care facilities are being built, with 60 scheduled to be constructed in the marsh region of southern Iraq.⁵³ Here, there are more than 37 districts and 150,000 Iraqis with little or no access to primary health care.

Security remains key. It is difficult to provide water, public sanitation, and electricity when insurgents are sabotaging public works. Life expectancy for a female is 70 years, and for a male 68 years.⁵⁴ 16% of children younger than five years of age are moderately to severely underweight due to malnutrition.⁵⁵ The number one killer of children at this age, however, remains diarrhea caused by drinking untreated water.⁵⁶ Estimates of the numbers of doctors and nurses that have left the country or stopped practicing due to death threats or assassinations range up to 40%. In Basra, the estimate is as high as 200 since the beginning of 2006.⁵⁷

Many Iraqis forego modern medicine, continuing to seek out the services of unlicensed traditional healers. For a fee, these healers will treat any number of ailments, from fractures to simple aches and pains. They have no formal training, learning their trade through apprenticeships. There are also many shops that sell traditional medicines and herbal remedies.

Visitors to Iraq should seek protection from Hepatitis A & B, malaria, rabies, typhoid, and get boosters for tetanus-diphtheria, measles, and a one-time polio vaccine for adults. Meningococcal vaccine is required for anyone that might travel to Mecca or Umra.⁵⁸

51 White House. "Iraq's Health Care System." 23 February 2004.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/02/20040223-12.html>

52 Coalition Provisional Authority Press Release. "Iraqi Ministry of Health Becomes First Ministry to Enter the Final Stage to Sovereignty." 23 March 2004. http://www.cpa-iraq.org/pressreleases/20040328_health.html

53 Defend America. "150 New Health Care Clinics Planned for Iraq." 6 July 2005.

<http://www.defendamerica.mil/articles/jul2005/a0707605dg4.html>

54 CIA World Factbook. Iraq. <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/iz.html>

55 Nationmaster.com. Iraq. Statistics. Health. <http://www.nationmaster.com/red/country/iz-iraq/hea-health&all=1>

56 World Health Organization. Iraqi Health Systems Profile, pg. 7. 2005.

<http://www.emro.who.int/iraq/pdf/HealthSystemsProfile.pdf>

57 Reuters News Service. "Iraq: Insecurity, under-funding threaten children's health in Basra." July 9, 2006.

<http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/IRIN/f5cd20d3878932441da02f70bb4eeca1.htm>

58 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Iraq. <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/mideast.htm#vaccines>

Work Problems

About 6.7 million people are in the work force, including 1.1 million women. Looking for work is a matter of necessity, with heads of households actively working or looking for employment. Unemployment is high, at 18.4% for the entire population, and even higher among young people with a high school or college education, at 37%. The government employs 29% of the total workforce, and provides better wages than in the private sector. Women work little outside the home, though the education of females typically puts more women in jobs. For example, 42% of women with secondary educations work actively. Nearly half of all workers are employed by private companies.⁵⁹ Since the invasion of Iraq by coalition forces, USD18.4 billion has been budgeted for, and is now all nearly spent on, reconstruction. Almost 50% of the funds were allocated for providing security, improving the criminal justice system, and for prosecuting Saddam Hussein. Therefore, it has been difficult to provide clean water, sewage treatment, and electricity. The U.S. administration says the funding will not be renewed, but left for European nations to provide.⁶⁰

Education

Iraq's educational system was once the pride of the Middle East. Its major asset was its well-educated populace with a very high rate of literacy. However, over the past 20 years, economic sanctions, wars, and misdirected funds have affected the system deeply. Schoolbooks full of propaganda from the Saddam era have also been a problem, requiring scrapping and wholesale rewriting. Those textbooks heading into the classrooms were hastily rewritten. All mention of Saddam Hussein, Baathists, the attacks against the Kurds and Assyrians, the Iran-Iraq War, Invasion of Kuwait, the Persian Gulf War, and the fall of Baghdad has been eliminated. It may take years to reach equitable treatment for those events.⁶¹



School buildings are in short supply. There are 14,000 primary schools, but only about 11,368 are available and almost 3,000 of these need major renovation. While attendance surged during 2003-2004, school buildings, desks, and chairs were insufficient. Many schools double up and run in shifts, 25% running three shifts/day, which reduces classroom time.⁶²

An estimated 40% of college and university teachers have left the country rather than continue facing kidnappings and murder threats. The literacy rate for youth aged 15-24 is 74%, which is lower than that of the 25-34 age group, indicating that literacy is declining. Literacy for women has not increased and there is still a very high rate of illiteracy

59 Khalid M. Khalid. UNDP. 2005. Iraq. <http://www.iq.undp.org/ILCS/labour.htm>

60 Ellen Knickmeyer. Washington Post. "US has end in sight on Iraq Rebuilding." January 2006. <http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/iraq/reconstruct/2006/0102rebuilding.htm>

61 Christina Asquith. Christian Science Monitor. November 2003. "Turning the page on Iraq's history." <http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/1104/p11s01-legn.html>

62 United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund Press Release. "Iraq's Schools Suffering from Neglect and War." October 15, 2004. http://www.unicef.org/media/media_23630.html

among adult women. The reason most often given by girls or women is that their families did not want them to go to school, or there were no schools nearby. About 89% of children generally attend schools until the age of 12. This declines steadily to 56% at age 15 and to 35% by age 18. Enrollment in basic schools tends to be higher in urban than in rural areas.⁶³ Overall literacy was 55% for males and 23% for females (2000 est.).⁶⁴

Daily Life of Urban Dwellers

Where there was once a considerable activity at night, there is now its marked absence. The threat of kidnappings, murders, bomb-rigged cars, and government sweeps has caused people to come home earlier and stay home. Incomes are up slightly, but food is difficult to get, gas lines are long, and prices are up. In March 2006, one kg (2.2 pounds) of lamb cost USD 6. One kg (2.2 pounds) of bread cost USD 0.50. Twenty liters (5.28 gallons) of gas cost USD 3.50 if subsidized, or USD 6.80-8.20 on the black market.⁶⁵ Many Iraqis of the former middle class have left for other countries, almost 500,000 of them to Amman, Jordan.



© Aramco Services Company
Street in an Iraqi city

The religious start the day before sunrise with ritual washing, then prayers, followed by breakfast and off to work.

One construction manager in Baghdad arises at 7 a.m, showers, and has a breakfast of perhaps yogurt and walnuts. At work, he discusses the day's projects with his staff and is very dependent on cell phone and email. Trips are taken in a convoy of three armored cars, changing the route and cars to avoid the dangers of predictability.⁶⁶

A high school English teacher living near Basra goes to work early because of the crowded streets. After teaching all morning, he eats a lunch he has brought from home. At three, he leaves to do errands for his family. In the evening, he has four hours of electricity. On some evenings, he might go to the riverbank where people meet to socialize, but he avoids the city.

Homes

The traditional Iraqi home would seem quite private by Western standards. If the family lives in a private house, it probably sits sheltered behind a high, windowless wall. Even in an apartment, the family guards its privacy. For example, even in modest homes, the house has a common kitchen, but separate living quarters. The family sets aside a room like a formal parlor for the men to receive male guests. With the separate room, other female family members can move around without being around the males.

The uncertainty arising from unattributed murders, kidnappings, and bombings causes almost everyone to be very much on edge. The Ministry of Defense has recommended

63 Khalid. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Iraq Living Conditions Survey 2004. Published 2005. <http://www.iq.undp.org/ILCS/education.htm>

64 Library of Congress. Country Studies, "Iraq" <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

65 BBC News. April 7, 2006. Middle East. Life in Iraq. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

66 BBC News. April 7, 2006. Middle East. My day in Iraq: Businessman. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

that people not open their doors at night to the Iraqi army or police on nightly patrols unless coalition forces are with them, because of the fear that those at the door might be insurgents bent on kidnapping. Sometimes, when the government sweeps a neighborhood, the first clue the sweep is coming is the loss of telephone service.⁶⁷

All Iraqis are eligible for a basic ration of foodstuffs such as rice, beans, soap, cooking oil, sugar, *chai* (tea), salt, and flour, almost all imported. There are occasional shortages of even these items in the basic ration. There are consistent shortages of sugar, milk, and *ghee* (a type of butter). Families cook meals on stoves fueled by propane delivered by men and boys with carts loaded with old propane cylinders. Men bang on the cylinders with a metal bar to alert people to the availability of propane as they make their deliveries around 7 a.m. Few can eat out at a restaurants. Thus, many have closed due to lack of business. People are now home and locked in by 5 or 6 p.m.⁶⁸

Iraqi hospitality, however, is second to none. Even during the embargo of the 1990s, when Iraqi families could barely feed themselves, they would go to great lengths to make a visitor feel welcome and valued. They would offer the best foods in large quantities and do so with much fellowship, laughter, and affection.

Favorite Pastimes

Smoking and drinking tea are favorite pastimes for Iraqis, although smoking is more prevalent among males. If you smoke among Iraqis, you should offer cigarettes all around. Anything less would be impolite. It is also impolite to ask an Iraqi not to smoke.⁶⁹ American coffee is less dominant in Iraqi society even though it is widely available in cafés and restaurants--mostly in the form of instant coffee (referred to as *Nescafé* in Iraq). Arabic coffee is the norm. Served in small cups, it is customary to shake the cup slightly once you have had enough; otherwise your cup will continuously be replenished.



© Dana Smilner Saudi Aramco WorldPEDIA
Men sitting in a teahouse

The tradition of serving Arabic coffee denotes generosity and is even a matter of tribal pride. Refusing to drink the coffee when offered could be mistaken for unfriendliness on the part of the guest. This is more so the case in the rural and tribal areas of Iraq, though with the increased movement of rural people to urban settings, it may also be true in cities.

In more secure times, taking children to a park for a picnic with family or sitting in a café drinking *chai*, talking and playing backgammon, were all popular pastimes. Now, most Iraqis are in their houses by dark, where they remain until daybreak.

67 Riverbend. Electronic Iraq. Blog March 2006. <http://electroniciraq.net/news/2326.shtml>

68 Dahr Jamail. The New Standard. Iraq Dispatches. <http://blog.newstandardnews.net/iraqdispatches/archives/000500.html>

69 University of Military Intelligence. Iraqi Culture. <http://www.universityofmilitaryintelligence.us/tcc/cultural/iraq>

Food & Eating Habits

Iraqis eat three meals each day, with the evening meal around 8 p.m. Extra food is often prepared in case surprise guests stop by to visit.

Arab food started as nomad food—easily carried, herded, and stored, such as lamb, goat, or beef, with many kinds of grains and nuts, cooked over open fires.⁷⁰ *Dolma* is a favorite food made of ground meat, usually lamb, that is mixed with rice and chopped peppers and then wrapped in a grape leaf. Most Iraqis prefer lamb, beef, goat, mutton, or poultry. They do not eat any pork products. Meat dishes are often combined with rice and



© Yoel Herzberg
Iraqi food

vegetables. The rice is of two varieties: amber rice in the north, and one called *neggaza* in the south. Main course dishes include *kebab*, skewered chunks of grilled meat; *quiz*, roasted and stuffed lamb; *kubba*, minced meat with nuts, raisins, and spices; *masgouf*, a special dish of fish from the Tigris river; and tripe, a dish made from cow's stomach. Most meals are served with flat breads called *samoons*.

Desserts feature fruits, rice pudding, Turkish Delight (*lokum*, a confection of starch and sugar, usually flavored with rosewater or lemon), or *baklava*, a pastry made by layering honey, pistachios or walnuts, and rose water, between sheets of filo dough.

The most common drinks are coffee and tea. The coffee is strong, black, bitter, and served in small china cups. Tea is usually served in small glasses, sweetened, and without milk. Fruit juices and soft drinks are common. Alcohol is forbidden to Muslims. At home, Iraqis can make soft drinks from rose petals, orange blossoms, lemons, oranges, apricots, pomegranates, or raisins.

Exchange 12: Have some.

Iraqi host/ friend:	Please have some.	tfaDhal.
Soldier/ guest:	Thank you.	shukran.

Market Place

There are markets, called *souks*, which sell meat and vegetables. Iraqis receive a monthly food ration that does not include meat or vegetables. *Souks* also specialize, so you might find a gold *souk*, a book *souk*, a rug *souk*, and so on. Typically, you can buy anything from “saffron to Saddam memorabilia.”⁷¹ Prices generally have not risen quickly, and bargaining is encouraged. Be advised to know the value of something before beginning negotiations. Do not start bargaining for something you have no intention of buying.

70 Canadian Citizen and Immigration. Eating the Iraqi Way. <http://www.cp-pc.ca/english/iraq/eating.html>

71 Shelley Thrakal. BBC News. “Iraq: 12 months on.”

http://news.bbc.co.uk/aboutbbcnews/hi/this_is_bbc_news/newsid_3700000/3700123.stm

Street Vendors

It is fine to accept food when you know and trust the one who has offered you the food. Do not buy food from street vendors. You can never be sure about its safety.

Exchange 13: Sorry, I can't eat while on duty.

Iraqi vendor:	Buy some baklava? It's very delicious!	tishtari baqlawa? kulish Tayeba!
Soldier:	Thank you, it sure looks great, but I am on duty and am not allowed to eat.	shukran, akeed Tayeba, bas ani bil-wajeb, mamnu' akul.

Traffic

Traffic chokes the streets of Baghdad. It is not only annoying; it can be a death trap. The enemy sometimes sets up traffic jams to explode devices in cars trapped in the jams. Soldiers must get out of traffic jams quickly, firmly, and politely. Obscene language will be counterproductive. Many Iraqis have seen enough western movies to understand English and its common four-letter words. It is best to use tactful, respectful language.

Exchange 14: Traffic Commands

Soldier:	Please give way.	raja-an inTee Tareeq.
Iraqi:	Please pull over.	raja-an waKher sayyartak.
Soldier:	Please let the military vehicle pass.	raja-an Khalee al-sayyarat al-skariya tfout.

Checkpoints

Checkpoints are a way of life for anyone living in a city. These are some of the situations one might encounter, and suggestions for dealing with them.

In a normal situation, women do not typically carry ID. Therefore, it would be best not to demand to see it. In fact, one should not demand to see anybody's ID, but politely request the ID. It would be far better to find a female coalition soldier to do the talking, protecting the honor of the family. If there is no female soldier to address the Iraqi woman, the next best thing is for the male soldier to address himself to the male family member of the Iraqi woman, not to the Iraqi woman directly. A female soldier may speak directly to an Iraqi male without reservation.



DOD photo
Soldiers conducting a vehicle search

Exchange 15: Your ID, ma'am.

Soldier:	Ma'am, your ID please.	uKhtee, haweeetich bala zaH-ma.
Iraqi woman:	I do not have an ID.	ma 'andi haweeya.

Exchange 16: IDs, please.

Soldier:	May I trouble you for your IDs, please?	bela zaH-ma huweeyatkum?
Iraqi:	Here, take it.	tfaDhal.

Grouping at the Checkpoint

Do not place males and females into the same group if they are not related. For example, if you are guarding a checkpoint and you must order the passengers of a bus to step off so that you can check their documents, try to lead the males into one group and the females into another group. At a checkpoint, allow families to stay together. Do not group unrelated males and females together.

Rifles Abound

There are many rifles in Iraq. Most families own at least one rifle for self-protection and self-defense. The coalition forces respect this tradition, but they ban these weapons in coalition facilities or zones.

Exchange 17: Open the trunk.

Soldier:	Are you carrying weapons?	shayel islaH?
Iraqi:	No.	la.
Soldier:	Please open the trunk.	raja-an iftaH sundoug al-sayyara.

In the following exchange, the soldier asks the Iraqi to surrender his weapon temporarily while on coalition grounds or passing through a checkpoint. Do not expect an Iraqi man to give up his rifle willingly. He owns his rifle to protect himself and his family, and it is a question of honor. He will not give it up easily.

Exchange 18: Surrender your weapon.

Soldier:	Are you carrying weapons?	shayel islaH?
Iraqi:	Yes.	na'am.
Soldier:	Please surrender your weapon, and you may enter.	raja-an sallem islaHak hna wa-tfaDhal udKhul.

At the Base Access Gate

Iraqis will sometimes show up at various coalition facilities seeking jobs, medical attention, or police assistance. They might also be selling food, snacks, or souvenirs. In most cases, the guard must redirect them or turn them away politely and respectfully. However, if they come with information about insurgents, follow the procedures given to you by your commander.



Exchange 19: I saw some insurgents.

Iraqi:	I saw some insurgents hiding in that house.	shufit cham muKharreb Khateleen beDhak albayt.
Soldier:	Thank you, please stay here.	shukran, raja-an ibqa hna.

Exchange 20: Go to a hospital.

Iraqi:	My son is sick, he needs treatment.	vine mareeDh, yinrad la-'ilaj.
Soldier:	Sorry, this is not a medical facility, please go to a hospital.	ani asef, haDhi mu binaya Tebbiya, raja-an ruH il-mustashfa.

Exchange 21: Call the cops.

Iraqi	Someone got killed in the street.	fad waHed inkital bras alshari'.
Soldier:	From the coalition forces?	min quwat attaHaluf?
Iraqi:	No, Iraqi.	la, iraqi.
Soldier:	Please inform the police.	raja-an Khabbar ashurTa.

Exchange 22: Someone got killed.

Iraqi	Someone got killed in the street.	fad waHed inkital bras alshari'.
Soldier:	From the coalition forces?	min quwat attaHaluf?
Iraqi:	Yes, American.	eh, amreekee.
Soldier:	Thank you, I will tell my commander.	shukran, raH agoul il-amer.

Exchange 23: Looking for a job.

Soldier:	Are you looking for a job?	inta itdower shughul?
Iraqi:	Yes sir.	na'am, saydee.
Soldier:	I am sorry; this is not a hiring place.	ani asef haDha mu makan ta'yeenat.

Rural Life

Tribal Distribution

Perhaps three quarters of Iraqis belong to one of 150 tribes. The existence of these tribes continues to be a major part of daily life in Iraq. Even citizens without tribal affiliation turn to *sheikhs* (tribal leaders) for assistance with government matters. In the early days of the Saddam regime, the Baathists tried without success to eliminate tribal structures and tribal names. They found that tribal Arabs still considered themselves to be Bedouin and genuinely Arab, and therefore could be depended upon in wars against Iran. They considered themselves bearers of the Arab tribal values of communal spirit, honor, and courage. A codependent relationship between the government and the tribes finally became official in the 1980s at the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war.

During Saddam Hussein's regime, the names appearing on passports were: first name, father's name, and grandfather's name. Tribal names did not appear. It was understood that being identified as a Tikriti, like Saddam, meant you were in the government and subject to deferential treatment.

The mostly nomadic tribes of the Ottoman period lived from tribute, trade, raids, and raising animals. Generally, camel breeders were at the top of the nomadic social hierarchy, with sheep herders, peasants, and marsh dwellers following. Another hierarchy put rice growers above vegetable growers, who were above manual workers.⁷² While this was mostly true of rural areas, the tribal structure has remained constant for urban areas, as the population has shifted to be almost 80% urban.



© Christian Briggs
Iraqi man

Virtually the entire population of Iraq is in the eastern half of the country with mostly Kurds in the North, mixed with Sunni Arabs and Turkomen around Tal Afar and Mosul. The area from here south along the Tigris River and along the Euphrates entering from Syria, is mostly Sunni. While Shia dominate the region just north of Karbala to the Persian Gulf, 79% of the population lives in the cities and, within the cities, tends to group themselves by tribe and village.⁷³

The Shi'a Arabs of the south are different from the Sunni Arabs in the center and north of Iraq. Shi'a tribal leaders, *sheikh*, have had to share power with the *sadah* (holy men) and the *ulema* (tribal council). The Shi'a have not politically challenged the government, but have indicated they want a unified Iraq with territorial integrity and peace.⁷⁴

The typical structure of a tribe is in a *biet*, or house, which is much like a *khams*. The most basic level of organization is a single family, and extended families that may include hundreds of members. Houses organize into a clan, or *fakhdh*. Clans form 'ashira,

72 Globalsecurity.org. Military. World. Iraq. Overview. "Tribal structures" <http://www.globalsecurity.org/>

73 Public Broadcasting System. Beyond Baghdad. Iraq Map: Peoples. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/beyond/etc/map.html>

74 Globalsecurity.org. Iraq Overview. "Tribal structures" <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/tribes.htm>

or tribal organizations. Sometimes tribes will organize around a town like Fallujah. The al-Fallujiyyin have 16 clans. Other towns have a few thousand or many thousands. Several tribes have a confederation, qabila, such as Saddam Hussein's al-BuNasir tribe, part of a confederation around Tikrit named al-Tikriti.⁷⁵

In 2004, the population was estimated to be 75 to 80% Arab, 15 to 20% Kurdish, and less than 5% Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Turkmens. A distinctive subgroup of Iraqi Arabs is the Ma'dan, Shia Muslims of the south, called Marsh Arabs.⁷⁶

The Kurds are ethnic Iranians who have inhabited stretches of Syria and Turkey through Iraq, Iran, and into Azerbaijan. Their language is related to Pashto and Baluchi as spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Mosul, Irbil, and As-Sulaymaniyah are cities with predominantly Kurdish populations. The most valuable oil fields in Iraq are in Kurdish territories.

Different Regions and Different Ways of Life

Kurds

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



Since the end of the First World War, the Kurds in Iraq have fought openly with non-Kurds, pausing mostly to regroup. Tribal allegiances have generally hobbled larger nationalistic Kurdish movements. One Iraqi government after another quashed these rebellions, but none as viciously as the Baathist regime of Saddam Hussein. From 1987 to 1989, Saddam's forces committed genocide against the Kurdish people, using poison gas in Halabja, as well as conventional means, to murder the Kurds. In 1991, coincidental with a call from the US for an uprising, the Kurds rose up and were smashed, forcing as many as 450,000 of them to the border of Turkey, where they were refused admission, and over a million into Iran.⁷⁷

A large Kurdish tribal confederacy, called a *shiret*, is divided into sub-tribes called *tira*. Membership in a *tira* is inherited patrilineally. Its leader, or *raiz*, inherits his position with the approval of the senior males. The *tira* will not generally camp in a unit, rather in tent camps called *khel*.⁷⁸

75 Council of Foreign Relations. "Iraq: The role of Tribes." <http://www.cfr.org/publication.html?id=7681#4>

76 Permanent Mission of Iraq to the United Nations. Iraq Country Profile. http://www.un.int/iraq/Iraq_CountryProfile.ppt#264,8,Slide 8

77 Encyclopedia Britannica. Iraq. http://www.britannica.com/worldsapart/3_timeline_print.html

78 Global Security. Iraq: Societal Framework. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/iraq/society.htm>

Nomads

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

Marsh Arabs

The *Ma'dan*, or Marsh Arabs, live in 15,540 sq. km (6,000 sq. miles) of marsh at the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, in a triangle formed by Amara, Nasiriya, and Basra. They depend on fishing and raising water buffalo, and live in Quonset hut-shaped houses built on reeds to keep them above water. When the water levels are high, they get around in canoe-like boats. Urban Iraqis consider the *Ma'dan* backward. The *Ma'dan* return the consideration, labeling urban Iraqis as irreligious and untrustworthy. Many of the *Ma'dan* have been devastated by the draining of the swamps, which was ordered by Saddam Hussein in retaliation for an attempted revolt against him during the 1990s.⁷⁹

Rural Economy



© AusAID/Lorraine Mulholland
Wheat from the Pearl of Fajarrah

Only 50 to 60% of the arable land in Iraq has been cultivated. Farmland in Kurdish territory has not contributed to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The international Oil-for-Food Program that ended in 2003 further depressed the rural economy. The program encouraged the importation of artificially low-priced foreign foods, so farmers had little incentive to plant. The 2003 production of grain was higher by 22% than the previous year and growth continued in 2004, but most experts predict that Iraq will be importing agricultural products for the future. There are plans to invest in agricultural machinery and materials, and improve crop varieties.⁸⁰ River fisheries do not add to the GDP as all of the approximately 30,000 tons caught

are consumed in Iraq.

The population subsists on agriculture, which contributes 7.3% to Iraq's GDP. The main crops are wheat, barley, corn, rice, vegetables, dates, and cotton; the main livestock are cattle and sheep. Almost all agriculture occurs along the river valleys.

Rural Education

During the 10-year period before the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the Baathist government reduced expenditures for education by almost 90%, redirecting the money to other uses. By 2003, 80% of Iraq's 15,000 school buildings needed rehabilitation, basic sanitary facilities, libraries, and laboratories.⁸¹ In 2003, the Coalition Provisional Authority started a total reform of the Iraq education system starting with removing Baathist ideology from curricula, and increasing teacher salaries and training. At that time, the system had about 6 million students in grades K-12, with 300,000 teachers and administrators. The United

79 Cultural Orientation Resource Center. "Iraqis-Their History and Culture." Refugee Fact Sheet No. 11. <http://www.culturalorientation.net/iraqi/ipeop.html>

80 Library of Congress. Country Studies. Iraq. April 2005. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Iraq.pdf>

81 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. "Iraq: Briefing paper on Education." IRINnews.org. http://www.irinnews.org/report.asp?ReportID=41159&SelectRegion=Middle_East

Nations Development Program estimates the total cost for rejuvenating the infrastructure at USD 4.8 billion.⁸²

Education is mandatory through the 6th grade, at which time students take a national exam that sorts them into one of two tracks: vocational or higher education. Boys and girls attend separate schools beginning in the 7th grade. The current obstacles are poor security, lack of accountability for teachers and administrators, and isolation of the system for the last 30 years. There are no private schools in rural areas. In 2000, the literacy rate was 55% for males, 23% for females.⁸³ Part of the problem in rural areas is the low rate of enrollment for females, who are often expected to stay at home to help with the chores. As a result, a UNESCO study found that only 37% of women in rural areas can read, and only 30% rural girls are enrolled in high school, compared to 42% of boys.⁸⁴

Transportation Issues

Through the 1970s and 1980s, Saddam Hussein built 39,000 km (24,233 miles) of broad, paved highway, mostly for military and commercial use. The 1991 Persian Gulf War targeted that transportation infrastructure of roads and bridges. Most of that damage has been repaired, but main roads have been subject to repeated damage by saboteurs.



Landmines

Iraq has a severe problem with landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) from conflicts dating back to World War II. Most of the landmines are along the northern border with Iran, left from the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, especially in the districts of Penjwin, Sharbazher, and Qaladiza. All twenty-five districts in these three provinces of northern Iraq are affected by land mines.⁸⁵ Most of the UXOs are cluster bombs that landed in soil too soft to go off. There were, however, many UXOs that were looted during the confusion of regime-change times in 2003.

Daily Life in the Countryside

The daily routine of life in the countryside follows the rhythm of the seasons. There are crops to tend and animals to move. Tea is served in the afternoon and dinner around 7 p.m. There are mandated prayer-times. While the work is hard, most of the sectarian violence is concentrated in cities and life is relatively safe from car bombs and murders. One town in the eastern marshlands has found a way to peacefully coexist with the insurgents; they use tribal connections to negotiate standoffs. After one insurgent attack,

82 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). "UN/World Bank cumulative Iraq Reconstruction Needs." <http://www.undp.org/dpa/journalists/unworldbank.pdf>

83 CIA Factbook. Iraq. People. <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/iz.html>

84 USAID. Assistance for Iraq. Education. June 21, 2006. <http://www.usaid.gov/iraq/accomplishments/education.html>

85 Human Rights Watch. "Landmines in Iraq: Questions and Answers." December 2002. <http://hrw.org/campaigns/iraq/iraqmines1212.htm>

a tribal trial called a *fahsal* was convened to examine the event. The wrongdoers' families agreed to pay a large fine and banish the two men who were responsible for the attack.⁸⁶

Almost all land ownership is in private hands, with the government owning the infrastructure. Agricultural plots are mostly for subsistence, worked and owned by the family. This is one of the reasons why it is very difficult for a young man to set up an independent household for himself, sometimes many years after marriage. The wife normally moves in with her husband's parents and they live there, sometimes until the father dies. Thereafter, the brothers could stay together and form joint family households that include remaining parents, themselves, wives, and children.

Invitations

If there were a sixth pillar of Islam, it would be hospitality. There is a long tradition among nomadic Arabs of granting sanctuary to anyone who asks, even an enemy. Most Arabs would be puzzled at how westerners seem to need specific invitations and notice before a visit. A general invitation from an Iraqi to visit, without giving a specific time and place, might leave Iraqis sitting at home, wondering why westerners are so unsociable.



DoD photo
Touch food with your
right hand only

Iraqis also insist on paying in restaurants, sometimes more than they can afford. It is impossible to explain that westerners keep informal records of whose turn it is to pay, and that there are many ways to repay friends, perhaps by hosting a picnic or giving a handmade gift.⁸⁷

Who is in Charge

Speak first with the oldest male. If you need to find the most influential person, find the leader of the tribe with the most members. Throughout Iraq, among Kurds or Arabs, tribal leaders supported by their families have more local, practical power than any urban or government force.

Hospitality

In a village, the tribal elder may invite you to a feast. He may slaughter a sheep and roast it and prepare an enormous meal in your honor. Serving plates full of food would be placed directly on the ground. Food is eaten communally. The males eat first; the females who prepared the food eat separately. When hands and fingers are necessary, only the right hand is used. Everybody sits around the food, on the ground, and eats without any forks, knives, spoons, or individual plates.

The host would reach into the plate of meat with his right hand and pull out the juiciest, most tender piece of meat and give it to you. Accept it with your right hand graciously and thank him sincerely. Remember, they are doing all this to honor you. To refuse is to dishonor them. Always leave some food on your plate (if you are eating from a plate) or

⁸⁶ Sabrina Tavernise and Qais Mizher. New York Times. "The Struggle for Iraq: Daily Life."
<http://travel2.nytimes.com/2006/07/10/world/middleeast/10amara.html>

⁸⁷ Iraqis-Their History and Culture. Culturenet Fact Sheet No. 11. <http://www.culturalorientation.net/iraqi/icult.html>

on the table: This will feed the rest of his family. If the host serves fruits, this signals that the main course is done.

The Kunya

You may search for a particular individual in his own neighborhood where he ought to be known. Yet his neighbors may say they do not know him. They might use a different name to address him. Close friends, relatives (even spouses), and neighbors do not use "official" names to address one another.



DOD photo
A soldier speaks to a tribal elder

Instead, they use the *kunya*, a name made up of “*abu*” (father of) or “*umm*” (mother of). For example, you may be searching for Muhammad Husayn Ad-Dalaymee. Muhammad’s eldest son is Ali. Muhammad’s friends and neighbors will refer to Muhammad as “*Abu Ali*” (father of Ali), not as “Muhammad.”

Exchange #24: You mean Abu Ali.

Soldier:	Please, we are looking for Muhammad Husayn Ad-Dalaymee.	raja-an dendawwer ala muHammad Husayn ad-dalaymee.
Iraqi #1:	I have not heard such a name.	ma sama' heechee ism.
Iraqi #2:	I know, you mean <i>Abu Ali</i> . You might find him in the market.	a'ruf, tuqsud abu ali. yimkin telgah bissoog.
Soldier:	Thank you.	shukran.

Search and Cordon

When searching a house, be sure not to bring a dog inside. It is highly insulting and it could get you killed. Dogs are considered unclean. If circumstances allow, knock on the door before you enter; courtesy will go a long way to save lives. Give the man of the house the chance to protect his family’s honor; avoid barging in on the family while the women are not covered.

Though one would hope that the man of the house cooperates, do not assume that this will always be the case. Sometimes you will not be able to extend as much courtesy as you might wish.

Exchange 25: Allow us to inspect your house.

Soldier:	Please allow us to inspect your house.	ismaHelna nfattesh baytkum.
Iraqi:	Sure, but just a minute while I get the family and the kids outside.	ma yKhallef, bas daqeeqa aTalli' al-ahel wa-jehal barra.
Soldier:	Take your time.	KhoDh raH-tak.

Family Life

Family Structure

Whereas Western society highly values individualism and independence, it is still the family that is held up to similar levels in the Arab world. Iraq is no exception. Here, a person is better known for his family and his position within it, than for his own professional achievements. It is the family that chooses both one's marriage partner and career. In some rural areas, someone moving into a neighborhood can become a member of a tribe or clan by generations of association, until the relationship is finally assumed to be by blood. Any Iraqi business owner would prefer to hire members of his own family or choose a close relative as his partner as a matter of trust.

The oldest male in a household will serve as its head. In rural areas, his mother, wife, sons, their wives and children, and any unmarried daughters or sisters generally live under the same roof. Although his wife and, perhaps, mother may wield considerable influence, his decision is the one that counts. The women perform family-care duties.

With less space to build, an urban family may have all the same relatives living in the vicinity and visit them frequently. It is likely that in-laws, cousins, aunts, and uncles live in the same neighborhood. This is part of the kinship relationship outside the immediate household.

Household Structure



DoG photo
Iraqi woman with child

Iraqi houses traditionally center on a courtyard, with a windowless wall to the outside. This helps protect the family's privacy. Most homes concentrate on the interior, with a structure that allows men to visit without accidentally running into the women of the house.⁸⁸

If you are searching for a man, and you come to his house, they may tell you that he is at his other house. If a man takes a second wife, he would prefer to install her in a second house if he can afford it. Nevertheless, it will probably be his name on the deed of both properties, not the wife's. Therefore, when they tell you that he is at "his other house," they mean that he is in the house where the other wife lives. Though a Muslim man may have more than one wife, he now needs a court order for permission and he also must treat each wife equally. Four wives is the maximum permitted by *sharia*.

Exchange 26: His Other House

Soldier:	Where is the father of your children?	wayna abu jjehal?
Iraqi:	In his other house.	bbayt al-luKh.
Soldier:	Thank you.	shukran.

88 BBC World. Islam. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/features/art/art5.shtml>

Polygamy is rare, however, and even illegal in some Arab countries. Its rarity comes from the wealth needed to have more than one wife, and the judicial permission required.

The patriarch takes care of the family's estate, however large or small it may be, and his word is law. In public situations, males will speak for female family members. This absolute authority has been moderated slightly in Baghdad and other big cities, with the growing influence of the public schools and other state institutions.

Life Events

Marriage

A marriage or engagement is an exciting event, as it signals the joining of two families or the cementing of relationships within one. It is more a social contract than religious ceremony. The groom will ask her father, in front of all males from both sides, while the women wait in another room. This serves as the major formal contract, the question already having been raised and discussed privately. The father will also most likely have asked his daughter if she wants to marry the prospective husband. Seldom now will a girl be forced into marriage, though it can and does happen. Marriage among cousins is common, even seen as desirable, for reinforcing family and tribal ties. The religious ceremony is brief, and registration of the marriage with the court is obligatory. The celebratory party after the ceremony is often big, with many guests and the best food and entertainment affordable.

Divorce

Divorce, called *Talaq*, is as emotionally difficult as in any society. Recent changes allow divorce to be initiated by either husbands or wives, and on several different grounds. Custody is granted on the basis of what best benefits the children, up to the age of 10, and in some cases, 15; at this age, children may choose whom they wish to live with. Both parties have separate and distinct financial rights under the law.⁸⁹

Birth

At the birth of a child, a Muslim father whispers the Muslim call to prayer, *adhhaan*, into the baby's right ear so those are the first words the newborn will hear. Then the parents might chew a piece of date and rub the juice along the baby's gums so its first taste is of something sweet.



© Adam Henning
Iraqi girl with her baby brother

After the seventh day, the baby's head is shaved to show the child is the servant of Allah. The hair is weighed and its equivalent in silver is given to charity. Additionally, a sheep is slaughtered and the meat is distributed to relatives, neighbors, and the poor. Subsequent birthdays are often celebrated as in western countries, with cakes, candles, gifts, and singing and dancing.

89 Emory School of Law. Islamic Family Law. <http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/legal/iraq.htm>

The rite of passage for boys is circumcision, called *tahara*, meaning "purification." It occurs at any time from birth to puberty. Whether it is celebrated elaborately or simply, it marks the beginning of a boy's life as an adult. As a prelude, the boy recites from the Koran from memory for the first time. There is much festivity, music, special foods, and many guests.

Superstitions

Every culture has its own superstitions. One popular Iraqi belief is that you should not admire or compliment a man's children unless you qualify it with the expression *ma sha Allah*, "May God protect him." The reason is that if you call attention to the fine features of a child, you are alerting the so-called Evil Eye, which will then come to harm the child.

Exchange 27: Ma sha Allah.

Iraqi:	This is my son Ah-mad.	haDha ibnee aHmad.
Soldier:	He looks so smart, may God protect him.	mbayyen alayh shaTer, ma sha allah.

Status of Elderly, Children, and Young Adults⁹⁰

Children are obligated to give their elderly parents the same care those parents gave their children. Most Iraqi families have several children, who are adored and indulged. Boys absorb the attitudes of males by being included early in all-male gatherings. The males thoroughly protect girls from the very beginning and the girls learn domestic skills by participation. It is common to find a family with five or ten children.



Naming Conventions

Iraqi Names – Introduction

A complete Iraqi name has a minimum of three components and often four, five, or more. The Iraqi naming system differs somewhat from the system used in the West, but it also bears certain similarities. In both the Western and Iraqi naming systems, the parents give the newborn child a "given name" which appears first in the order of names. In the West, that name might be "John" or "Mary" and in Iraq, that might be "Muhammad" or "Alia."

The So-Called "Middle Name"

In the West, we have the concept of a "middle name." A male may bear the first and middle names "John Paul" and a female may be "Mary Elizabeth." The concept of the "middle name" does not exist in Iraq. Instead, every child takes his father's first name as his or her own second name.

For example, if a child's first name is Muhammad and his father's first name is Husayn, the child's first and second names will be, respectively, Muhammad Husayn. If Muhammad has a sister, Alia, her first two names will be Alia Husayn. In other words,

⁹⁰ Library of Congress. Country Studies, Iraq. [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+iq0044\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+iq0044))

this rule applies to males and females alike. So far, Iraqi and Western names do not differ vastly. However, after the second name, we may find significant divergence.

In the West, the name that follows the middle name is the family name, i.e., the last name. Thus, when we meet “John Paul Goldenpepper” and “Mary Elizabeth Goldenpepper,” we could infer from the last name that they are related by blood or marriage.

A Five-Part Name

With Iraqi names, the third name may not be the last name at all! All Iraqis have family names, but the family name may show up not in third position, but perhaps in 4th, 5th, or 6th position. The reason is that some Iraqis wear the names of their paternal grandfather or great-grandfather in front of their family name. Thus, we could encounter a five-component name such as the following:



<i>Muhammad</i>	given name
<i>Husayn</i>	given name of father
<i>Ali</i>	given name of paternal grandfather
<i>Abdallah</i>	given name of paternal great-grandfather
<i>Al-Dlaymi</i>	family or tribal name

The likely three

Most Likely:	
<i>Muhammad</i>	Given name
<i>Husayn</i>	Given name of father
<i>Al-Dlaymi</i>	Family or tribal name
Less Likely:	
<i>Muhammad</i>	Given name
<i>Husayn</i>	Given name of father
<i>Ali</i>	Given name of paternal grandfather

Prefixes and Suffixes in Iraqi Names

Any component of the name could contain two segments – a prefix plus a stem or a stem plus a suffix. A common prefix is *Abd*—“servant of...”. Muslims believe the highest service is service to *Allah* (God). According to Islam, *Allah* has 99 attributes: *al-Rahman* (“The Merciful”), *al-Raheem* (“The Compassionate”), *al-‘aleem* (“The Most Knowing”), *al-Kareem* (“The Generous”), etc.

Abd Names

A common way to form names is to place the prefix *Abd* in front of *Allah* or one of his 99 attributes, e.g., *Abdallah* (Servant of Allah), *Abd al-Kareem* (Servant of The Generous [God]), *Abd al-Rahman* (Servant of The Merciful [God]), etc. Problems arise in how to write these names using the Roman alphabet. For any *Abd* name, there are a multitude of spellings:

Abd al-Rahman / Abdul Rahman / Abdarahman / Abdal Rahman / Abd alrahman / Abdurrahman / Abdel Rahman / Abd elrahman / Abderrahmane. Statistically, the *Abdel / Abdal* configuration tends to show up most frequently.

Abu Names

Another key prefix is *Abu* —"father of..." Iraqi parents take enormous pride in their children, and they take something else, too: their names! Recall that in the name above, *Muhammad's* dad is named *Husayn*. Let's say that *Muhammad* is the first son of *Husayn*. *Husayn* will take such pride in *Muhammad* that he will name himself after his son. He will call himself *Abu Muhammad*, i.e., "Father of Muhammad." Soon his relatives, friends, neighbors, and co-workers will start calling him *Abu Muhammad* instead of *Husayn*. If *Husayn's* wife is *Alia*, *Alia* will soon be called *Umm Muhammad*, i.e., "Mother of Muhammad" instead of *Alia*. This use of *Abu* or *Umm* is called the *kunya* (nickname). You will usually not find the *kunya* in official documents, but prepare for an occasional additional complexity: The *kunya* may be incorporated into the family or tribal name, e.g., *Abu Shabbara*, *Abu Haneefa*, *Abu Zu'ayma*, etc.

Thus, you may find the following name:

<i>Muhammad</i>	given name
<i>Husayn</i>	given name of the father
<i>Ali</i>	given name of the paternal grandfather
<i>Abdallah</i>	given name of the paternal great-grandfather
<i>Abu Haneefa</i>	family or tribal name

Al-Deen

In the West, we are familiar with the name *Saladin*, the mighty Muslim commander who defeated the Crusaders in the Holy Land. Few of us know, however, that his name is actually *Sallah al-deen* or *Sallah addeen* meaning "Rectifier of the Religion." The suffix *al-deen* shows up in many Muslim names, a small sample of which follows. Note, however, that these Arabic names may be spelled in various ways when the Roman alphabet is used, and this list is by no means exhaustive.

<i>Sallah al-deen</i>	<i>Shams al-deen</i>	<i>Nour al-deen</i>
<i>Sallah addin</i>	<i>Shams addin</i>	<i>Nour addin</i>
<i>Sallahaddin</i>	<i>Shamsaddin</i>	<i>Nouraddin</i>
<i>Sallahedin</i>	<i>Shamsedin</i>	<i>Nouredin</i>



© Michael Spencer Saudi Aramco World/PADIA
Iraqi tribal elder

Names Identify Background

Certain names reveal a person's religious or ethnic background. Christians prefer Biblical names; Muslims prefer Islamic names. Shi'as avoid names of Sunni historical figures, who persecuted the Shi'as. Christians may bear non-Arabic names, Muslim men do not.

Sunnis, Shi'as, Christians, and Kurds share thousands of non-Islamic Arabic names. A small sample might include *Faris, Saleem, Sami, Sabri, Sabah, Muneer, Salim, Sameer, Nizar, Sa'eed, Shakir, Siham, Layla, Niran, Masam, Haytham, Layth, and Sinan*. Family or tribal names often start with "al" and end with "i", e.g. *al-Tikri*

Given Names by Ethnicity/Religion

Shi'a	Sunni	Kurdish	Christian	Chaldean	Armenian
<i>Abid Ali</i>	<i>Omar</i>	<i>Azad</i>	<i>Boutros</i>	<i>Sargon</i>	<i>Arshak</i>
<i>Haydar</i>	<i>Muawiyah</i>	<i>Badirkhan</i>	<i>Boulos</i>	<i>Sancharib</i>	<i>Arteen</i>
<i>Kadham</i>	<i>Oth-man</i>	<i>Armanj</i>	<i>Morkos</i>	<i>Ashur</i>	<i>Yuhanees</i>
<i>Abdul Husayn</i>	<i>Yazeed</i>	<i>Nazaneen</i>	<i>Fadi</i>	<i>Ashtar</i>	<i>Vatkees</i>
<i>Abdul A'imma</i>	<i>Bakir</i>	<i>Ashti</i>	<i>Abdel Messih</i>	<i>Ninwi</i>	<i>Vahan</i>
<i>Abdul Zah-ra</i>	<i>Sufyan</i>	<i>Sarbast</i>	<i>Georgis</i>	<i>Ninus</i>	<i>Boxhos</i>
<i>Abdul Hassan</i>	<i>'Aisha</i>	<i>Shivan</i>	<i>Esho</i>		
<i>Abdul Ikhwa</i>	<i>Abdul Qadir</i>		<i>Quryqos</i>		

Tribal Names, Sunni vs. Shi'a*

Sunni		Shi'a	
<i>Al-Dulaymi</i>	<i>Al-Tae</i>	<i>Al-Tamimi</i>	<i>Al-Samawi</i>
<i>Al-Shamari</i>	<i>Al-Basri</i>	<i>Al-Musawi</i>	<i>Ajja'fari</i>
<i>Al-Jubori</i>	<i>Al-Ani</i>	<i>Al-Mudarrisi</i>	<i>Al-Hilli</i>
<i>Al-Samarai</i>	<i>Al-Rawi</i>	<i>Al-Hakim</i>	<i>Al-Lami</i>
<i>Al-Haditih</i>	<i>Saadoun</i>	<i>Assadir</i>	<i>Al-Hussaini</i>

*While this table may seem to indicate a sharp distinction between Shi'a and Sunni family/tribal names, these distinctions represent statistical majorities only. In other words, a Shi'a might bear some of the family/tribal names shown in the Sunni column, and vice-versa.