

City Tourism

Iraq:

The Cradle of Civilization and Land of Prophethood

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Alongside the atrocities of the war in Iraq, the world has witnessed the appalling aftermath of looting and destruction, which befell Iraq's cultural and historical heritage. However, such unfortunate attention has nevertheless highlighted the importance of this region's historical significance in the world at large. The first known civilization in existence, is that of Mesopotamia, which flourished amidst the land which is today predominately occupied by Iraq.

Having established settlements and progressed in the development of agricultural methods, man in southern Iraq, succeeded approximately seven thousand years ago, in establishing the first city in the world. By the end of the Fourth Millennium B.C., man had advanced in devising the first form of writing, constructed irrigational and protective canals, excelled in architectural design as well as formulating the basic principles of mathematics, and made headway in the fields of astronomy. Serious steps were taken in the field of urbanization leading to the establishment of the first empire in history.

Mesopotamia

'Mesopotamia' refers to the land located between the River Tigris and the River Euphrates and is the name given to it by the Greeks, literally meaning the land between two rivers. However it has been referred to by differing names by various people. The Sumerians, who were the land's most ancient inhabitants named it as 'Kalam', ➤

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Specimen of Assyrian writing.

نموذج من الكتابة الآشورية على الحجر

their contemporaries the Akkadians called it 'Matu' (meaning land), while the Egyptians referred to it as 'Nahreena'. This ancient land can also be found mentioned in the text of the Torah, whereby it is alluded to by the name 'Shanaar', and in addition to all the above-mentioned, as it is known today it was known as 'Iraq', prior to the Arab conquests. The brilliance of the Sumerian people, its prime inhabitants, was one of the reasons why Mesopotamia attained such worldwide fame, and reached an elevated historical and political status. The south of Iraq, from the geological point of view was a depression in the gulf of Basra, its land was formed due to the deposits of silt resulting from the floodwaters of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The water of the Gulf receded gradually and became part of the land. The Sumerians modified the swamps turning them into fertile fields, their eminence

becoming widely acclaimed due to their perfect canals and irrigational systems. Herodotus, stated in his historical accounts that: "Their agricultural products, grow so thrivingly, that no land is equal thereto in its fertility, throughout the world".

The ancient heritage of Mesopotamia embraces hundreds of thousands of various types of antiquities, which belong to diverse civilizations: pre-historic civilizations, Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian and Greek amongst others. Such artifacts now decorate the world's most renowned museums in London, Paris, Berlin, Philadelphia, and Istanbul.

Aside from the aforementioned points of historical value, Mesopotamia also boasts the auspicious claim to be the touching point to which the first man the Prophet Adam (as) descended, following his expulsion from Paradise by God the Almighty. This sacred

and propitious land was also the resting place of Noah's Ark after the deluge. Prophet Abraham (as) was born in its city of Ur, from where he first began propagating his message.

Dawn of the Era of Ancestries

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This period was ensued by the eon known as the Era of Ancestries (2850 – 2400 B.C.). It is also known as the Ancient Sumerian Era, or the Era of the Cities, namely the cities of Warka (Uruk), Ur, Erido, Lagash, and Kish aswell as others.

Each city was the equivalent of a kingdom and was governed by its own appointed monarch. During times of war, the kingdoms sometimes united becoming consolidated under one ruling authority.

In the south of Ancient Iraq, the area was known as the land of Sumer, however the precise origin of the Sumerians is still the subject of contention amongst historians. We have already mentioned the invention of writing by the Sumerians, some of the oldest existent texts available in the Sumeric script, date back around five thousand years.

The Akkadians

The Sumerians were not alone in Mesopotamia, as some of the nomadic Semitic tribes, who immigrated from the Arabian Peninsula, used to occupy the areas located north of Sumer. These lands were known as Akkad, and the Akkadians built there major cities such as Kaborsia, Kish, and Nofar. Fighting was a continual phenomenon between these two communities. With the seizing of power by Sargon the Akkadian (2371 – 2316 B.C.) who ousted the Sumerians from their territory and united Iraq under one kingdom. ➤

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الجزء العلوي من مسلة حمورابي

Upper part of the stele.

He thereupon proceeded with his conquests to the Mediterranean and Asia Minor. During the Akkadian period, great advancement in architecture and art became evident; the arts in general were characterized by energy, vitality and action.

Following the decline of the Akkadians, the Sumerians managed to recapture their independence, a fact that led the Akkadians to adopt a policy aiming at ending the fighting and unifying both peoples, and thus the kingdom of Akkad and Sumer, was founded. The Akkadians adopted the Sumerian cuneiform for recording their language in addition to sharing in the accomplishments of the Sumerians, maintaining and improving upon their civilization to the extent that the outcome would appear to be the mutual work of two peoples diverse in language and ethnic and geographical origin. Towards the end of this era, the southern part of the land of Sumer and Akkad was subjected to an invasion by neighboring nations, however certain regions continued to flourish and develop, such as the city of Lagash and its surrounding areas.

A Sumerian prince by the name of Jodiah, gained prominence and became renown for his statues, construction of numerous magnificent temples and revival of Sumerian literature.

Sumerian rule

The Sumerian king Oto- Hikal, who declared himself the king of Sumer and gave

assurance to the inhabitants that he would rid the area of the occupying forces, governed the City of Warka. Among the existent antiques of this city is an engraving that dates back to 4000 B.C., depicting a 20 cm high woman's head. The marble visage appears almost transparent due to its fine polishing and depiction, it is deemed a masterpiece of such Sumerian art. There is also a pitcher made from shell aswell as a cylindrical pot dating back to 3200 –3500 B.C., which is engraved with scenes symbolizing the rank of beings on earth; it commences with water at the bottom, followed by plants, man, then votive-offering bearing priests and then finally the nymph. Such is the like of these exquisite antiquities that history has preserved for us.

Sumerian rule then transferred to the city of Ur, where a new ancestry known as the Third Ancestry of Ur - considered to be the last Sumerian Ancestry in history (2113 – 2006 B.C.) - came into being. Amongst the city's most illustrious kings was King Ur-Nimo, who is reckoned to be one of the oldest legislators in history, and was among those who were attentive to building and civil developments. One of his most prominent achievements was a construction of a three-storied Ziggurat in Ur.

The Ancient Babylonian Era

A Semitic tribe known as the Amorians, who had dwelt in the Mediterranean vicinity since the early times, succeeded in conquering Babylon in Mesopotamia. Babylon at that time was relatively small, and the Amorians made it their base towards the beginning of the Second Millennium B.C. They further succeeded in dominating the territories of Akkad and Sumer, and established a magnificent kingdom, referred to as the First Babylonian Ancestry (1894 – 1595 B.C.). This kingdom was famed for its sixth king "Hammurabi" (1793 – 1751 B.C.), who managed to unify the country under one kingdom, and designated Babylon as the capital. Hammurabi expanded and developed this city, turning it into one of the most well known cities of that time, which resulted in its name - Babylon - being adopted for the entire

country.

Among the most important acts carried out by Hammurabi was the enactment of one legislation, known as 'Hammurabi's Legislation'. Its requirements were applicable throughout the kingdom, and it was deemed one of the first integral legislations in the world. It combined Civil Laws, Penal Codes and Personal Statutes, and it is now available to view in the Louvre Museum in Paris. It comprises of 282 Legal Articles, and Hammurabi is pictured on the top of an Obelisk receiving the laws from the Arch-Sun god.

The distinguishing factor unique to the Babylonian epoch is the spaciousness and numerosness of its cities. The Babylonians made important headway in human knowledge and science and it is this era, which must receive the recognition for the true emergence of human science.

Babylon then fell into the hands of the Hittites, a nation from Anatolia. Rule reverted after them to a people from the Aryans, known by the name of Koshians, who immigrated to Iraq from the northwest, and established for themselves a capital in the place known, by the name of 'Agargouf' (Dorikado). Their rule lasted a further 577 years.

The Assyrians

The Assyrians (1300 – 606 B.C.) were a Semitic nation who took residence in northwest Iraq, circa 3000 B.C. They were under the rule of both the Akkadians and the Babylonians, however they managed thereafter to gain power in Babylon, and hence expand and exercise control over Syria and most of the Phoenician countries; finalizing their control in the middle of the eighth century B.C. 'Tiglatblizer the Third' (745 – →



ثور من البرونز المطعم بالفضة من نتاج السومريين.

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

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The period of New Babylonia (626 – 539 B.C.) is one of the most prosperous in Ancient Iraq. The last of the Semitic people took possession of Babylon from the Assyrians, refurbishing and restoring its beauty and splendor thereto. They established Babylon as their capital and named their conquest as the State of New Babylonia.

727 B.C.), who is believed to have been one of the greatest kings of this new era, united Babylon and Assyria into one kingdom, whereby the Assyrian Empire became the new Master of the Ancient East. Further competent rulers, which governed the empire include Sargon the second and his son Sennacherib aswell as Ashurbanipal (668 – 626 B.C.) who was the most attentive of the Assyrian kings towards the fields of literature and knowledge. He gathered together around thirty thousand mud slabs containing information on various sciences and literature.

Sargon the Second took immense care over the great artistic and architectural works, amongst which was the construction of a new capital near Nineveh, which he named as 'Dor Chrekeen', i.e., "Sargon City. The city's ruins are today known as Khorsabad. Amongst the most famous of the Assyrian cities in Nimrod, whose name was cited in the Holy Books as 'Khalo'. Nimrod lies 35 Kilometers south of Mosul, and is where King Assurnasripal II (883 – 859 B.C.) made the military capital of the state; he had buildings and palaces constructed therein, and lavished attention on the Ziggurat, claimed to be one of the most important of the era.

Foreign archaeological teams have excavated the ruins of Nimrod and discovered a multitude of precious antiquities within the strongholds, temples and palaces. Many of the priceless artifacts were subsequently transferred to numerous world museums. Such finds include the wall stone slabs which used to adorn the Royal Halls, numerous statues and unique pieces of intrinsic artistic value, aswell as the winged oxen which used to embellish the Assyrian gates and palaces and which now adorns the British Museum.

New Babylonia

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refurbishing and restoring its beauty and splendor thereto. They established Babylon as their capital and named their conquest as the State of New Babylonia. One of the most distinguished kings of that epoch was 'Nebuchadnezzar' (604 – 562 B.C.), whose era receives the accolades of a unique revival. The Babylonians divided the day into twenty-four hours, the hour into sixty minutes and the minute into sixty seconds, aswell as discovering the solar and lunar year, the eclipse, and other celestial phenomena and so forth of achievements.

Nebuchadnezzar occupied Jerusalem, the capital of the state of the Jews, he subsequently destroyed it several years later, burning its temples and capturing and exiling a large number of its inhabitants to Babylon in Iraq. In 539 B.C. Babylon fell into the hands of the king of Alakhmeneyeen. From that time onwards the curtain lowered over the civilization of Ancient Iraq, its science and glories remaining buried for many long and dark centuries that ensued prior to the rising dawn of the advent of Islam.

Capital of the Ancient East

Babylon became the most famous city in the Ancient World, and a wonder therein, after attaining the summit in its expansion at the hands of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Its reputation dominated, so that it became a symbol of the civilization of Ancient Iraq, and the country was consequently named Babylonia after Babylon. Its city walls and Hanging Gardens were considered to be one of the 'Seven Wonders of the Ancient World', and Aristotle deemed Babylon a wonder in its greatness and spaciousness. The city of Babylon began as a small village; developing into a town towards the end of the third Millennium B.C. and then further evolving until it became the capital of the first and second Babylonian empires. During the rule of Nebuchadnezzar its expanse was approximately 10 Km square and its perimeter 18 Km, contrasted to the area of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrians which was 7.4 Km square and its perimeter 9 Km,



Uruk's vessel.

إتاء الوركاء.



حاكم لجش السومري جوبيه.
Gudea, pious ruler of Lagash.

and Athens which at that time comprised only 2.2 Km. When Alexander the Great vanquished the Persians and entered Babylon, he expressed his admiration and remained there until his death in 323 B.C.

Babylon lies on the banks of the River Euphrates, which divides the city roughly into two equal halves, crossing it from north to south. The city is rectangular in shape and has two great walls each with a water trench behind them. There is an internal wall containing eight gates leading into the city. The planning of the city is characterized by wide perpendicular streets, which end at the main gates. The famous Hanging Gardens overlook the Ishtar Gate, (now in the Berlin Museum) and Parade Street {the most important of the city's streets}. The city used to house numerous temples, the most important of which was the Babylonian High Tower, a construction estimated to be around 91 metres in height and composed of seven levels, each one smaller than the one preceding it. Among the Babylon antiquities is a lion, which is known as the Babylon Lion, which used to symbolize power in Ancient Iraq. Today the ruins of ancient Babylon lie near the city of Hilla in Iraq. ■