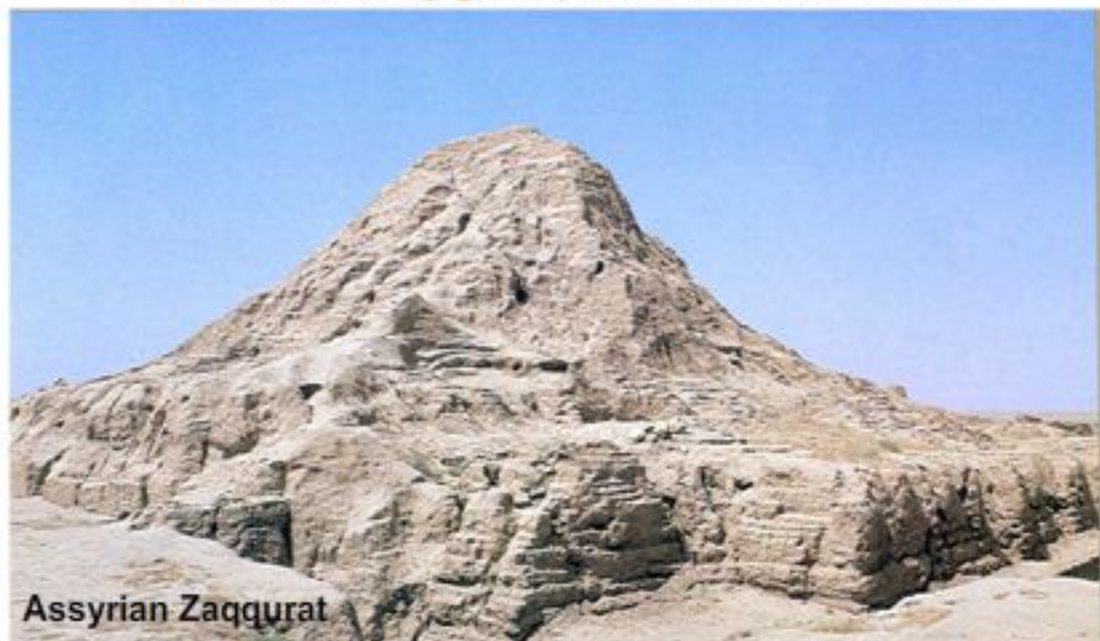


The historical and geographical significance of Iraq

By: Aliaa Ismail Abdul-Hamid

Iraq is the Biblical Fertile Crescent and the cradle of civilization and home for many great ancient cities in the world.



Assyrian Ziqqurat

It is rich in natural resources and enjoys a wealth of heritage, culture and economy. Modern Iraq was known in early history as Mesopotamia, a name given by the Greeks for the 'land between the two rivers', the Tigris and the Euphrates. The name Iraq means 'firmly rooted country', which comes from the 7th century in acknowledgement of the nation's influence on ancient civilisations.

As Samuel Noah Karamer stated in the book *Cradle of Civilisation*, "The Mesopotamians were the first people on earth to live in cities, study the stars, use the arch and wheeled vehicles, write epic poetry and compile a legal code. They also manufactured linen, built sailing ships, laid the foundations of astrology and for 3000 years engaged in serious scholarship which left marks on the science, mathematics, medicine, literature, philosophy and religion of subsequent civilisations."

Mesopotamian land comprised Assyria in the north and

Babylonia and Sumerian in the south and these places have links with biblical connections. It is the land of prophets and it was there that Adam descended to earth; Noah's ark came to rest from its journey and Abraham began preaching God's message. For the first time in human history, hunting and gathering societies were replaced by permanent settlements and organised farming.

The hanging gardens of Babylon, a creation of King Nabuchadnezzar (605-562BC), are regarded as one of the



Boeuf aillé



Babylon

Abu Dalaf in Samara



seven wonders of the ancient world.

This region, in early times, witnessed developed systems of irrigation, flourishing trade, and wide occurrences of writing, and judged the literature as one of the marked cultural achievements. Some of the world's finest ceramics were created during 500BC in Iraq, the villages had cobbled streets and the primitive irrigation system was augmented with small canals and reservoirs. The Mesopotamians were the first nation to experience tourism and

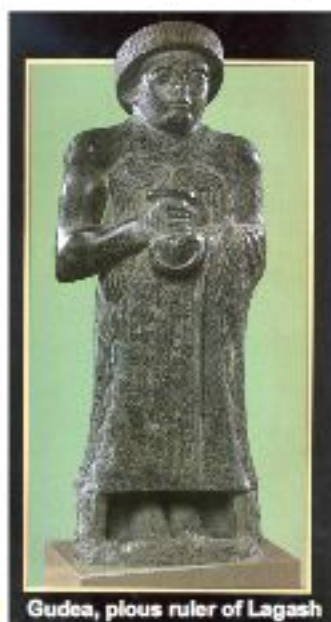
the emergent tourism system and embraced the availability of a permanent water supply from the Tigris and Euphrates. They had rich alluvial soils, a warm climate and a central location between Asia, Africa, and Europe; all of which have contributed to the development of agriculture.

Mesopotamia was the birthplace of many important inventions and innovations that introduced both the demand and the ability to travel for tourism-related purposes. These include the wheel, the wagon, money, the

alphabet, domesticated animals such as the horse and roads. The early cities such as Ur and Nippur were apparently overcrowded and these inventions allowed the elite to escape them in their spare time. This established development of destinations and transit regions and civilisation gradually spread from Mesopotamia westwards to the Nile Valley into ancient Egypt. Furthermore, Mesopotamia had the oldest cuisines and art of cooking in the world, as confirmed by three cuneiform tablets dating from

around 1600BC that were unearthed from the drawers of the rich Babylonian collection at Yale University, which evidenced the presence of basic leisure tourism and hospitality during those olden-day times.

In the Middle Ages, Iraq was the hub of the Islamic Empire, with Baghdad the cultural and political capital of an area extending from Morocco to the Indian subcontinent; however, Mongol invasions in 13th century saw its influence wane. After World War One, the British were given a mandate over all of Iraq



Lions of Babylon



at the conference of San Remo; borders of Iraq created insurrection in 1920 and Iraq later took its independence from British control in 1932 and became a member of the United Nations in 1945.

Recent history has portrayed Iraq as a war zone for nearly three decades; the first war was with Iran during 1980-1988 and then the Gulf war in 1991 emerged out of Iraq's invasion of

Kuwait together with the subsequent imposition of international restrictions during 1991-2003. This was followed by the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The prolonged wars had a destructive effect on Iraq's economy and society, which affected the country enormously for many years, leaving the whole nation's infrastructures, oil industry, institutions, and most of the

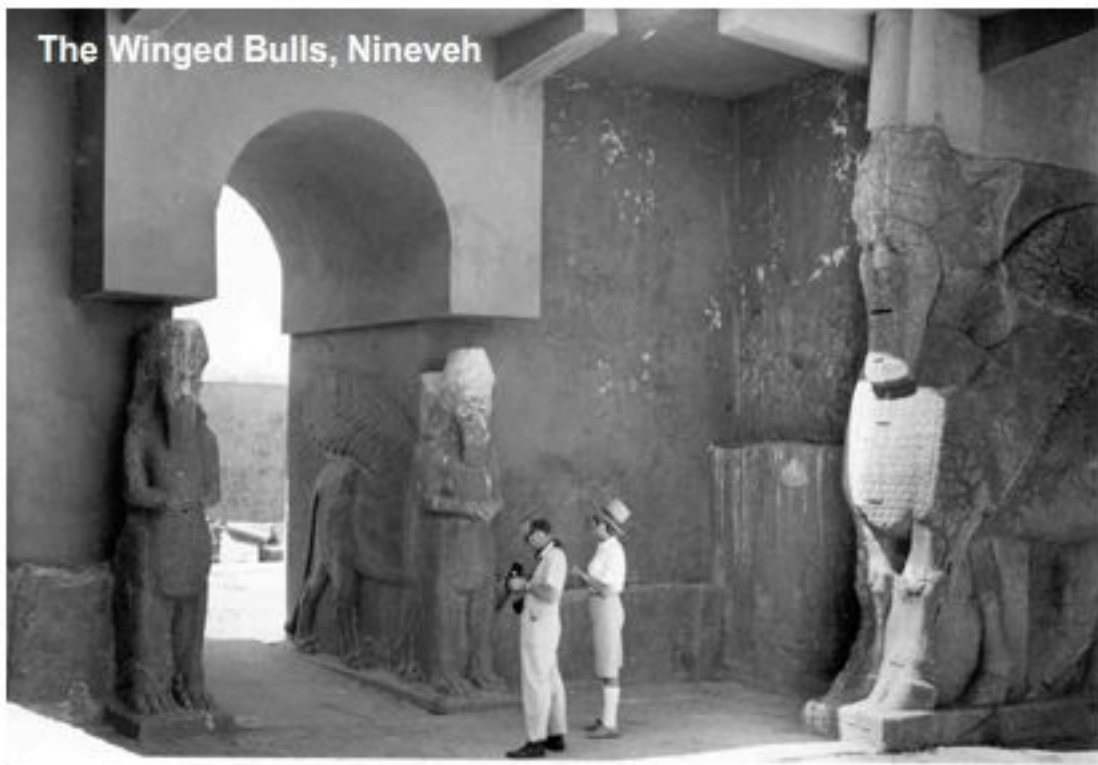
basic services such as food, electricity power and water services almost destroyed.

Iraq is located in the Middle East with Baghdad as the capital, covering 438,317sq.km, with a population of 29 million and a coastline of about 58 km, bordering the Persian Gulf. Iraq shares land borders with Iran to the east, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to the south, Jordan and Syria to the west and Turkey to the north. The landscape ranges

from snow to torturous desert sands and dramatic marshlands.

The north and north east of Iraq is made up of snow-clad mountains, which account for 20% of the land area, desert covering 59% of the land area and the southern part is flat with lowland alluvial plains, famous for their unique swamps and marshlands. Iraq is located relatively close to major world markets namely Europe, Asia and Africa and the landscape is

The Winged Bulls, Nineveh





Hatra



Features of an Akkadian ruler, possibly of Naram Sin, created from the hollow bronze casting



A bull from cast of bronze and inlaid with silver, were being produced in southern Mesopotamia

dominated by two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. The official language is Arabic and Kurdish, and the ethnic groups are Arab (80%) and Kurdish (15%), and others (5%).

The Tigris and the Euphrates rivers run through the country

from north to south before joining in the south near Basra at Al Qurna. Geographically, Iraq is a bridge between East and West, linking most parts of the world by air, land and sea; Far Eastern countries are linked by sea through the Arabian Gulf.