

IRAK



I R A K – THE CRADLE OF CIVILIZATION



Map of the Ancient Near East

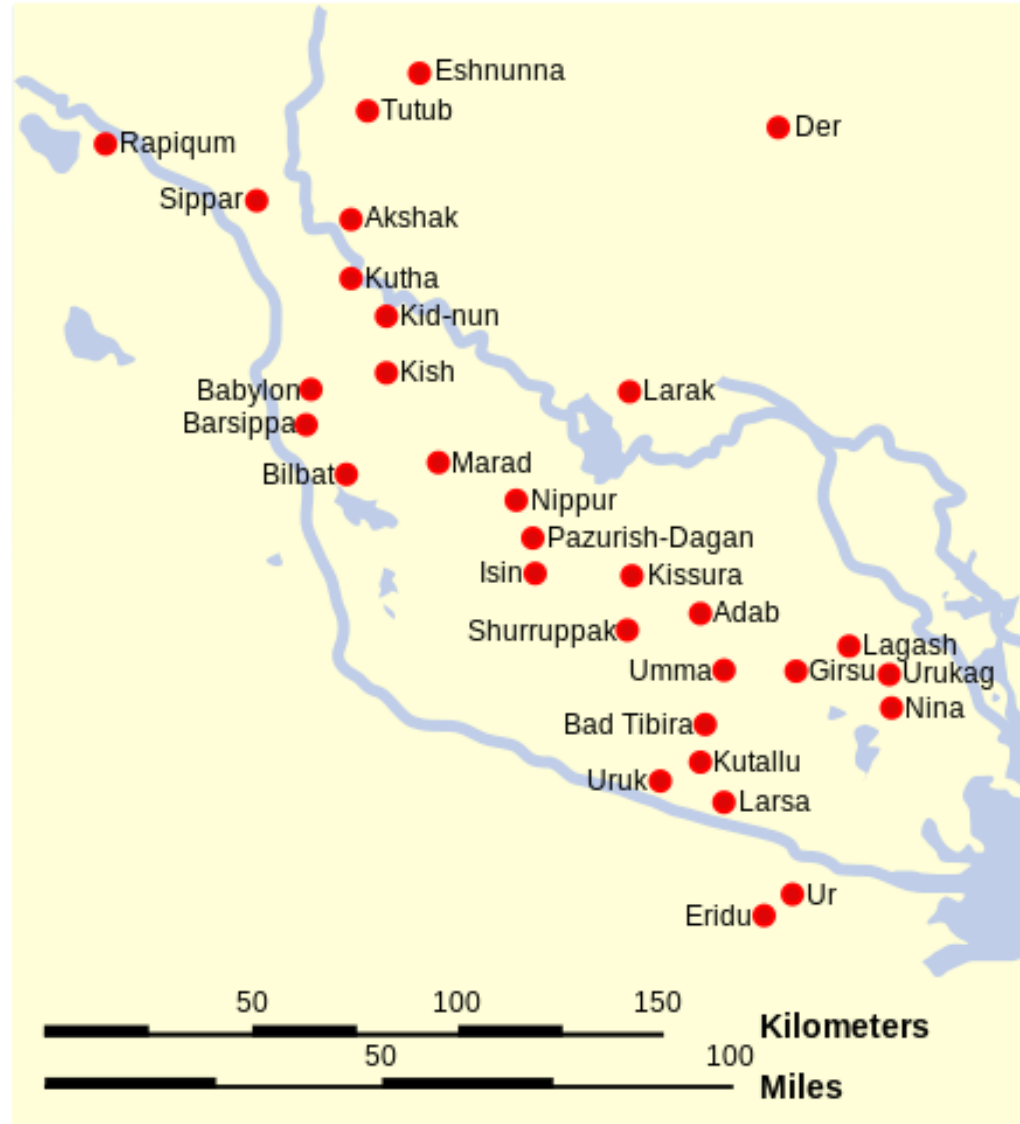
IRAQ

Geography and the growth of cities

Mesopotamia remains a region of stark geographical contrasts: vast deserts rimmed by rugged mountain ranges, punctuated by lush oases. Flowing through this topography are rivers and it was the irrigation systems that drew off the water from these rivers, specifically in southern Mesopotamia, that provided the support for the very early urban centers here.

The region lacks stone (for building), precious metals and timber. Historically, it has relied on the long-distance trade of its agricultural products to secure these materials. The large-scale irrigation systems and labor required for extensive farming was managed by a centralized authority. The early development of this authority, over large numbers of people in an urban center, is really what distinguishes Mesopotamia and gives it a special position in the history of Western culture. Here, for the first time, thanks to ample food and a strong administrative class, the West develops a very high level of craft specialization and artistic production.

Essay by Dr. Senta German



Cities of ancient Sumer, [photo](#) (CC BY 3.0)

Map of the world

This tablet contains both a cuneiform inscription and a unique map of the Mesopotamian world. Babylon is shown in the center (the rectangle in the top half of the circle), and Assyria, Elam and other places are also named.



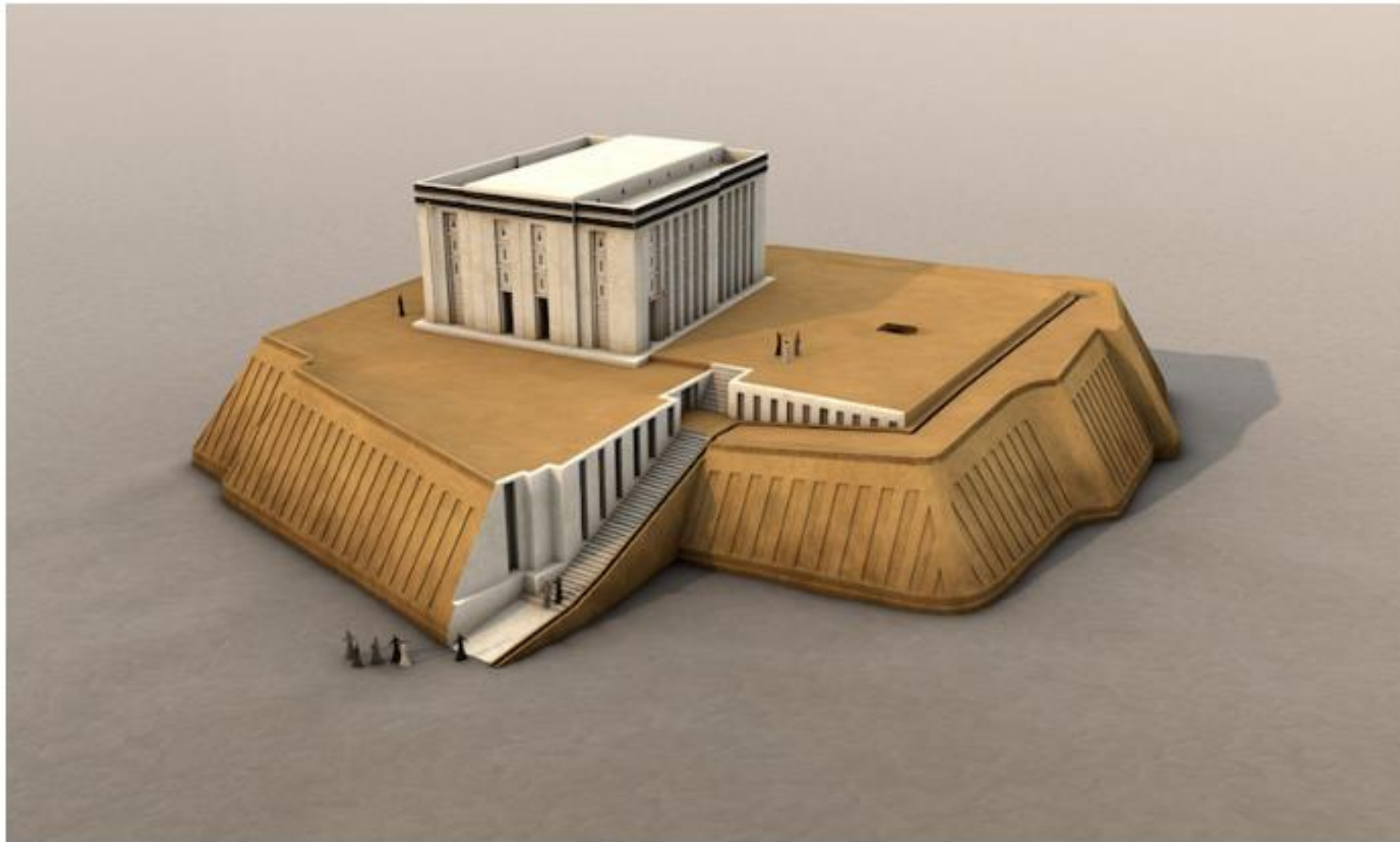
Map of the World, Babylonian, c. 700-500 B.C.E., clay, 12.2 x 8.2 cm, probably from Sippar, southern Iraq © Trustees of the British Museum



Reconstruction drawing of Nimrud, the site of an ancient Assyrian palace, by James Fergusson for Sir Henry Layard, published in 1853. The columns depicted here were never found. The reconstruction is clearly influenced by what was known at that time of Greco-Roman architecture and by John Martin's *Fall of Nineveh* (1829).



Remains of Building C in Uruk. Only a couple of mud-brick rows have survived to offer a basic ground plan. The building dates into the 4th millennium B.C.E. © German Archaeological Institute, Oriental Institute, W 10767, all rights reserved.



Digital reconstruction of the White Temple and ziggurat, Uruk (modern Warka), c. 3517-3358 B.C.E. © artefacts-berlin.de; scientific material: German Archaeological Institute

Known today as Tell el-Muqayyar, the "Mound of Pitch," the site was occupied from around 5000 B.C.E. to 300 B.C.E. Although Ur is famous as the home of the Old Testament patriarch Abraham (Genesis 11:29-32), there is no actual proof that Tell el-Muqayyar was identical with "Ur of the Chaldees." In antiquity the city was known as Urim.

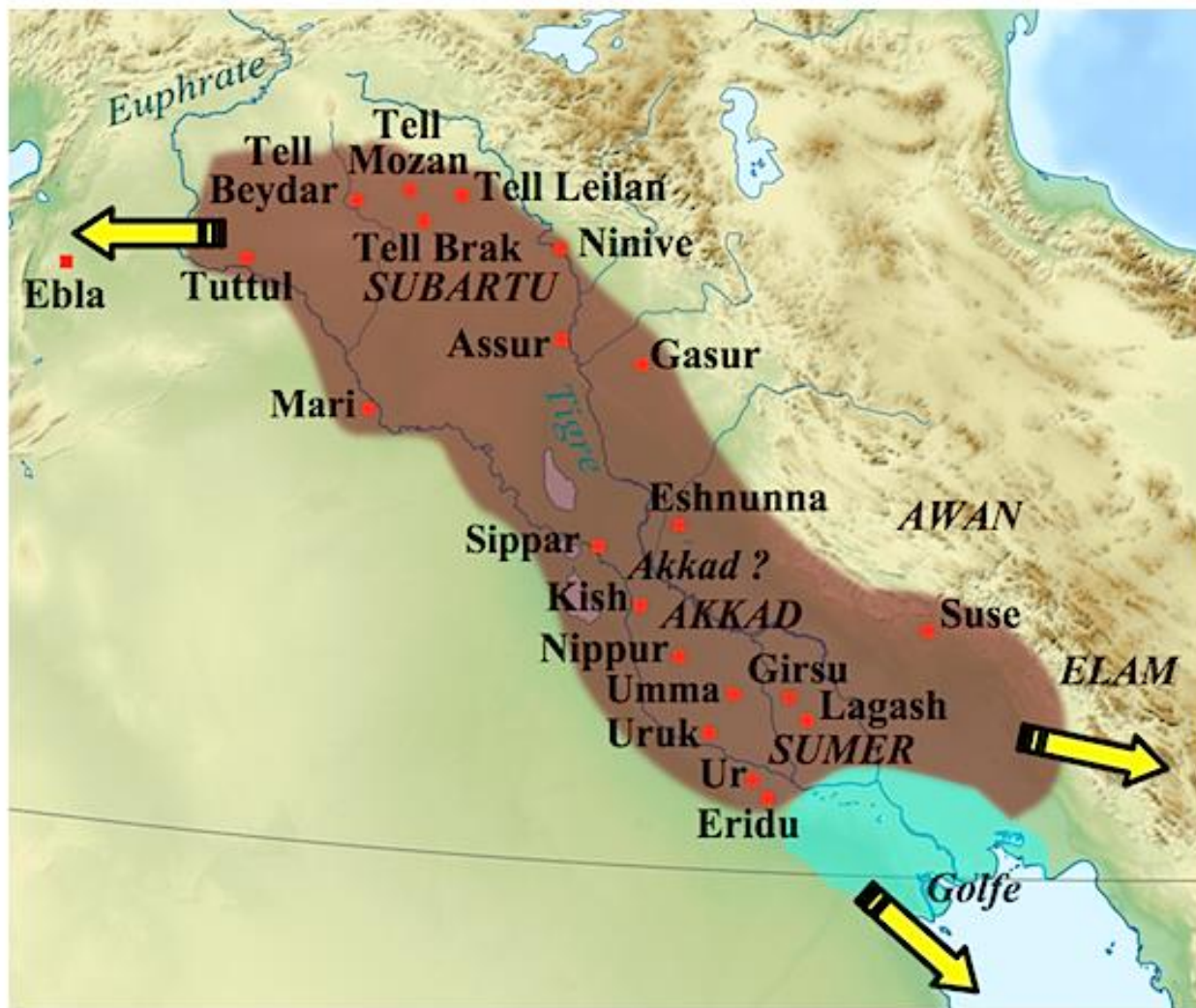


A STREET SCENE AT UR IN THE LEVEL OF THE ABRAHAMIC PERIOD, 2000—1900 B. C.

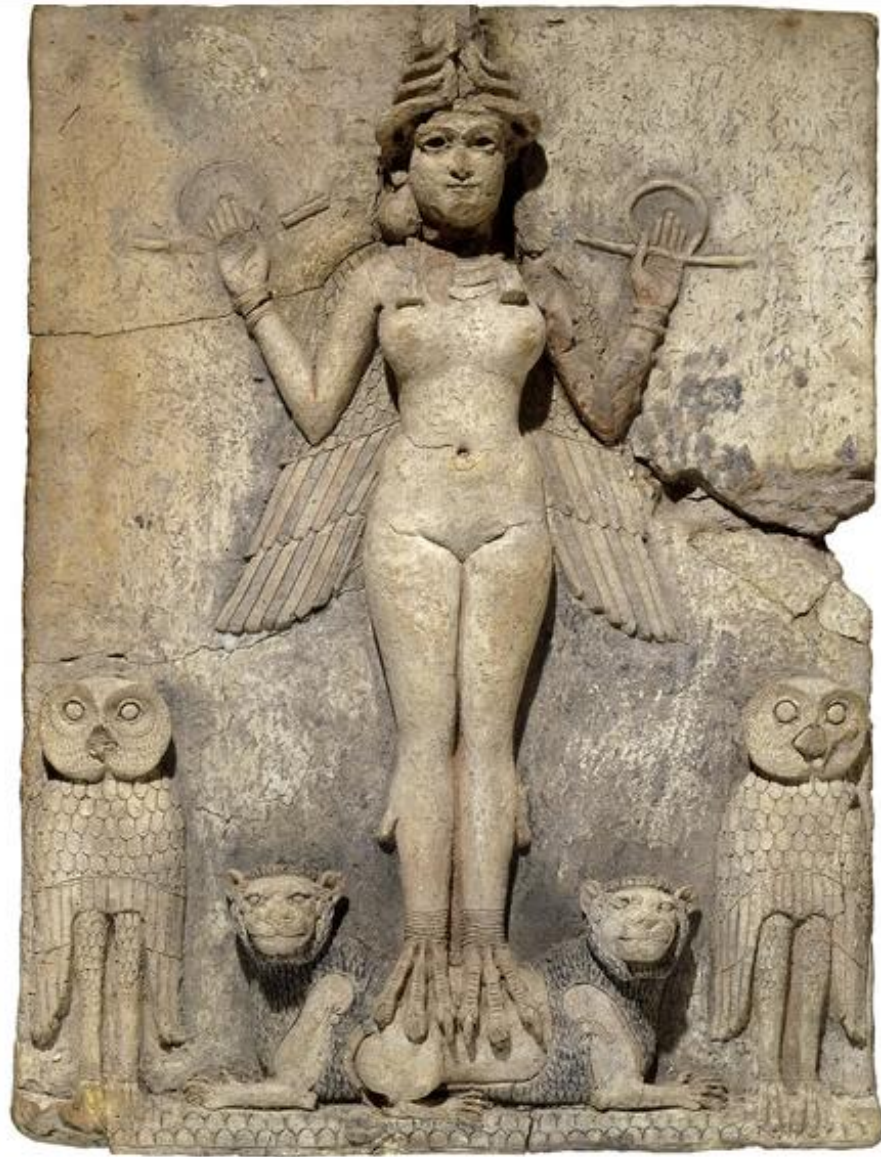
Postcard; printed; photograph showing archaeological excavations at Ur, with Arab workmen standing for scale in the excavated street of an early second millennium B.C.E. residential quarter © Trustees of the British Museum



Cylinder seal of Pu-abi, c. 2600 B.C.E., lapis lazuli, 4.9 x 2.6 cm, from Ur
© Trustees of the British Museum

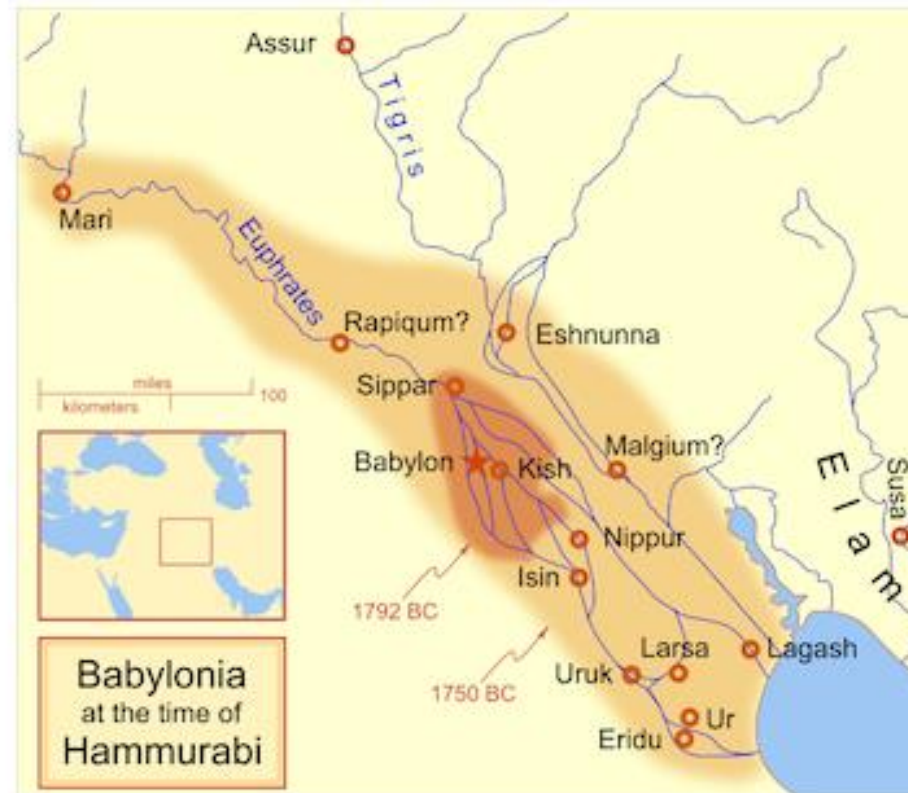


Map showing the approximate extension of the Akkad empire during the reign of Narâm-Sîn, yellow arrows indicate the directions in which military campaigns were conducted, [photo](#) (CC BY-SA 3.0)



The "Queen of the Night" Relief, 1800-1750 B.C.E., Old Babylonian, baked straw-tempered clay, 49 x 37 x 4.8 cm © Trustees of the British Museum

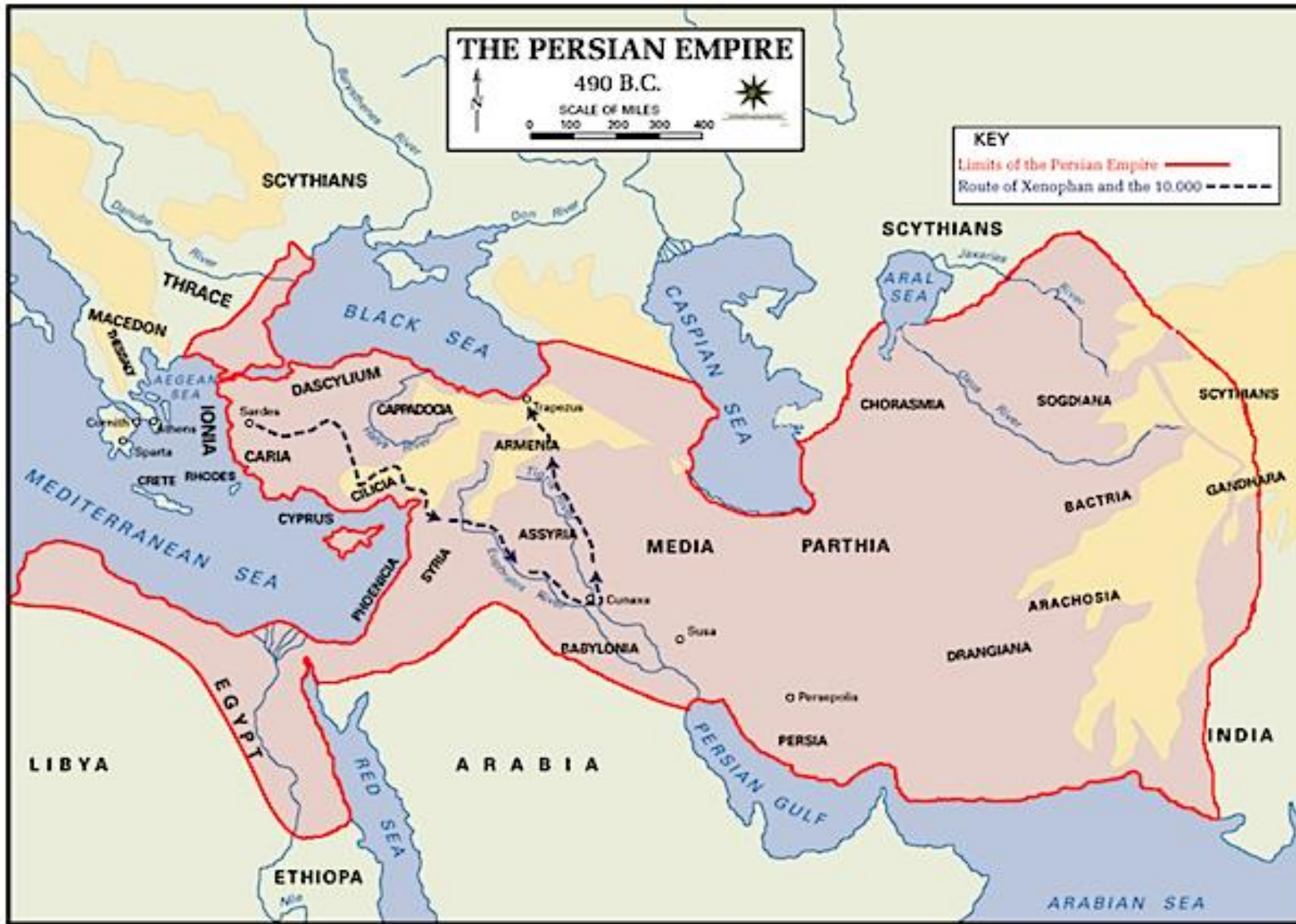
Hammurabi: The king who made the four quarters of the earth obedient



Babylonia at the time of Hammurabi



Map of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and its expansions.



The Persian Empire, 490 B.C.E.

The walls of the spaces and stairs leading up to the reception hall were carved with hundreds of figures, several of which illustrated subject peoples of various ethnicities, bringing tribute to the Persian king.



Apadana staircase, Persepolis, Iran

IRAK



The Euphrates River in 2005

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| | |
|--|---|
| Land Area | 437,367 km ² |
| Water Area | 950 km ² |
| Total Area | 438,317km ² (#58) |
| Population | 38,146,025 (#36) |
| Population Density | 87.22/km ² |
| Government Type | Federal Parliamentary Republic |
| GDP (PPP) | \$597.00 Billion |
| GDP Per Capita | \$16,500 |
| Currency | Dinar (IQD) |
| More Information | Iraq |
| Largest Cities | |
| Baghdad (5,672,513) | Erbil (932,800) |
| Al Basrah (2,600,000) | Abu Ghurayb (900,000) |
| Al Mawsil al Jadidah (2,065,597) | As Sulaymaniyah (723,170) |
| Al Basrah al Qadimah (2,015,483) | Kirkuk (601,433) |
| Mosul (1,739,800) | An Najaf (482,576) |
| View all cities in Iraq | |

IRAK



LIFE EXPECTANCY
72.6 (M) 77.2 (W)



CAPITAL
Baghdad



LARGEST CITY
Baghdad



NATIONALITY
Iraqi



RELIGIONS
Islam, Christianity,
Yazidi

IRAQ OVERVIEW



CURRENCY
Iraqi
Dinar (IQD)



POPULATION
39,192,111
(2017)



LANGUAGES
Arabic, Kurdish, Turkmen,
Assyrian, Armenian



AGRICULTURE
Wheat, Barley, Rice,
Vegetables, Dates, Cotton
Cattle, Sheep, Poultry



INDUSTRIES
Petroleum, Chemicals, Textiles,
Leather, Construction Materials
Food Processing, Fertilizer

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Iraq, which occupies an area once home to some of the earliest known civilisations, has been a battleground for competing forces since the US-led ouster of President Saddam Hussein in 2003.



The mainly Shia-led governments that have held power since have struggled to maintain order, and the country has enjoyed only brief periods of respite from high levels of sectarian violence.

Instability and sabotage have hindered efforts to rebuild an economy shattered by decades of conflict and sanctions, even though Iraq has the world's second-largest reserves of crude oil.

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GEOGRAPHY

Iraq is one of the easternmost countries in the Arab world. The country shares a border with Turkey to the north, Iran to the east, Syria and Jordan to the west, and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to the south. Iraq has a short but important coastline of 58 km (or 36 miles) on the Persian Gulf. Altogether, Iraq has an area of 438,317 sq. km (169,235 sq. miles), which is roughly the size of California.

Iraq has a desert climate, which leads to mild, cool winters with temperatures from 2 to 5°C (35.6–41°F) and hot, dry summers that can reach 48°C (118.4°F). The desert climate can also lead to sandstorms and dust storms. Iraq's desert area is mainly to the south and west, extending to and beyond its borders with Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia. Iraq is mostly flat, but it has a mountain range, the Zagros Mountains, to the northeast on the borders with Turkey and Iran. The mountains receive heavy snowfall in the winter, which can result in flooding in the spring. Its northern region is situated between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, and it is where the name Mesopotamia, meaning "land between the rivers", comes from.

Currently, Iraq faces many environmental issues: desertification, lack of safe drinking water, damage to marshes and other natural habitats, soil degradation, and water and air pollution. The question of water security has sparked some regional disputes, including with Turkey over the Euphrates River (see more on this in the International & Regional Issues section below).

Government water control projects have drained most of the marsh areas that used to exist east of An Nasiriyah by emptying or diverting the streams and rivers. The draining of the swamp areas has meant that the population of Marsh Arabs, who inhabited these areas for thousands of years, have been displaced. Furthermore, the destruction of these natural habitats poses serious threats to the area's wildlife populations.



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By the 2nd millennium BCE, a group of nomads from the west called the Amorites invaded Mesopotamia. The Amorites founded dynasties in the city-states of Eshnunna, Larsa, Isin, and Babylon. In 1792 BCE, Babylonian dynastic leader, King Hammurabi, conquered Mesopotamia, resulting in the formation of the First Babylonian Empire over which he presided as king until his death. He was among the first to create a written set of laws called "Hammurabi's Code." These laws were written in cuneiform (right) on large stone pillars that were displayed in cities. Hammurabi's Code was extensive and addressed commercial, property and family issues. The Assyrians in the city-state of Ashur rose to prominence around the same time that Babylon did, but it was not until 1220 BCE that Babylon became part of the Assyrian empire.

Various empires ruled Mesopotamia during the following centuries. Cyrus the Great of Persia invaded Mesopotamia in 539 BCE (Achaemenid Dynasty), followed by Alexander the Great (a king of the Ancient Greek kingdom of Macedon) and his successor dynasty, the Seleucids, in 331 BCE. The Roman Emperor Trajan claimed the region in the 2nd century CE. The area was then conquered and ruled by the Parthians, a group of Persians from northern Iran, until their defeat by the Persian Sassanid dynasty in 224 CE.

The rise of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula brought substantial change to the region of present-day Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine, known collectively as the Levant. Under the Rashidun caliphs (chief rulers) who succeeded the Prophet Muhammad as leaders of the Islamic community, Persia, the Levant, and much of North Africa were incorporated into the Islamic Empire by 654. In 661, a succession crisis precipitated the rise of the Umayyad dynasty, which took control of the empire and established its capital in Damascus. A significant transformation ensued as the majority of the population adopted Islam and the Arabic script. The Abbasids overthrew the Umayyads in 750 and moved the capital from Damascus to Baghdad. The Abbasid civilization flourished in the Levant for several centuries and Baghdad enjoyed prosperity as the center of the Muslim world.



Cuneiform tablet featuring a tally of sheep and goats, from Tello, southern Iraq. © Gianni Dagli Orti/Corbis

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Some key dates in Iraq's history:

1534-1918 - Ottoman rule.

1917 - Britain seizes control, creates state of Iraq.

1932 - Independence, followed by frequent coups.

1979 - Saddam Hussein becomes president.

1980-1988 - Iran-Iraq war.

1990 - Iraq invades Kuwait, putting it on a collision course with the international community.

2003 - US-led coalition invades, starting years of guerrilla warfare and instability.

2014 - The armed Islamic State group emerges as a major force in the region and seizes large parts of Iraq, which it holds until a government offensive drives it out in 2017.

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A chronology of key events:

1534 - 1918 - Region is part of the Ottoman Empire.

1917 - Britain seizes Baghdad during First World War.

1920 - League of Nations approves British mandate in Iraq, prompting nationwide revolt.

1921 - Britain appoints Feisal, son of Hussein Bin Ali, the Sherif of Mecca, as king.

Independence

1932 - Mandate ends, Iraq becomes independent. Britain retains military bases.

1941 - Britain re-occupies Iraq after pro-Axis coup during Second World War.

1958 - The monarchy is overthrown in a left-wing military coup led by Abd-al-Karim Qasim. Iraq leaves the pro-British Baghdad Pact.

1963 - Prime Minister Qasim is ousted in a coup led by the pan-Arab Baath Party.

1963 - The Baathist government is overthrown, but seizes power again five years later

Baathists in power

1968 - A Baathist led-coup puts Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr in power.

1972 - Iraq nationalises the Iraq Petroleum Company.

1974 - Iraq grants limited autonomy to Kurdish region.

1979 - Saddam Hussein takes over from President Al-Bakr.

Iran-Iraq war

1980-1988 - Iran-Iraq war results in stalemate.

1981 June - Israeli air raid destroys Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak near Baghdad.

1988 March - Iraq attacks Kurdish town of Halabjah with poison gas, killing thousands.

First US-Iraq war

1990 - Iraq invades and annexes Kuwait, prompting what becomes known as the first Gulf War. A massive US-led military campaign forces Iraq to withdraw in February 1991.

1991 April - Iraq subjected to weapons inspection programme.

1991 Mid-March/early April - Southern Shia and northern Kurdish populations - encouraged by Iraq's defeat in Kuwait - rebel, prompting a brutal crackdown.

1991 April - UN-approved haven established in northern Iraq to protect the Kurds. Iraq ordered to end all military activity in the area.

1991 - Iraq subjected to sanctions, weapons inspections and no-fly zones.

2003 - US-led coalition invades, starting years of guerrilla warfare and instability.

1991 Gulf War

1991 April - UN-approved haven established in northern Iraq to protect the Kurds. Iraq ordered to end all military activity in the area.

1992 August - A no-fly zone, which Iraqi planes are not allowed to enter, is set up in southern Iraq.

1995 April - UN allows partial resumption of Iraq's oil exports to buy food and medicine in an oil-for-food programme.

1996 September - US extends northern limit of southern no-fly zone to just south of Baghdad.

1998 October - Iraq ends cooperation with UN Special Commission to Oversee the Destruction of Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Operation Desert Fox

1998 December - US and British Operation Desert Fox bombing campaign aims to destroy Iraq's nuclear, chemical and biological weapons programmes.

2002 September - US President George W Bush tells UN Iraq poses "grave and gathering danger".

2002 November - UN weapons inspectors return to Iraq backed by a UN resolution which threatens serious consequences if Iraq is in "material breach" of its terms.

1991 Gulf War



Iraq's army was crushed in 1991 Gulf War that followed the invasion of Kuwait

1991: Jubilation follows Gulf War ceasefire

Saddam's fall



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Saddam ousted

2003 March - US-led invasion topples Saddam Hussein's government, marks start of years of violent conflict with different groups competing for power.

2003 July - US-appointed Governing Council meets for first time. Commander of US forces says his troops face low-intensity guerrilla-style war.

2003 August - Suicide truck bomb wrecks UN headquarters in Baghdad, killing UN envoy Sergio Vieira de Mello.

Car bomb in Najaf kills 125 including Shia leader Ayatollah Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim.

2003 December - Saddam Hussein captured in Tikrit.

2004 March - Suicide bombers attack Shia festival-goers in Karbala and Baghdad, killing 140 people.

2004 April-May - Photographic evidence emerges of abuse of Iraqi prisoners by US troops at Abu Ghreib prison in Baghdad.

Sovereignty and elections

2004 June - US hands sovereignty to interim government headed by Prime Minister Iyad Allawi.

2004 August - Fighting in Najaf between US forces and Shia militia of radical cleric Moqtada Sadr.

2004 November - Major US-led offensive against insurgents in Falluja.

Saddam Hussein's ouster by US forces prompted jubilation among many Iraqis

Saddam 'sure he would survive'

Iraq war shows limits of US power

2005 April - Amid escalating violence, parliament selects Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani as president. Ibrahim Jaafari, a Shia, is named as prime minister.

2005 May onwards - Surge in car bombings, bomb explosions and shootings: government puts civilian death toll for May at 672, up from 364 in April.

2005 June - Massoud Barzani is sworn in as regional president of Iraqi Kurdistan.

2005 October - Voters approve a new constitution, which aims to create an Islamic federal democracy.

2005 December - Iraqis vote for the first, full-term government and parliament since the US-led invasion.

Sectarian violence

2006 February onwards - A bomb attack on an important Shia shrine in Samarra unleashes a wave of sectarian violence in which hundreds of people are killed.

2006 April - Newly re-elected President Talabani asks Shia compromise candidate Nouri al-Maliki to form a new government, ending months of deadlock.

2006 June - Al-Qaeda leader in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, is killed in an air strike.

2006 November - Iraq and Baathist Syria restore diplomatic relations after nearly a quarter century.

Bombings



Thousands of Iraqis have been killed in sectarian suicide and car bomb attacks

Iraq Body Count: War dead figures

Guide: Armed groups in Iraq

Up to 200 killed in Baghdad bombs

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Saddam executed

2006 December - Saddam Hussein is executed for crimes against humanity.

2007 January - US President Bush announces a new Iraq strategy; thousands more US troops will be dispatched to shore up security in Baghdad.

2007 August - Kurdish and Shia leaders form an alliance to support Prime Minister Maliki's government, but fail to bring in Sunni leaders.

2007 September - Controversy over private security contractors after Blackwater security guards allegedly fire at civilians in Baghdad, killing 17.

2007 December - Britain hands over security of Basra province to Iraqi forces, effectively marking the end of nearly five years of British control of southern Iraq.

2008 March - Prime Minister Maliki orders crackdown on militia in Basra, sparking pitched battles with Moqtada Sadr's Mehdi Army. Hundreds are killed.

2008 September - US forces hand over control of the western province of Anbar - once an insurgent and Al-Qaeda stronghold - to the Iraqi government. It is the first Sunni province to be returned to the Shia-led government.

Shia holy sites



Shrine of the Imam Ali, one of Shia Islam's holiest places

Shrine of the Imam Ali, one of Shia Islam's holiest places

Karbala and Najaf: Shia holy cities

Security pact approved

2008 November - Parliament approves a security pact with the United States, under which all US troops are due to leave the country by the end of 2011.

2009 June - US troops withdraw from towns and cities in Iraq, six years after the invasion, having formally handed over security duties to new Iraqi forces.

2010 March - Elections. Parliament approves new government of all major factions in December.

2010 August - Seven years after the US-led invasion, the last US combat brigade leaves Iraq.

2011 January - Radical Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr returns after four years of self-imposed exile in Iran.

US pulls out

2011 December - US completes troop pull-out.

Unity government faces disarray. Arrest warrant issued for vice-president Tariq al-Hashemi, a leading Sunni politician. Sunni bloc boycotts parliament and cabinet.

2012 March - Tight security for Arab League summit in Baghdad. It is the first major summit to be held in Iraq since the fall of Saddam Hussein. A wave of pre-summit attacks kills scores of people.

2012 November - Iraq cancels a \$4.2bn deal to buy arms from Russia because of concerns about alleged corruption within the Iraqi government.

Moqtada al-Sadr



Radical Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr announced he was withdrawing from politics in 2014 but has since resumed his political activities

Iraqi fears of new Sadrist power

Sadr followers push for reform

Profile: Moqtada Sadr

Fractious politics



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Violence intensifies

2013 April - Sunni insurgency intensifies, with levels of violence matching those of 2008. By July the country is described as being yet again in a state of full-blown sectarian war.

2013 September - Series of bombings hits Kurdistan capital Irbil in the first such attack since 2007. The Islamic State of Iraq group says it was responding to alleged Iraqi Kurdish support for Kurds fighting jihadists in Syria.

2013 October - Government says October is deadliest month since April 2008, with 900 killed. By the year-end the UN estimates the 2013 death toll of civilians as 7,157 - a dramatic increase in the previous year's figure of 3,238.

2014 January - Islamist fighters infiltrate Falluja and Ramadi after months of mounting violence in mainly-Sunni Anbar province. Government forces recapture Ramadi but face entrenched rebels in Falluja.

2014 April - Prime Minister Al-Maliki's coalition wins a plurality at first parliamentary election since 2011 withdrawal of US troops, but falls short of a majority.

2014 June-September - Sunni rebels led by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant surge out of Anbar Province to seize Iraq's second city of Mosul and other key towns. Tens of thousands flee amid atrocities. Kurdish forces, US and Iran assist government in repelling attacks.

A complex political landscape came into being after the fall of Saddam Hussein

Guide to political groups in Iraq



Iraq has enjoyed only brief periods of respite from high levels of sectarian violence



Thousands of Syrians have fled to neighbouring countries, including Iraq, to escape civil war at home

Broad government

2014 September - Shia politician Haider al-Abadi forms a broad-based government including Sunni Arabs and Kurds. Kurdish leadership agrees to put independence referendum on hold.

2014 December - The Iraqi government and the leadership of the Kurdish Region sign a deal on sharing Iraq's oil wealth and military resources, amid hopes that the agreement will help to reunite the country in the face of the common threat represented by Islamic State.

2015 March - Islamic State destroys Assyrian archaeological sites of Nimrud and Hatra.

Offensive against Islamic State

2015-2016 - Government and Islamic State forces fight for control of Tikrit and Anbar Province.

2016 April - Supporters of cleric Moqtada al-Sadr storm parliament building demanding new government to fight corruption and end allocation of government posts along sectarian lines.

2016 November - Parliament recognises the Shia Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) militia as part of the armed forces with full legal status.

2017 September - Kurds back independence in referendum staged by Kurdish regional government. Baghdad imposes punitive measures.

2017 November - Government forces with Shia and Kurdish allies drive Islamic State out of all but a few redoubts.

Army offensive drives back Kurdish forces in a move aimed at halting the regional government's moves towards an independent Kurdistan.

2018 May - Parliamentary elections. The political bloc of Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr wins most votes.

2018 October - Parliament elects veteran Kurdish politician Barham Salih as president. He appoints Shia former minister Adel Abdul Mahdi as prime minister, with the support of the Shia majority of MPs.

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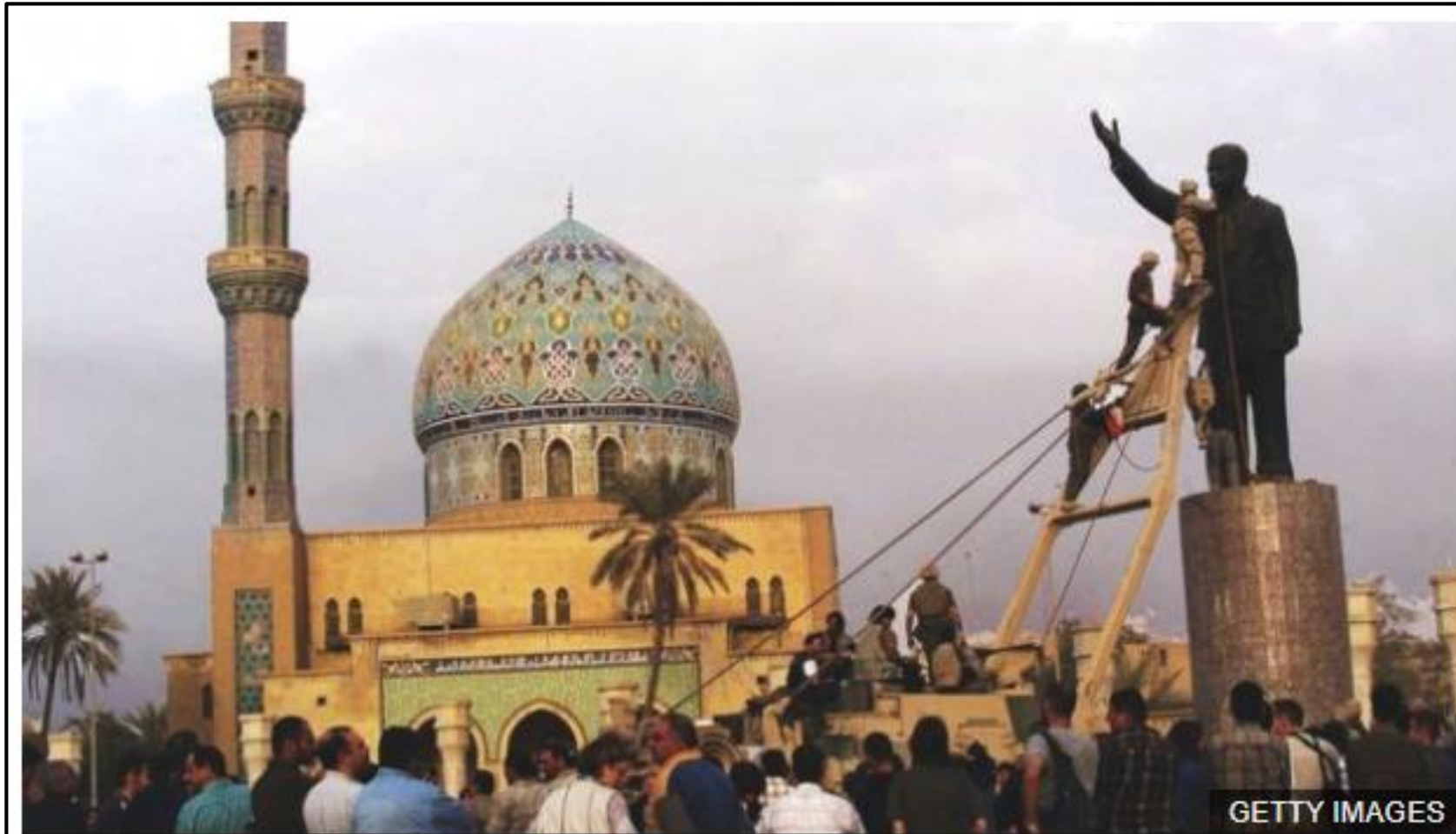
GOVERNMENT

Iraq's government is based upon the constitution drafted and ratified in 2005, which established an executive, legislative, and judicial branch. Current Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi is head of the executive branch. He is responsible for appointing the Council of Ministers, which act as his cabinet. The elected council of representatives is the legislative branch, and the supreme court rules on judicial matters in the country. Much of Iraq's legal system is based on French civil law, and the constitution guarantees civil liberties, such as freedom of religion and speech. These liberties are affected by two exemption clauses. The first is that the council of representatives has the power to define the scope of freedoms. The second is that no freedom can conflict with the teachings of Islam or Islamic morality. Those who belong to minority Muslim groups or who are non-Muslims are sometimes discriminated against or targets of threats or violence due to these clauses.



Prime Minister of Iraq Haider Al-Abadi

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GETTY IMAGES

US marines toppled the statue of Saddam Hussein shortly after the invasion in 2003. Years of instability followed

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14542954>

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INTERNATIONAL & REGIONAL ISSUES

Though the United States military were completely withdrawn from Iraq in 2011, since August 2014, the **US-led coalition** has conducted more than 12,400 air strikes against IS targets in the country. Most attacks have been carried out by US aircraft, but those from Australia, Belgium, Denmark, France, Jordan, the Netherlands and the UK have also taken part. As of 2017, there were approximately 5,000 American troops in Iraq.

The Shatt al-Arab river, the southern border between Iraq and Iran, has been a major point of contention between the two nations. Since it is the only outlet to the Persian Gulf from Iraq, it is important to the economic stability of the nation that is otherwise landlocked and whose early wealth stemmed from oil exports. The dividing line between Iran and Iraq on the river, however, has never been firmly established despite many treaties attempting to solve the problem, including the Peace Treaty of 1639, the **Constantinople Protocol of 1913**, and the **Algiers Agreement of 1975**. The Shatt al-Arab was one of the reasons behind the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88).

Though gains made by Iraqi security forces has resulted in the return of many refugees and IDPs to their homes, a humanitarian crisis is ongoing in Iraq particularly because of the civilians trapped in conflict zones. Approximately **3.4 million Iraqis remain displaced**. Syrians fleeing their civil war make up a large number of the refugees in Iraq; there were **close to 250,000 Syrians in Iraq in 2017**. There are also approximately 11,500 Palestinian refugees. In addition, there are an **estimated 6,000-7,000 Iranian refugees** living in Iraq. The Iranian refugees are primarily located in Camp Ashraf, 50 miles from the border with Iran, and compose the Iranian opposition group People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI/MEK). The Iraqis who have been displaced or fled ISIS advances have given rise to a proliferation of temporary refugees and formal refugee camps. Iraqis in exile following the previous wars have been affected as well.

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SOCIETY

Iraq's population is 75-80% Arab. Kurds make up 15-20%, and Turkoman, Assyrian, Yazidi, or other ethnic minorities make up the remaining 5%. The Kurds are semi-nomadic and speak Kurdish, which is the official language in their region.

Population of Iraq



Iraq's population is 75-80% Arab. Kurds make up 15-20%, and Turkoman, Assyrian, Yazidi, or other ethnic minorities make up roughly 1%. The Kurds are semi-nomadic and speak Kurdish, which is the official language in their region.

The population has fluctuated significantly due to the numerous conflicts and associated sanctions that have been imposed going back to the 90-91 Gulf War. This caused a lower birth rate and many Iraqis fled to surrounding countries both in exile and in search of a better life. The annual population growth rate is 2.95%. As of June 2017, the population of Iraq is estimated to be 38,654,287, making Iraq the fourth most populous country in the Middle East and North Africa.

The majority of the population **lives in urban areas** (70%), and there has been an increase in the number of people moving to the cities looking for jobs (3.01% annual rate of change). This migration has caused a mixing of ethno-religious backgrounds in many cities, with the exception of Kurds who are concentrated in the north.

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UNESCO reported that prior to the first Gulf War in 1991 Iraq had one of the best educational **performances** in the region. Primary school gross enrollment rate was 100% and literacy levels were high. Education has been severely impacted by conflict and upheaval since the 2003 invasion. Officially the government mandates 6 years of education; the destruction of schools and general insecurity have kept many children from gaining a formal education during this time. As Iraqi forces have reclaimed IS territory, schools have begun operating again. Reliable statistics regarding enrollment and literacy, therefore, are difficult to obtain. **22% of the population was illiterate** in 2013 and Iraqi authorities with the Ministry of Education planned to establish more than 500 literacy centers. In order to go to college, students must pass an exam in their last year of general education. The last two years of high school are dedicated to preparation for this exam. If students fail to pass the exam, they are allowed to go to a vocational school, but not college.

Education is free in Iraq and private schools are permitted only at the university level. There are several colleges throughout Iraq, with a concentration in Baghdad and the Kurdish region. The University of Baghdad is the largest higher education institution in the country and the second largest in the Middle East following the University of Cairo. About 80,000 students are enrolled, though enrollment and completion have dropped as a result of ongoing violence.

Iraq moved to create a centralized healthcare system in the 1970s funded through oil profits. To do this, they imported everything from medicine and medical equipment to nurses and doctors. Before 1990 and the Gulf War, 97% of urban dwellers and 71% of people living in the rural areas had access to free healthcare. The conflict essentially reset the country back to its pre-1970s healthcare system in which infrastructure was underdeveloped and medical personnel were not widely available. Iraqi healthcare infrastructure has yet to develop beyond this reduced capacity due in large part to national security concerns and a lack of reliable utilities. According to the **World Health Organization**, the health status of Iraq's population has suffered major blows due to decades of war and economic sanctions. This has resulted in a severe drop in Iraq's gross domestic product and consequently its public expenditure on health. Health services have deteriorated and the sector has faced continuous shortages in drugs and other supplies. Moreover, the current ongoing conflict and poor security situation has further damaged the country's health infrastructure. Many health professionals have fled for safety to neighboring countries and abroad and the population's access to basic health services has become increasingly impaired. Key indicators such as infant and maternal mortality rates have lagged behind those of its neighbors. The infant mortality rate in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was 14.58 deaths for every 1,000 births in 2014; in contrast, for the same year in Iraq, the rate was significantly higher at 37.53.

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RELIGION

Approximately 99% of the population is Muslim. 51% is Shia and 42% is Sunni; 5% do not claim a sect. The remaining population (1%) is made up of a number of religious minority groups such as Christians, Yazidis, Chaldeans and Mandeans. Many non-Muslim Iraqi citizens have had to flee the country due to persecution under consecutive regimes including Hussein's and ISIS, particularly the **Yazidi people**, have been targeted. Since the country of Iraq was established, there has been intense conflict between the Iraqi central government and the Kurds in the north. There is more information on the Kurdish conflict in the section titled "History & Government".

In ancient times, Zoroastrianism was the predominant religion. Zoroastrianism is one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions, and it is based on the teachings of Prophet Zoroaster. Today less than 190,000 people worldwide practice Zoroastrianism.

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CULTURE

Iraq has a rich cultural history, interwoven with religious traditions and language. Its cultural history is among the oldest in the world, Iraq being the home of ancient Mesopotamia, or the cradle of civilization. The country is known for its poets, painters, and sculptors. Iraq is also famous for producing fine handicrafts, including rugs. Unlike many Arab countries, Iraq embraces and celebrates the achievements of its past in pre-Islamic times.

Generosity and humility are valued in Iraqi culture. Men commonly hold hands or kiss when greeting each other, but this is typically not the case between men and women. Respect is given to the elderly and women, especially those with children.

Food

Iraqi cuisine mirrors that of Syria and Lebanon, with strong influences from the culinary traditions of Turkey and Iran. Popular dishes include kebab (skewered meat, typically beef), falafel (fried chickpea balls), kofta (Iraqi meatballs were first made in Iraq) and masgouf (open-air-grilled carp). Meals typically begin with mezza, appetizers or salads similar to Spanish tapas. Mezza includes dips like baba ghanoush (baked eggplant) and hummus (chickpea) as well as small portions like warak enab (grape leaves stuffed with vegetables, rice and sometimes meat). Long-grain rice is a staple in Iraq and is served with most dishes.

IRAQ

Clothing

There is a mix of Western and Eastern influence in the street fashion you see in everyday Iraq. When Iraq was first established as an independent state it was common to see both men and women in Western clothing.



An Iraqi soldier shows a pamphlet which reads "Wearing beards is compulsory, shaving is prohibited" along a street of the town of al-Shura, which was recaptured from Islamic State (IS) on Saturday, south of Mosul, Iraq October 30, 2016. Zohra Bensemra/File Photo

In most urbanized areas women wear long pants, shirts with only half sleeves, and dress as they like. Many conservative Islamic Iraqi women dress as they please while at home or while in the homes of friends or family, away from the public eye and from unrelated male relatives—wearing jeans, t-shirts, and other Western or Iraqi traditional fashions while wearing more modest clothing – including the traditional abaya and hijab – in public.

Men's fashion is also split into traditional and modern. Iraqi youths normally wear pants and t-shirts with modern brands. The brands are a favorite among the youth because it shows wealth; however like the women's, these brands are not original, but more often knockoffs originating from China and Turkey. Traditional men's fashion is comprised of a long gown, called a thawb. Men also wear traditional fabric hats, shamagh. The black band

which holds the fabric in place is called agal.

Appearance was dramatically impacted by religious militants following the 2003 invasion. For instance, according to [Reuters](#), after Islamic State conquered villages in northern Iraq, it spelled out in minute detail the rules of its self-proclaimed caliphate, from beard length to alms to guidelines for taking women as sex slaves. Islamic State documents and posters, as seen above obtained in villages captured by Iraqi forces, highlight a tight and comprehensive system of rule by the militants, who went to great lengths to explain their fundamentalist philosophy. [Stories of mass shavings proliferated](#) in western media after the liberation of numerous Iraqi cities.

IRAK

Music

Iraq has a rich musical history and a strong tradition of *maqam*, a musical style in which the musician improvises on the original music within a set of rules. Each rule set, *anjā*, involves specific changes to the music, such as altering the pitch or notes. These improvisations vary based on the person's mood or the day. The main instruments used in Iraqi music are the *oud* (pear-shaped instrument similar to a European lute), *santur* (a trapezoid box with 92 strings) and *joza* (a four-string spike fiddle). Lyrics are often poetry set to the rhythm of music. This poetry is generally from famous or ancient Arab texts or influenced by them.

Contemporary music in Iraq incorporates traditional lyrics played with a mix of modern and traditional instruments. Like in many other Middle Eastern nations, Western musical genres and artists have become popular. The Voice of Youth radio station, for example, plays American hip-hop and rock and is conducted almost exclusively in English. Some Iraqi artists also enjoy widespread popularity. Kadim Al Sahir is one of the most successful singers in the Middle East and known for favoring both Arab classical and contemporary pop music. His hit "*La Ya Sadiki*" ("No, My Friend") used maqams that had been unused for decades.

During Saddam Hussein's rule, many Iraqi artists fled the country in fear of persecution. Music that was considered inappropriate or critical to the regime was banned. In recent years however, artists have slowly returned to Iraq despite lingering violence due to extremist factions. While music censorship has decreased since the fall of Saddam Hussein, religious extremists who disagree with the content and message of contemporary music have targeted nightclubs and music stores with terror attacks.

IRAQ

Art

Ancient Iraqi art is classified by the period during which it was created (Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian etc.). Stone sculptures show up consistently throughout many of the periods. One impressive sculpture from the Assyrian period is that of a human-headed winged bull made for King Sargon II between 710-705 BCE. Other surviving art from ancient Mesopotamia includes clay statues and pottery. The Baghdad battery, a clay jar from the Sassanid Period (224–651), may have also served as a rudimentary battery, and is an interesting example of Iraqi pottery.

In addition to three-dimensional art, many engravings have been found on the facades of buildings or carved into the sides of large pottery. In the Babylonian period, engravings were made on a cylinder seal. Cylinder seals were usually one inch long and featured engraved scenes or written characters that could be transferred to wet clay when the cylinder was rolled along it. The Hematite cylinder seal (1800 BCE) from southern Iraq portrays two men fighting a bull-man and an inverted lion, reflecting the common theme of men and deities in conflict that was popular during the time. The details of many engravings are still clear today and depict rich cultural tradition. Due to conflict over the past two decades, however, many historic works of art have been stolen or lost. In recent years, some pieces of art have begun to make their way back to Iraq and museum curators continue to search for missing Iraqi art.



IRAK

Modern Iraqi art receives little attention from the Western art community though there is an active movement. Abdul Qadir Al Rassam (1882-1952) was the first well-known modern Iraqi painter and a leader in the realism movement. Al Rassam was an oil painter who focused on recreating realistic Iraqi landscapes. Most of his paintings are now owned by private collectors. Female artists, such as Suad al-Attar (1942 –), have also been successful in Iraq and around the world. Al-Attar was the first woman to hold a solo exhibition in Iraq. Her paintings, which typically intertwine Mesopotamian stories and modern-day Iraq, are dreamlike and heavy in symbolism. "Gilgamesh and Enkido," for example, reimagines the 4,000 year old *Epic of Gilgamesh* by inserting a female protagonist in an all-male legend. These artists' experimentation with color, style, and technique earned their work a place in the modern art section of the Iraq Museum.

After the fall of Saddam Hussein, during a period of 36 hours beginning on April 8, 2003, the museum was looted and nearly 15,000 works disappeared. Original estimates were much higher, in the range of 170,000. Stolen goods began trickling back to the museum after authorities made statements that there would be impunity and no questions asked if thieves returned items to the museum. Domestic raids and foreign governments have further contributed to the recovery of some materials that found their way into the black market. U.S. Marine Colonel Matthew Bogdanos led a security, investigative, and recovery team to mitigate the impact of the looting; he later earned a National Humanities Medal for his efforts. Iraqi art has also found its way into the United States where museums have held exhibitions exclusively featuring Iraqi art. In 2017, owners of an American chain of stores, The Hobby Lobby, gained infamy and significant sanctions for their involvement in the illegal trade of Iraqi artifacts to be used in a forthcoming bible museum in Washington, DC (read more in link below).

IRAK

Sites

Iraq is home to many famous destinations that demonstrate the greatness of the empires that have ruled the land. Babylon, built during the height of the Babylonian empire, was a city known for its heavily fortified surrounding walls and for housing one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Hanging Gardens. Recent research suggests, however, that the **Hanging Gardens were actually located in Ninevah**, some 300 miles north. Babylon is also famous for the Bible's many references to its Tower of Babel.



Located on the edge of the Tallil Airbase, one of the largest military bases in the Middle East, the Ziggurat of Ur was spared the worst of the post-invasion destruction of historic sites elsewhere. The site has been inside the security perimeter of the airbase since it was occupied by coalition forces in 2003. Closed to civilian visitors, Ur has been open to visits from military personnel.

Iraqis have recreated some of the famous structures from their ancient history, such as the ziggurat. Ziggurats were rectangular stepped towers made out of bricks that sometimes housed temples on the top level. The exact purpose of ziggurats is unknown, though they have been linked to religion. The city of Ur, a Sumerian city-state, contains the partially restored ruins of the Ziggurat of Ur which stands 21 meters (65 feet) above the desert. This ziggurat is one of the best-preserved in Iran and Iraq. Ur was once a coastal city and likely flourished similarly to Babylon until a drought in 2000 BCE. This drought and the decline of Ur are thought to have led to the extinction of the Sumerian language.

The Abbasids, the last civilization in power before the Mongol invasion, also left impressive ruins. The Abbasid Palace, built in the twelfth

century, is the last palace standing in Baghdad. Archaeological excavations have concluded that the structure is more likely to have been used as a madrasa (school) than a palace. The two-story building features impressive arches and intricate brickwork and has been partially reconstructed for its historical value.

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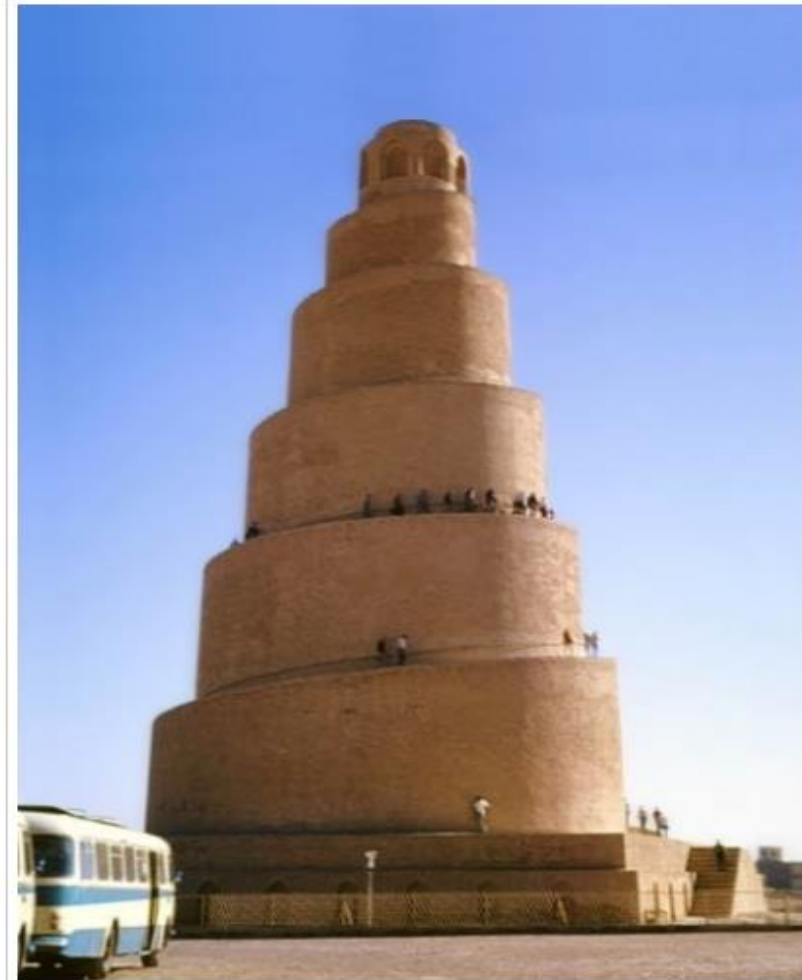
Another site of Abbasid ruins is the ancient city of Samarra, the second capital of the Abbasid civilization. Because the city was abandoned, Samarra's original architecture and art are remarkably well preserved. Samarran citizens pioneered carved stucco for buildings as well as a new ceramic that imitated precious metals. **Located on both sides of the Tigris River** 130 km north of Baghdad, the length of the site from north to south is 41.5 km; its width varying from 8 km to 4 km. It testifies to the architectural and artistic innovations that developed there and spread to the other regions of the Islamic world and beyond. The 9th-century Great Mosque and its spiral minaret are among the numerous remarkable architectural monuments of the site, 80% of which remain to be excavated. In 2005 the top of the **Malwiya minaret** was damaged by a bomb. Iraqi police said insurgents blew up the top section of the (171 ft) tower, which had previously been used by U.S. soldiers as a lookout position, although US troops had pulled out of the site a month prior to the attack.

IRAQ

The city of **Erbil** is another great destination in Iraq. The city is in the Kurdish region of Iraq and sits on top of a tell (a hill created by generations of settlers rebuilding on the same land). Surrounding the inner city is a continuous wall of 19th century facades, which lends the city an image of an impenetrable fortress. The city is structured in a fan-like pattern, which dates back to its Ottoman era. Erbil has a long history and features in several cultural and religious records. Erbil corresponds to ancient Arbela, which was an important Assyrian political and religious center.

Several of Iraq's ancient sites and artifacts have been destroyed by ISIS fighters. The group claims that the destruction of archaeological and holy sites is religiously motivated, saying they are ridding Iraq and Syria of religious influences that conflict with their own ideology. The group has targeted well-known ancient sites, Christian as well as Islamic, along with more modern graves and shrines belonging to other Muslim sects. ISIS has also been known to loot the sites they destroy, and they will then sell many of the stolen artifacts in order to finance their military operations. Larger sites that have been partially or fully destroyed by ISIS include Hatra, Nineveh, Nimrud, the Great Mosque of al-Nure, and Mosul museums and **libraries**.

Hatra was the capital of an independent kingdom on the outskirts of the Roman Empire, built in the third century BCE. It was a prominent trading center along the Silk Road, a fact that was reflected in its Greek and Roman architecture. It was named a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1985. A video released by ISIS in April 2015 showed fighters using sledgehammers and automatic weapons to destroy sculptures in several of the site's largest buildings, which made the head of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, point out that ISIS was practicing a form of **cultural cleansing** in Iraq.



The minaret of the Great Mosque of Samarra, a ninth-century mosque commissioned in 848 and completed in 851 by the Abbasid caliph Al-Mutawakkil. By IgorF - vlastni foto, CC BY-SA 3.0, wikipedia

IRAK

Nineveh was at one point the largest city in the world. It was one of many capitals used during the reign of the Assyrians, who created one of the first true empires in the world. Nineveh truly flourished in 700 BCE under Emperor Sennacherib. The city is situated on the outskirts of modern day Mosul.

Nimrud was the first capital of the Assyrian Empire, founded 3,200 years ago. The city displayed the empire's power and wealth through ornate decoration and impressive structures. The site was excavated in the 1840s by British archaeologists, and many of its statues and artifacts were sent to museums abroad. However, as with most artifacts from above sites, the excavated treasures were sent to Iraqi museums – many of which have now been looted and destroyed by ISIS.

The Mosul museums and libraries have perhaps suffered the most significant losses at the hands of ISIS in the country. Centuries old manuscripts and thousands of books were stolen. Mosul University's library was set on fire in December 2014, and in February the following year Mosul's central public library was rigged with explosives and demolished, together with thousands of manuscripts and instruments used by Arab scientists. Around the same time, [videos emerged of ISIS fighters](#) rampaging through the Mosul Museum, smashing art and artifacts with hammers and ruining statues. For more sites and artifacts that have been destroyed by ISIS in Iraq and Syria consult [this](#) article.

IRAK

Babylon, Iraq

Babylon, the legendary city, is indeed, the most famous ancient city in the whole World. It was the capital of ten Mesopotamian dynasties starting with the dynasty of King Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC); the 6th king of the 1st dynasty; reaching prominence as the capital city of the great kingdom of Babylonia. The last dynasty at which Babylon achieved its zenith, is well known particularly of its 2nd king, Nebuchadnezzar II (605-563 BC), to whom most of Babylon's existing buildings belongs.



Babylon was renowned for its high, well-fortified walls and for the magnificence of its temples and palaces. Its famous Hanging Gardens, built by King Nebuchadnezzar II for his wife Amytas, were one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Amytas was a Medes and her home was in mountainous country, so the King reputedly had the Hanging Gardens built to allay her homesickness.

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In Akkadian times, around 2350 BC, Babylon was a small village, which in 5 or 6 centuries had grown in size and importance, mostly during the reign of the 3rd Dynasty, until it rose like a city meteor to deal the coup de grace to Sumerian authority in Mesopotamia under Amorite kings. Babylon itself became a major city-state, as the capital of the great Amorite soldier, the famous king, law-giver and social reformer King Hammurabi, with a code of common law, and a king with genuine concern for the well-being of his subjects - an unusual feature in those times.



Hammurabi's lasting monument is the Code. It was inscribed on eight-foot steles, like the eight-foot black diorite stela, pillaged from Babylon by an Elamite King and found in 1901 by French archaeologists in Susa, the ancient Elamite capital (to the east of modern Amara). The French transported it to the Louvre where you can see it and read, in Babylonian cuneiform writing, the 3000 lines of the Code.

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Nebuchadnezzar's Southern Palace (190 x 300 m) is situated on the west side of this major street, made up of five courtyards each surrounded by halls and a diversity of chambers, one of which is the throne room (52 x 25 m). The Hanging Gardens, the remains of which are still visible nowadays, were part of this palace.



To the east of the Street of Processions lies Nin Makh's Temple, reconstructed recently. To the north are the remains of the Main Palace, where the Lion of Babylon is. It should be noted that many remains lie under the accumulations of later buildings, as the place continued to be inhabited, or have been so submerged by the Euphrates that it is almost impossible to retrieve it.

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Ishtar Gate, in a depression a little short way off the Street of Processions, still has some of its old wall decorations of bulls, symbol of Adad, god of storms, and dragons, symbol of Marduk, the chief god. The dragon here is a composite animal with the physical attributes of snake, lion and eagle. These brick relieves are not glazed, as the beautiful glazed-brick panels figuring bulls, and dragons and lions (symbol of Ishtar) which decorated the Gate, the Palace and the Street of Processions were all taken, prior to World War I, to Berlin by the German expedition which excavated Babylon then. Along the Street, on the left a brick column is seen, which may have had a statue standing on it.



The Lion of Babylon, large and splendidly carved in basalt, reminds us again that the lion was the symbol of the goddess Ishtar. In the sculpture, the lion's back has marks indicating that it was meant for a precious saddle upon which the goddess Ishtar would stand.

IRAQ

"The Tower of Babylon"

Text and image courtesy of Museum of Unnatural Mystery by Mr. Lee Krystek

Archaeologists examining the remains of the city of Babylon have found what appears to be the foundation of the tower: a square of earthen embankments 91 meters on each side. The tower's most splendid incarnation was probably under King Nebuchadnezzar II who lived from 605-562 BC. The King rebuilt the tower to stand 91 meters high. According to an inscription made by the king the tower was constructed of "baked brick enameled in brilliant blue". The terraces of the tower may have also been planted with flowers and trees.

The tower, referred to by the Babylonians as Etemenanki, was only one of the marvels of the city. The final beginning of the end of the tower of Babylon probably began around 478 BC. The city had been taken over by the Persian King Xerxes who crushed a rebellion there that year. The tower was neglected and crumbled.

Although the Tower of Babylon now gone, a few lesser ziggurats still exist. The largest surviving, although damaged, temple is now found in western Iran, in what was once the ancient land of Elam. It is located about 29

km from the capital of Elam, a city named Susa. Built in 1250 BC by the King Untash-Napirisha it once had five levels and stood 52 meters in height.





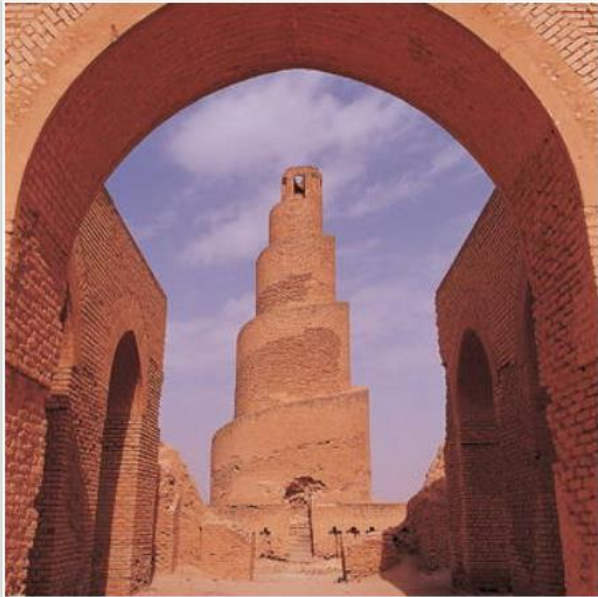
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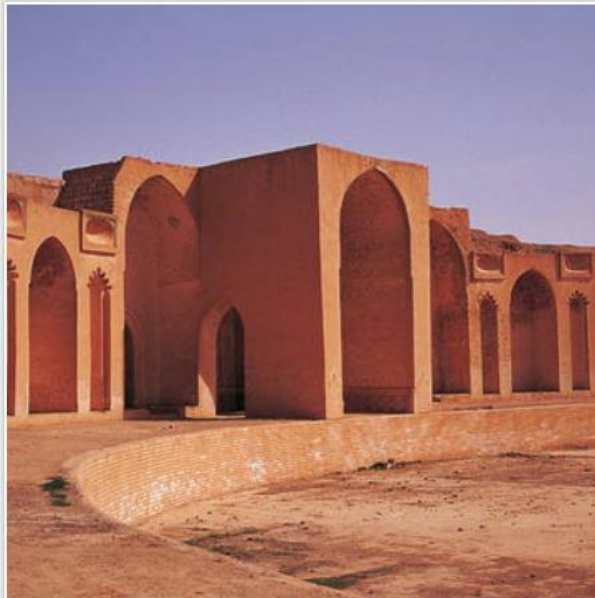
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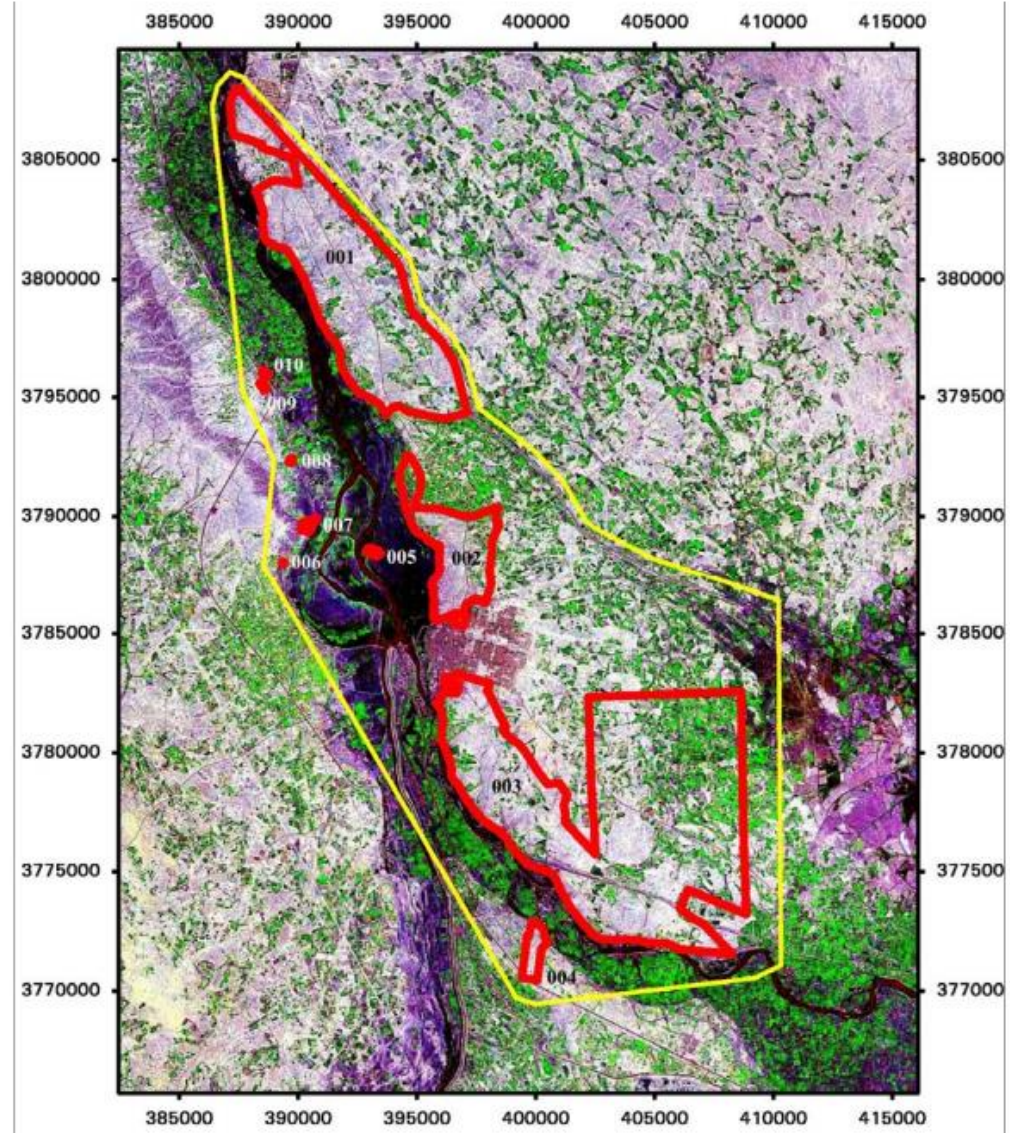
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(Figure # 1) Map showing boundaries and buffer zone of Samarra Archaeological City

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