

DISCOVER YOUR PAST

**An introductory guide to the archaeology
and history of the Kufa region**



Welcome to the Land of Kufa!!

This booklet is the result of the fieldwork activity conducted between 2018 and 2019 by the University of Bologna (Licia Proserpio, Giulia Scazzosi, Federico Zaina) and the University of Kufa (Alaa Hussein J. Al-Lami, Ream Hussein Al-Rubaie). It is realised within the frame of the “Eduu” project coordinated by Nicolò Marchetti for the dissemination of the Iraqi cultural heritage and the improvement of social cohesion. The project is funded by the European Union in the framework of EuropeAid funding scheme.

Fieldwork activities have been conducted in collaboration with the Land of Kufa training and survey project co-directed by the Koç University of Istanbul, the University of Bologna and the University of Kufa, in the area north-east of the modern city of Kufa.

The booklet is developed in partnership with the Kufa State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, in particular the director Mohammed B. Al-Mayali to whom goes our gratitude. We thank Dr. Hayder Al-Hamdany of the University of Kufa for the logistical support.

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This booklet is realised by a group of Iraqi and Italian archaeologists and anthropologists who worked together in the Kufa region to re-discover the ancient cities, villages and the life of the people who populated them through time.

To tell you the long history of this region, the booklet is divided into four main themes, each one identified by a specific colour.



HISTORY AND ENVIRONMENT. The first part, in red, concerns the history and archeology of the Kufa region.



THE ANCIENT LANDSCAPE. The second part, in green, shows how the ancient cities and villages were distributed in the Kufa region and how they were connected through the water channels.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES. The third part, in blue, presents the archaeological sites in the region north of Kufa, briefly telling their story.



THE ARCHAEOLOGIST. In the fourth part, in yellow, the profession of the archaeologist, his tasks and the main archaeological discoveries in Mesopotamia are illustrated.



PROTECTING THE PAST. The fifth part, in purple, explains which are the main institutions in Iraq working in the archaeological field, why it is important to preserve archaeological sites and what the individual can do to protect them.

The history of my land

BABYLONIANS 3000 years ago



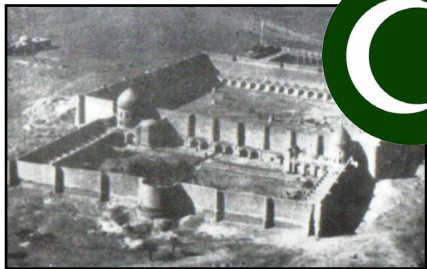
Almost 3000 years ago, the kings of Babylon took the control of most of the modern Iraq. Among them was the famous king Hammurabi who developed the first known code of law in history. In this period the area between Al-Hurriyah and Al-Abbasiyah was occupied by several small villages which became part of the Babylonian empire.

PARTHIANS AND SASANIANS 2200 years ago



The Parthian and Sasanian empires ruled over the majority of the Middle East for almost 800 years. These were among the largest empires of ancient world. In the Kufa region they established new towns such as Kuar, Nahb and Al-Hira and improved the canalisation system in order to provide water for agriculture.

ISLAM 1400 years ago

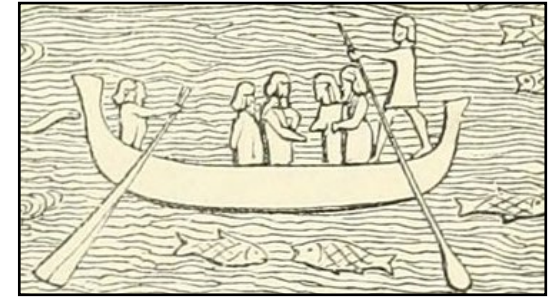


With the emergence of the Islamic dynasties of the Umayyads and Abbasids, over 1400 years ago, a new and prosperous period began in the region. The cities of Kufa and Najaf were founded which represent two important places for the history of Islam. New irrigation canals were opened and new villages were occupied.

The environment of my region

The Kufa region is located at the western fringes of Mesopotamia. It is characterised by a flat flood plain created over millennia by the Euphrates river. From the main stream of the river, hundreds of ancient and modern artificial channels spread all over the region to provide water for agriculture, animals and people.

Such a varied landscape has profoundly changed over time, with the main course of the Euphrates slightly shifting from the Hilla and Al-Qadisiya regions towards the city of Kufa at the beginning of the 20th century. This has generated a marshy, environment recently transformed into a fertile region thanks to human activities.



The rich environment of the Najaf and Kufa region hosts a number of faunal species. Water buffaloes certainly represent one of the most iconic animals. These were already used by the ancient population such as the Babylonians over 3000 years ago. The region of Kufa is also rich in riverine fishes such as barb, common carp or silver carp.

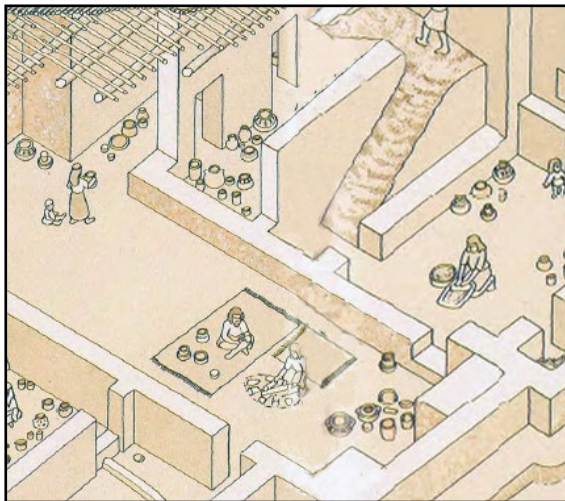
How did the ancient people live? ———

————— The ancient towns

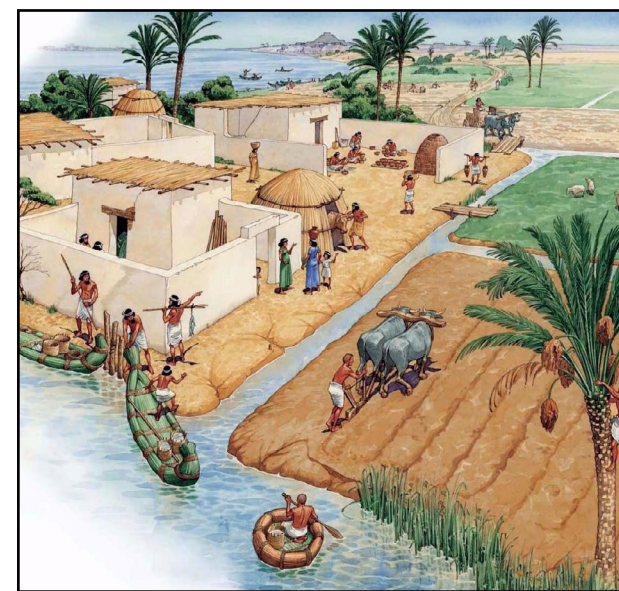
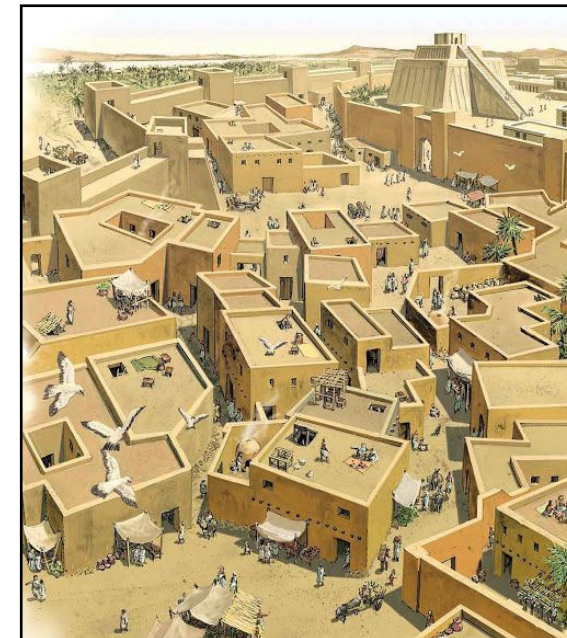
Ancient houses were mainly made of perishable materials like mud and reeds. For this reason the majority of the Mesopotamian cities are not preserved.

So, for the archaeologists it is not always simple to understand the ways of life of our ancestors. The dimensions, shapes and functions of the rooms of the houses considerably change through time, from the Babylonian period (3000 years ago) until today. In the first cities and villages the population was divided into élites, soldiers, specialised workers and slaves.

The élites included priests and kings who controlled politics and religion. Specialised workers could be farmers, artisans, scribes and administrators.



Ancient Mesopotamia was dotted with small villages and large cities located along rivers or navigable canals. The emergence of urban centers took place around 6000 years ago. Domestic buildings were packed in large neighbourhoods, while the élite buildings were located close to palaces and temples.



In the region of Kufa thousands of people lived in the large centers of Kufa, Kuar or Nahb, while many settlements were made up of a few houses inhabited by one or more families.



The writing was invented by Sumerians in central Iraq about 5500 years ago. Unlike today, writing was a complicated technique and only few specialised scribes were able to write. The earliest type of writing was characterised by pictograms that depict objects to indicate concepts. About 5000 years ago, this system evolved into real signs called cuneiform because they were made with wedge-shaped tools on clay tablets.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE OF KUFA, AL-ABBASIYAH AND AL-HURRIYAH



This map shows the archaeological sites in the Kufa region (yellow dots) and the main city and towns (white square).

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE OF KUFA, AL-ABBASIYAH AND AL-HURRIYAH UNDER THE BABYLONIAN KINGS (3000 YEARS AGO)



This map shows the archaeological sites in the Kufa region (red dots) which were inhabited at the time of the Babylonian kings (3000 years ago). Some of them were just small villages, while others were large towns.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE OF KUFA, AL-ABBASIYAH AND AL-HURRIYAH DURING THE PARTHIAN AND SASANIAN EMPIRES (2200 YEARS AGO)

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE OF KUFA, AL-ABBASIYAH AND AL-HURRIYAH UNDER THE ISLAMIC DYNASTIES OF UMAYYYADS AND ABBASIDS (1400 YEARS AGO)



This map shows the archaeological sites in the Kufa region (blue dots) which were inhabited at the time of the Parthian and Sasanian empires (2200 years ago). During this period the population of the region increased and new settlements were founded. Some of them were just small villages, while others were large towns.

This map shows the archaeological sites in the Kufa region (green dots) which were inhabited during the Islamic dynasties (1400 years ago). As you can see, most of the archaeological sites established by the Parthian and Sasanian king are still occupied. This was the time of the foundation of the holy city of Kufa which soon became one of the most important in the region.

The heritage of Kufa

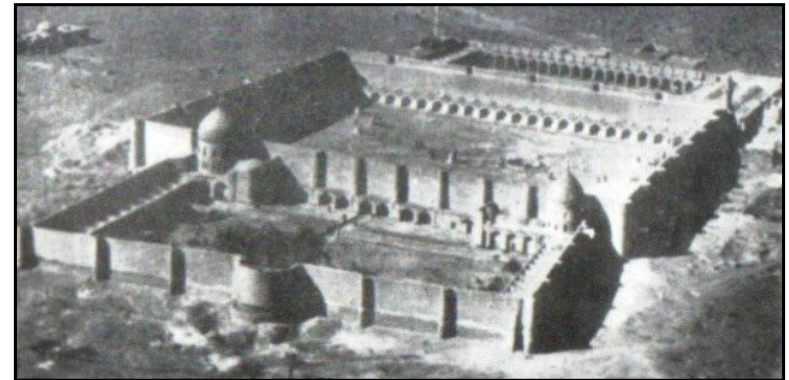
Today many ancient buildings testify the glorious history of the city. If you walk through the tiny Medieval streets in the heart of the old city, close to the Euphrates river, you can still appreciate some of them. The heritage of Kufa includes private houses over 200 years old as well as large buildings made at the time of King Faisal I. Among others, the Suq Al-Tueqar hosts many shops and houses decorated with wooden balconies and brick arches.



You may also find some nice hans, hammams and mosques, which are now often reused as shops. It is important to preserve such a rich cultural heritage because these monuments tell us an important chapter of the history of Iraq!



The history of Kufa



Along with Samarra, Karbala, Kadhimiya and Najaf, Kufa is one of the five Iraqi cities that are of great importance to Shi'ite Muslims. The city was the final capital of the fourth Rashidun Caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib, and was founded 1381 years ago (17 Hijrah) by the second Rashidun Caliph, Umar ibn Al-Khattab. At that time, Muslims had just conquered Al-Madain and were looking for a suitable place for habitation. Under the guidance of Salman and Hudhayfa bin al-Yamman, among others, people chose this land and, after having offered prayers there, founded the city of Kufa.



NAHB

Nahb is a large site of over 70 hectares. From the Parthian and Sasanian (2200 years ago) until the beginning of the Islamic period, Nahb was one of the largest cities in the region. Some streets and walls of the old houses are still visible on the ground. The city was crossed by small navigable canals, along which some pottery workshops.

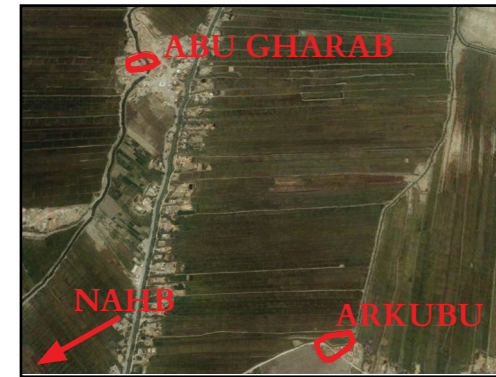


TELL WAGSA

Tell Wagsa is a 18 ha site located south of Nahb. It was probably an important town under the Babylonian kings (3000 years ago), with palaces, temples, houses and irrigated fields. When the Parthian and Sasanian empires emerged, it became a small village with few houses. Today the site is mostly a high tell, but a large part of it is cut by modern fields.

ABU GHARAB

Abu Gharab is a very small flat site extending less than 1 hectare (ha). It was a small village with a handful of houses, cultivated fields and irrigation channels all around. It was first settled by the Babylonians 3000 years ago and it was probably inhabited under the Parthian and Sasanian empires and during the Islamic period.



ARKUBU

Arkubu is a very small flat site extending for about 1 ha. In the past it was a small village with few houses, cultivated fields and irrigation channels all around. It was first settled by the Babylonians 3000 years ago and it was probably inhabited under the Parthian and Sasanian empires as well as during the Islamic period.





AL-GUBERA

Al-Gubera is a 10 ha site located north of Nahb. It was probably an important town under the Babylonian kings (3000 years ago), with houses and temples as well as irrigated fields all around. The city was inhabited for thousands of years under the rule of the Parthian and Sasanian kings and it was abandoned at the beginning of the Islamic period.

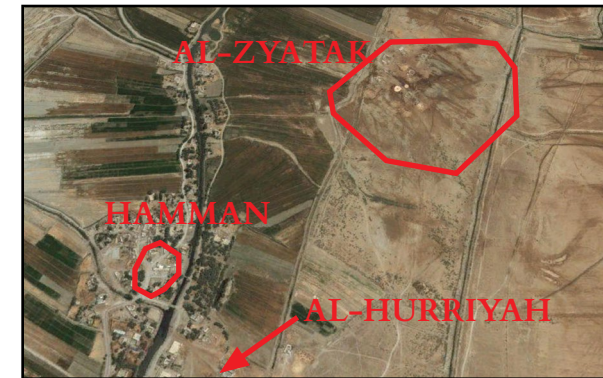


TIGTAGE

Tigtage is a small flat site extending for 2 ha north of Nahb. It was a small village with a handful of houses, cultivated fields and irrigation channels all around. It was first settled by the Babylonians 3000 years ago and it was probably inhabited under the Parthian and Sasanian empires as well as during the Islamic period.

HAMMAN

Hamman is a very small site extending for 1 ha north-est of Al-Hurriyah, close to Al-Zyatak. It is now almost completely destroyed by a modern village. The archaeological remains suggest that in the past it was a small village with few houses. It was founded 2200 years ago under the Parthian and Sasanian empires.



AL-ZYATAK

Al-Zyatak is a large archaeological site of 20 ha located north-est of Al-Hurriyah, close to Hamman. During the Babylonian period (3000 years ago) it was probably a small village, while 2200 years ago, under the Parthian and Sasanian emperors, it became a major town with palaces, temples, houses and irrigated fields.





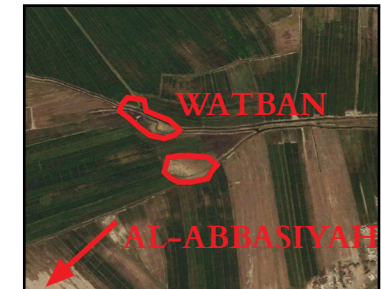
ABU SHARA

Abu Shara is a very small flat site extending for about 1 ha. In the past it was a small village with few houses, cultivated fields and irrigation channels all around. It was first settled by the Babylonians 3000 years ago and it was probably inhabited under the Parthian and Sasanian empires as well as during the Islamic period.



AL-ABYAD SHEMALI

Al-Abyad Shemali is a large site extending for 11 ha and located west of Nahb. The ancient site was a small town during the Babylonian period (3000 years ago), with many houses and temples as well as irrigated fields all around. It became a small village under the rule of the Parthian and Sasanian kings and it was abandoned at the beginning of the Islamic period.



THRANI

Thrani is a 10 ha site located south-east of Tell Wagsa. It was probably an important town under the Babylonian kings (3000 years ago), with many houses and temples as well as irrigated fields all around. The ancient city was inhabited for thousands of years under the rule of the Parthian and Sasanian kings and it was abandoned at the beginning of the Islamic period.



WATBAN

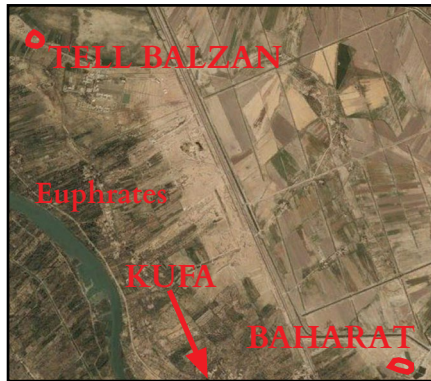
Watban is a small flat site extending for 2 ha north-east of Al-Abbasiyah. It was first settled 2200 years ago during the Parthian and Sasanian empires and it was inhabited until the Islamic period before being abandoned. It was a small village with a handful of houses and cultivated fields all around. Today part of the ancient site is damaged by cultivations.





TELL BALZAN

Tell Balzan is a small site of 1 ha located north-west of Kufa, near Baharat. It was first settled 2200 years ago during the Parthian and Sasanian empires and it was inhabited until the Islamic period before being abandoned. Tell Balzan was probably a small village with a handful of houses, cultivated fields and irrigation channels all around.



BAHARAT

Baharat is a small site of 1.3 ha located north-west of Kufa, near Tell Balzan. It was probably a small village consisting of few houses and cultivated fields all around. Baharat was first occupied 2200 years ago during the Parthian and Sasanian empires and it was inhabited until the Islamic period before being abandoned.

ABU DIBIA

The site of Abu Dibia consists of a single very small tell which may have hosted few houses. The earliest occupation of this site dates back to the Babylonian period (3000 years ago). Abu Dibia was inhabited for more than 3000 years, both during the Parthian and Sasanian periods, as well as during the Islamic epoch before being abandoned.



SEYID SHAHIR

Seyid Shahir is a 9 ha archaeological site located close to Abu Dibia. It has a particular shape consisting of three small telul located at the three boundaries of the site. It was probably an important town founded 2200 years ago by the Parthians or Sasanians. On the three telul and in the lower part of the town there were houses and temples as well as irrigated fields all around.





KUAR

Kuar is a large site of almost 50 hectares. During the Parthian and Sasanian era and then at the beginning of the Islamic period, Kuar was one of the largest cities in the region, together with Nahb and Al -Hira. The city consisted of hundreds of houses as well as public buildings and it was crossed by small navigable canals. Kuar is now largely destroyed by modern cultivations and a factory of bricks.

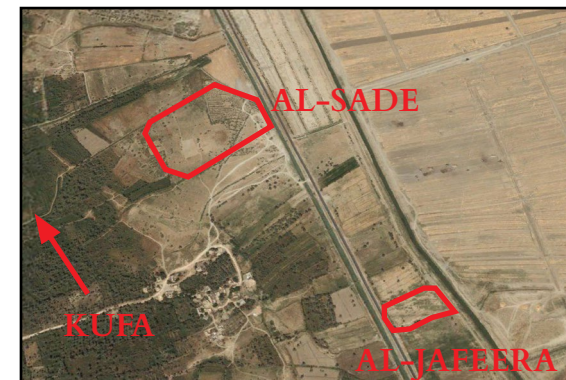


ABU TOHER

Abu Toher is a 3 ha small site located north-west of Kufa, near Kuar. The site was occupied for the first time 2200 years ago during the Parthian and Sasanian empires and it was inhabited until the Islamic period before being abandoned. Abu Toher was probably a small village with a handful of houses, cultivated fields and irrigation channels all around.

AL-SADE

Al-Sade is a small flat site extending about 1.5 ha. In the past it was a small village with few houses, cultivated fields and irrigation channels all around. It was first settled by the Parthians and Sasanians 2200 years ago and it was probably abandoned during the Islamic period. Today Al-Sade is largely damaged by modern cultivations.



AL-JAFEERA

Al-Jafeera is a 8 ha archaeological site located close to Al-Sade. It was probably an important town founded 2200 years ago by the Parthians or Sasanians. The town probably consisted of houses and public buildings as well as irrigated fields all around. Most of the ancient site is damaged by modern cultivations.





AL-JABAO

Al-Jabao is a small site less than 1 ha, located north-west of Kufa, near Al-Jafeera. It was probably a small village with few houses and cultivated fields all around. Al Jabao was first occupied 2200 years ago during the Parthian and Sasanian empires and it was abandoned approximately 1400 years ago. Today the site is threatened by modern cultivations which are damaging part of it.



MOHAMMED KHADA

Mohammed Khada is a small site of 1 ha located north-west of Kufa, near Al-Jabao. It was first settled 2200 years ago during the Parthian and Sasanian empires and it was inhabited until the Islamic period before being abandoned. Mohammed Khada was probably a small village with a handful of houses, cultivated fields and irrigation channels.

KHARCHIT

Kharchit is a 4 ha site located at the south end of the region, close to Mohammed Khada. It was a small village with a handful of houses probably settled by the Parthian and Sasanian kings about 2200 years ago. Cultivated fields and irrigation channels were probably located all around. Today Kharchit is damaged by modern cultivations and canalisa-tions.



TELL ASHARA

Tell Ashara was one of the largest towns in the region before the foundation of Kufa. The archaeological site is about 26 ha and is located in the centre of the modern city of Kufa. The numerous buildings excavated by the Iraqi archaeologists are about 2200 years old, the time of the Parthian and Sasanian empires. Tell Ashara is now protected with fences put by the SBAH to avoid looting.



Where to study archaeology



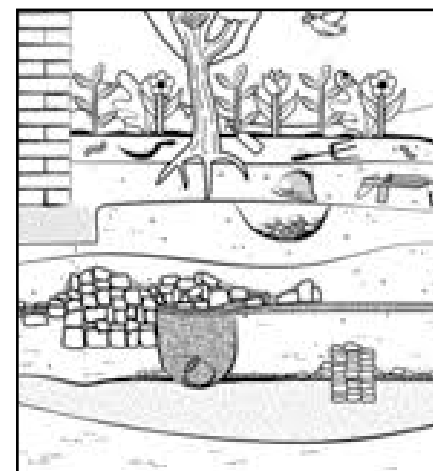
Archaeology can be studied at University level. In the Kufa region, the University of Kufa offers courses under the “College of Archaeology and Heritage”. The “College of Archaeology and Heritage” has the mission to prepare qualified professional in order to study Archaeology and Heritage cooperating with the local and international academics.



At the same time, professors and researchers of the University contribute to the maintenance, preservation and rehabilitation of the Heritage through practical work, workshops and courses. The University and its members contribute to the community wellbeing by considering the ethnic diversity and peaceful co-existence of the Iraqi people during ancient time as a symbol for national unity among them.

The archaeologist

Archaeologists study the origin and development of ancient human societies. They examine the cultures, languages, behaviours, archaeological remains, and physical characteristics of people in various parts of the world. Archaeologists use scientific techniques to dig the site. They observe, record, categorise, and interpret what they find, then share their discoveries with other scientists and the public.



Each archaeological site tells a story. All the historical events are preserved in the ground as different layers. Each layer represents a moment in the history of that place. The task of the archaeologists is to dig layer by layer in order to reconstruct all the events in the history of a site. Each layer contains the remains of buildings and objects used by ancient populations.

The National Museum of Iraq

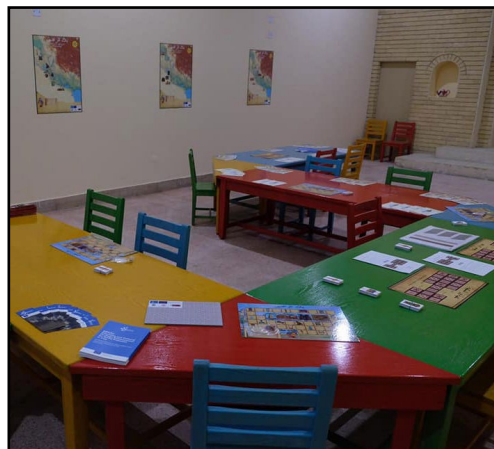
The objects found by the archaeologists must be stored and displayed in places where everyone can see them! Objects from the past are public property and need to be protected in order to allow also the future generations to see and appreciate them.

The National Museum of Iraq in the city of Baghdad is one of the most relevant museums in the world! It has been established in 1926 and it displays thousands of ancient artefacts covering the entire history of Iraq from prehistory to the emergence of Islam.

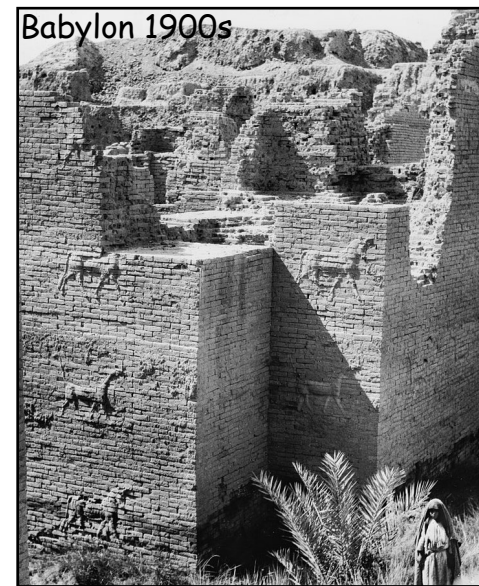


Bring your family to the museum!

At the National Museum of Iraq, there is a new room for children! Children can play with the past and learn the ancient history of Iraq in a fun way. Knowing the past will help children understand the importance of preserving the heritage. If you go to the museum with your family do not forget to ask to go to the EDUU didactic room!



The history of archaeology in Iraq



The archaeological explorations in Iraq has started 200 years ago. During this period many important ancient cities like Uruk, Ur, Ashur, Babylon, Nineveh, , Hatra and Al-Hira were found. These outstanding discoveries have allowed to understand the history of civilizations such as the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Parthian, Sasanians and many Islamic dynasties like the Ilkhanids and the Abbasids.

Archaeology in the Kufa region

Today the archaeologists are still working to reconstruct the history of the Kufa region. A team from Iraqi, Italian and Turkish universities and the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage is now working in the area between Kufa, Al-Abbasiyah and Al-Hurriyah to discover the ancient cities and towns.



Who protects our past?



The State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) is the Iraqi national body in charge of the protection of archaeological sites and monuments. In the Najaf governorate, the head office is located in Kufa. In addition to the director, numerous inspectors monitor the state of preservation of the sites.

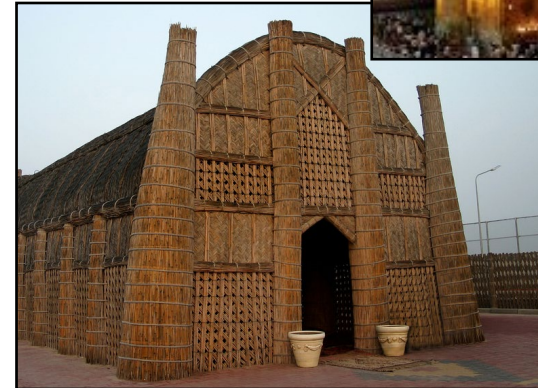


Each site is controlled by a keeper who has the task of protecting the site and of communicating its importance to the local population. The archaeological police is in charge of supporting SBAH representatives in the monitoring and preservation of the archaeological sites and heritage buildings.

Why is the past important?

The past tells us about our origins, the history of our ancestors, how they lived and how through their actions we have come to the present day.

It teaches us the mistakes not to be repeated and the important lessons to be treasured.



Thousands of Iraq's important archaeological sites and complexes are currently at risk! Everyone can help in protecting them, learn how in the next pages!



How can I protect the past?



The best way to protect a site is not to damage it with any kind of action!

Agricultural activities and the construction of buildings on an archaeological area cause the removal of ancient remains and finds.



Looting is an illicit activity carried out to steal ancient artefacts from sites. During the last decade thousands of archaeological sites in Iraq have been destroyed by looters!

If you see someone doing one of these activities on an archaeological site, call the archaeological police and the SBAH!

What to do if I find an ancient object?

Ancient objects such as fragments of pottery vessels, tools made of stone or clay, etc., are important to understand the life of our ancestors. A pot tells us how they cooked, a stone grinder tells us how they prepared food, a human or animal figurine made of clay could be ancient toys or used for religious purposes.



The role of archaeologists is to understand their function in order to tell the story of the people who owned them. The place where these objects are found is very important, because it helps us to understand where those activities were carried out. If you find an ancient object on a site, do not pick it up, but inform the keeper of the site and the SBAH authorities! They know how to collect and document it and if they can, they will tell you its story!

