

# Iraq: Erasing History

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Who is erasing Iraq's history? A visitor only has to be in the country minute's before someone informs them: 'We are the cradle of civilization' and launches in to the pride and passion of historical jewels and archeological wonders stretching back seemingly beyond time. They are not Sunni, Shia, Christian, Turkoman, Yazidi jewels, they are Mesopotamia's and have been proudly nurtured since the mists of time.

Samara's great golden domes, destroyed on 22nd February last year, a Shia shrine in a largely Sunni city, had been tended and protected by residents for centuries. The southern holy cities of Najav and Kerbala were places where Iraqis of all or no religion, demanded to take visitors. Before the invasion it was unthinkable to even wonder whether a host, driver, shopkeeper was of a particular religion, sect. They were Iraqis, intermarried, living mostly side by side. From the day all Iraq was reduced to an intensive care unit (9th April 2003) 'mission accomplished', patient critical, suddenly there were 'Sunni'. 'Shia', 'tribes', in the US and UK lexicon. They were a people 'unable yet to take responsibility for their country' (which they had managed pretty imaginatively even under the thirteen years of crippling sanctions, which will forever be former weak willed UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's murderous legacy for not being able to stand up to US/UK pressure.)

So having presented a divided, backward nation to the world, why not show them as such - and 'divide and rule' and sew doubt where none had existed and demolish all that is cohesive: history itself?

A bit of modern - by Iraq standards - history destroyed this week is the Al Sarafiya Bridge, built by the British in another Mesopotamian adventure, in the early 1900's. Unlike many of Iraq's wondrous bridges spanning the Tigris and the Euphrates, it survived the 1991 carpet bombing, but not now the invasion. Whilst accounts differ, from a truck bomb (and there are plenty of reports of trucks, vans, cars being stopped the allied troops and their owners later finding bombs in them) one eyewitness, Farhan Sudani, states he saw a missile dropped from a US helicopter.

'It is one of Baghdad's monuments. We are losing a lot of our history every day', Ahmed Adul-Karim, who lives nearby is quoted as saying. 'It is one of our famous monuments, linked to Baghdad's modern history', said architect Haider Ghazala. Iraq's bridges are its very arteries, they feed the country's heart and extremities. When they were bombed in 1991, almost all were rebuilt with extraordinary ingenuity, in spite of the embargo on materials. The Fourteenth of July Bridge, named to commemorate the 1958 revolution against the British (who had opened to doors for monopolies to plunder the oil wealth) was the last to be rebuilt. Iraqis had watched the complexities with baited breath, many thinking it could not be done. When it was, they flocked to Baghdad, from throughout the country, many lying on it to kiss the concrete.

The Roman processional and most of Babylon has been ruined by US and Polish troops, archeological barbarians, as Ur, believed birthplace of Abraham. And who has the courage to travel in 'liberated' Iraq, to make an inventory of the destruction of the thousands of Iraq's other ochre and golden historical gems?

Today it is Kerbala, site of one of the two most revered Shia shrines, resting place of Imam Hussein Bin Ali and his brother Abbas who left their mark on Islamic history at the Battle of Tuff (622), Imam Hussein mercilessly slaughtered, who is believed to have died with a Koran in one hand and a sword in the other. His words: 'Death with dignity is better than a life of humiliation', have not only a deep resonance with his Shia followers, but throughout Iraq. Or indeed, would strike resonance with any invaded nation. As I write they will be gathering the body parts.

Before the invasion, suicide bombings were unheard of in Iraq. The 1990's had some car bombs in Baghdad, which bewildered Iraqis and it would seem were generated by former US darling Iyad Allawi's Iraq National Accord. American spokespersons have a mantra: 'Al Qaeda'. But there was no Al Qaeda (anyway a CIA creation) in Iraq before the invasion. Has the most powerful army on earth no ability to control Iraq's borders? Saddam Hussein never had a problem. Anyway, the US military itself has stated that only a minimal percentage of attacks are by foreign fighters and Iraqis have lived together for centuries. When a friend – and many others – said, just prior to the invasion: 'Let them come, we have been fighting invaders for centuries', she was talking about just that. Not Iraqis fighting Iraqis.

Would Sunnis attack Kerbala? During the siege of Falluja the people of Najav and Kerbala traveled the perilous route north west, to take trucks of food, goods and medicines. Would they repay with this, or is there an enemy within, closer to the occupiers?

'Even in the Iran-Iraq war, our archeological sites, our history and theirs were respected', said a near tearful archeologist in 1991, referring to the indiscriminate destruction from the air, of humanity's history and utter disregard for civilian life, throwing to the winds, then as now, every international convention and treaty on the rules of war. It also happens to be an Zionist trait to destroy the ancient, the beautiful, the very historic soul of a nation and people, America's indivisible ally. Israeli Defense Force personnel and others, certainly came in with the US and British troops. Who else did? And remember the bomb which went off under a bridge in Iran's neighboring province to Basra? 'This bomb has a British accent', said an Iranian government spokesman. Maybe or may be not, but 'stuff happens', throughout the region – to quote Rumsfeld after the invasion's looting and decimation – that was not happening before 9th April 2003. British Forces (some of whom were caught in Arab dress with a carload of explosives last year, who were arrested and for whom the British demolished a police station to rescue) are due to hand over Kerbala to Iraqis later this month. They had to hand it back after invading it in 1915 too.

Over Easter the British and the Czech invaders in southern Iraq had a competition involving pulling fire engines to raise money for charity (the Czechs won) and raised £2.000 sterling. The charity was for their fellow injured service personnel in one of the richest countries on earth, the UK. Not for the maimed parents and children of southern Iraq for whose injuries they are responsible. It would be good to think they are winging their way up to Kerbala to donate it to the decimated as a parting gift and rushing the sort of aid that Najav and Kerbala, in spite of poverty and deprivation, did to Falluja. No breath holding.

And WHO IS erasing Iraq's history?

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