

Shabak

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Profile

The Shabak are an ethnic and cultural minority located in a handful of villages east of Mosul, in the Nineveh Plains, and a small group in Mosul itself. Their language is a confection of Turkish, Persian, Kurdish and Arabic. About 70 per cent of the group is Shi'a and the rest Sunni. Shabak have been in Iraq since 1502, and today are mainly farmers.

Historical context

According to some locals, the name *Shabak* is derived from Arabic *shabaka* (which means 'inter-twining') as an indication that the Shabak are composed of many different tribes. For political reasons, it has at times been tempting to overemphasize one of the component features of the *Shabaks*, and to claim that they are Arabs, Kurds, or Turkomans. During the Hussein era, the government attempted to 'Arabize' the Shabak in an effort to consolidate control of the oil-rich north.

Current issues

Like most minorities that are linked into the Kurdish identity in some way, the *Shabaks* are also caught up in a process of consolidating their own identity within an emerging Kurdistan, and of clarifying their links with both the Kurdish and Arab ethnic identities. Particularly following the ouster of the Hussein regime, Shabak in the Nineveh Plains have faced harassment from Kurdish militants. Kurds wishing to extend land claims into the Nineveh governate claim that Shabaks are really Kurds. Additionally, the majority of Shabak who are Shi'a have been targeted by Sunni militants. In July 2007 a Shabak MP claimed that Sunni militants had killed around 1,000 Shabak and displaced a further 4,000 from the Mosul area since 2003.