



Field Report, 25 October 2022

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These Field Reports are prepared by the field staff of UNAMI's Development Support Office (DSO), who are based in Iraq's governorates, where they coordinate with local government officials, NGOs, community groups, and other development actors. They also monitor socio-economic and development trends to improve the UN's understanding of events in Iraq.

1. Qadisiya – Pieces of Iraq's History Come Home



Iraq's cultural heritage got a major boost after retrieving more than 17,000 artifacts from the government of United States last year. These included clay tablets, small statues, and cylindrical seals.

Most of the pieces recovered from the United States come from Cornell University, which has an extensive archive of ancient cuneiform tablets.

"Iraqi antiquities have been subject to smuggling for decades," according to Qahtan Al-Obaid, the director of Basra's antiquities and heritage.

The expert explains that "it is not possible to count the number of artifacts that were stolen from archaeological sites directly, because they are not numbered," and are also unknown or not yet discovered, especially in areas that witnessed armed conflicts.

He explains that "some of these thefts are intentional and come within the framework of organized crime," while others "are unintended, especially in remote areas where local residents search for precious stones and sell antiques in order to secure daily living, and they do not know their value and importance."

Archaeological sites throughout Iraq were subjected to great destruction, theft, and neglect during the wars over the past decades, especially in the phase that followed the military operations of the international coalition led by the United States to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003.

About 15,000 antiquities and 32,000 pieces were stolen from Baghdad Museum alone, and from 12,000 archaeological sites after the 2003 war.

Also, ISIS, which took control of a third of the country in June 2014, destroyed many archaeological sites, most of them in northern Iraq. Antiquities experts said ISIS fighters destroyed large artifacts and stole small artifacts for trade.

Recently the head of the Iraqi Antiquities and Heritage Authority, Laith Majid Hussein, announced that the Iraqi embassy in Berlin had retrieved 125 stone artifacts from the Institute of Near Eastern Archeology, which was represented by Susan Bullock during Iraq's participation in the 66th International Assyrian Conference held in July of this year in Frankfurt and Mainz. Laith Hussein said that the Iraqi embassy received the pieces loaned for study purposes in 1990.



Some of the historical artifacts retrieved by the Iraqi Embassy © social media



He added that these pieces are from the site of Abu Salabikh in Qadisiya Governorate and date back to the fourth era of Uruk (4000-3100 B.C.).¹

The low tells (small mounds) at Abu Salabikh, located 20 km northwest of the site of ancient Nippur in Al-Qadisiya Governorate, mark the site of a small city-state of the mid-third millennium BCE, with cultural connections to the cities of Kish, Mari, and Ebla.²

The site consists of several mounds and only eroded traces remain on the site's surface of habitation after the Early Dynastic Period.



Abu Salabikh Historical site © social media

Its contemporary name is uncertain: perhaps this was Eresh.³ Kish was suggested by Thorkild Jacobsen⁴ before excavations began. The Euphrates was the city's highway and lifeline. When its riverbed shifted in the middle third millennium BCE, the city dwindled away.

Abu Salabikh was excavated by an American expedition from the Oriental Institute of Chicago led by Donald P. Hansen in 1963 and 1965 for a total of eight weeks. The expedition found around 500 tablets and fragments, containing some of the earliest ancient literature,⁵ which was largely lost when the Iraq Museum in Baghdad was looted in the early stages of the Second Iraq War.

The site was a British concern after 1975, under the direction of Nicholas Postgate for the British School of Archaeology in Iraq (1975–89).⁶

The included school texts, literary texts, word lists, and some administrative archives, as well as the Instructions of Shuruppak, a well-known Sumerian “wisdom” text, of which the Abu Salabikh tablet is the oldest copy. A list of deities includes the oldest known mention of the Semitic god Ba‘al.⁷ Postgate's interdisciplinary approach was integrated under the broad aim of describing the daily life of a small Sumerian city, down to the lives of the simplest illiterate inhabitants.

- ¹ The site Abu Slabikh is in the southern alluvial plains of Iraq, approximately midway between Baghdad and Basra. The site is composed of a core of six mounds occupied from the Uruk through the Akkadian periods (ca. 3900- 2200 B.C.).
- ² The discovery of large numbers of cuneiform texts at the Syrian site of Tell Mardikh, which turned out to be the ancient city of Ebla, created a sensation in scholarly circles as well as among the public at large. Soon after the discovery synthetic accounts of the culture of ancient Ebla, as well as scholarly publications of the tablets uncovered in that city, began to appear. Although some time has passed since the initial opinions on the social and political organization of Ebla were expressed, many of the first impressions of scholars working on these materials have not been supported by the evidence which has been available. Many researchers had reexamined some of these assumptions considering the published documentation, concentrating on the chronology of the archives and on the relationships with the city-state of Mari and kish.
- ³ Matthews, Roger (2003). *The archaeology of Mesopotamia: theories and approaches*. London; New York: Routledge. ISBN 978-0-415-25316-1. OCLC 50252068
- ⁴ Thorkild Peter Rudolph Jacobsen (1904-1993) was a renowned Danish historian specializing in Assyriology and Sumerian literature. He was one of the foremost scholars on the ancient Near East.
- ⁵ Their work was concentrated on the main mound, where they uncovered tablets dating to the (mid-third millennium B.C).
- ⁶ Under the direction of Nicholas Postgate, on the main and west mounds, except for a small sounding and limited surface investigations, no additional work was undertaken at the Uruk mound until 1985.
- ⁷ Ba'al was a title and honorific meaning "owner", "lord" in the Northwest Semitic languages spoken in the Levant during antiquity. From its use among people, it came to be applied to gods

In 1990, the government of Germany requested the Iraqi government to loan some of the artifacts discovered by a German archeological mission working in southern Iraq for the purpose of study. The Iraqi government approved the request for two years.

Excavations were suspended with the Invasion of Kuwait (1990). "Plans to resume fieldwork have now been abandoned in the light of current political conditions," Postgate reports.

After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Iraq was put under sanctions followed by a military operation to liberate Kuwait, which suspended retrieval of the artifacts.

2. Muthanna – Autism Steals Children's Lives



Hassan is an 8-year-old child suffering from autism.⁸ He had communication difficulties, narrow interests, repetitive behaviour, and the absence of interest in other people, including the lack of eye contact.

But three years after joining a private institute for children with autism at Samawah, the capital city of Muthanna, Hasan started a new life. He has learned the skills he needs for daily activities and now plays and interacts with others while developing his social communication skills.

His mother, Zainab, age 41, says, “Now my son makes cartoon animations with painted colours, and he is back to a normal life. Three years ago, people sometimes chastised me when my child did something strange in front of other children, and they kept their children away from him. Most people in our society consider autistic children crazy and bully them.”

Zainab struggled to deal with and nurture her autistic child. She learned through social media about supporting autistic children in Iraq, and she shared her experience and tips with other families.

According to Dr. Ibrahim Safa, the Director of the Imam Hussain Autism Institute in Muthanna (established in 2018), Muthanna has 328 registered Autistic children between the ages of 1-13, but it has a capacity to support only forty children and admits children only between 5-7 years.

The institute provides care and specialized services, including one-on-one behaviour therapy with training for parents to help



Children in Learning class @ Autism Institute page



Hassan Makes Cartoon Characters © Institute Page

⁸ Autism spectrum disorder is a condition related to brain development that impacts how a person perceives and socializes with others, causing problems in social interaction and communication. The disorder also includes limited and repetitive patterns of behavior. There is no cure for autism spectrum disorder, intensive, early treatment can make a big difference in the lives of many children.

enhance children's skills at a low cost. The monthly fee ranges from 50,000 to 250,000 Iraqi dinars (\$35 to \$170). Treatment includes using play to help a child learn how to think and behave differently.



Children in Learning class @ Autism Institute page

According to Dr. Hussein Al Kaabai, the General Director of the National Autism Centre, autism in Iraq is on the rise. There are no official statistics, but it is estimated that there are 200,000 children with autism among a population of forty million in Iraq, up from 30,000 children in 2014.⁹ Doctors estimate that forty out of every 1,000 children in Iraq have autism. It is mainly diagnosed among boys, with four cases for every one detected among girls.

The National Autism Centre, established in Baghdad in 2018, is the only government-run center in Iraq that has five specialized doctors. Muthanna Governorate does not have private centers to provide care to autistic children.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one child in every one hundred children globally is believed to be autistic. The causes are still unknown, but WHO says that available scientific evidence suggests that there are probably many factors that make a child more likely to have autism, including environmental, brain development, and genetic factors.¹⁰

3. Diyala – Small Donations Can Make a Big Difference



The people of Diyala have always been famous for their generosity and they showed it by supporting workers and owners of the Al-Farouq market, who lost their jobs and businesses after a fire

burned down of the entire commercial complex in Baquba's main market in late June.

The mayor of Baquba district, Abdullah Al-Hayali, said that the fire led to the burning of sixty-eight shops, noting that the losses amounted to about five billion Iraqi dinars, equivalent to \$3.3 million.



The remaining of the Business complex © Diyala media

⁹ <https://www.thenationalnews.com/mena/iraq/2022/04/02/many-iraqi-families-with-autistic-children-left-to-cope-on-their-own/>

¹⁰ The brains of autistic children tend to grow faster than average during early childhood, especially during the first three years of life. We do not know why this rapid growth happens. But it means that in autistic children, parts of the brain communicate with each other in an atypical way. Evidence strongly suggests a genetic basis for autism. But it is unlikely that one specific gene is responsible for autism. It is more likely that several genes act together. Researchers have found many genes that might play a role in the development of autism.

Al-Hayali explained, "the results of the investigation currently indicated that the cause of the fire was due to an electrical short and bad electrical wiring, more over the absence of safety measures."

According to Mustafa Abdul-Hussein Kazem, a shop owner, the Ministry of Electricity was also responsible for the losses at the complex due to abuse of the network and the failure to provide suitable electrical transformers.

Regardless of who is to blame, the Diyala Chamber of Commerce was a pioneer in providing a helping hand to the owners of the shops by appealing to everyone in Diyala to participate in a donation campaign that provided nearly sixty million Iraqi dinars (\$40,000).



Donation campaign imposed by the nearby shops. © social media

Donations made by the people of nearby shops and Al-Farouq Mosque also contributed to the affected people with approximately forty-two million dinars (\$28,000). These funds were used to rehabilitate parts of the business complex and helped the owners restore their businesses again after two months of closure.

4. Wasit –A New School Year, New School Buildings



"School challenges in rural areas put heavy burdens on families," said Amjad Raheem, a member of the Wasit Teachers Syndicate Council, adding that the problems include an insufficient number of schools, unpaved roads, and poverty.

The overcrowded schools are affecting learning outcomes, while it is more difficult for school officials to implement their teaching plans. "The greater the number of students in a classroom, the less attention each student can receive from the teacher," said Raheem.

According to Engineer Ali Al-Musawi, the Head of the Schools' Buildings Department, "families in rural regions are obligated to travel long distances to reach alternative schools, the distance may reach 13 Km."

Traveling these distances, in some areas on unpaved roads, is just adding additional burdens on parents' lives in rural areas and on their kids. The opening of new schools will relieve a lot of these burdens.

On the 2 October, the Wasit local government inaugurated two school buildings in the rural areas of Al-Suwaira district, 160 Km north of Kut City. The schools have the capacity to accommodate eight hundred students.



Aerial view shows Al-Shejairia Primary School in Al-Suwaira District © Wasit Education Directorate

The newly opened schools were constructed at a cost of IQD 2.7 billion (\$1.85 million). The capacity of Al-Shejairia primary school is eighteen classrooms, whereas Jewamesa school contains twelve classrooms.

The Wasit Education Directorate is planning to add more schools in the upcoming years, and it continues to update the geographical distribution of schools to facilitate their reach.

The local government has laid the foundation stone for the construction of forty-eight schools according to the Iraqi Chinese framework agreement. The schools will be constructed by Power China Company within a period of two years.



Wasit Governor Lays the Foundation Stone for Launching the Works in the Chinese Schools in Wasit Province © Wasit Education Directorate

According to Dr. Ahmed Al-Atabi, the Director-General of the Wasit Education Directorate, the Chinese schools' project would help in solving the school crisis in some areas, but the province needs 300 schools to satisfy its needs during the upcoming three years. "We are committed to ensuring that the educational programs and services can reach all students and beneficiaries like the illiteracy eradication program and the Industrial Preparatory Schools," said Al-Atabi.

5. Anbar – Idea Turn to Reality - Younis Soap



Retired English language professor Younis Saleh owns a small private soap production factory in Heet¹¹ city in Anbar Governorate.

Heet contains a natural sulfur springs and people with skin diseases come to it from different areas of Anbar for treatment. From here the idea came to Saleh to produce a natural medical soap with the highest specifications using sulfur spring water from the city to help people.

Saleh began making soap in a small room of his house following the best methods. Now he owns a full-fledged factory with all the equipment and has a full set of safety conditions and quality control procedures. The factory covers an area of four hundred square meters, and two people work with him manufacturing soap.

¹¹ Heet also spelled Hit, is an Iraqi city in Al-Anbar province. Heet lies northwest of Ramadi, the provincial capital. Straddling the Euphrates River, Heet marks the beginning of the high sedimentary plain on the Euphrates, and it contains a number of hot springs. The city of Heet is also famous for its ancient yet still functioning water wheels (also known as norias, or al-Nawaeer) which used to play an important role in the irrigation of fields and palm groves.

His soap has become one of the most sought-after products in the area and has reached other of the governorates of Iraq within three years.

Saleh's natural soap hardens using the cold method, which depends on the preparation of oils. There is no need for a heating process except in the case of solid fatty materials that are heated and melted at a temperature of 60-70 degrees Celsius and then added to the rest of the oils.

Sodium hydroxide is added with constant stirring until the consistency becomes thick. Then the paste is poured into wooden molds and left for at least three days for the reaction to occur. It is then sealed and used only after three months or more.

His handicrafts are distinguished from others by not heating the oils in order to preserve all the minerals and vitamins contained in those oils.

This natural soap is manufactured in small quantities manually using a mixture of natural vegetable oils such as olive, palm, coconut, sunflower, castor, sweet almond oil, and sesame oil.

Commercial soaps on the other hand are manufactured in large quantities with industrial ingredients that produce a large foam, which causes the skin to dry out and strips it of the layer of natural oils that protect it from external factors.

The story of this success with the simplest beginnings is a lesson for young people who intend to open small projects but are hesitant. Such projects support the national economy, compete with the imported products, and create jobs opportunities for unemployed Iraqi youth.

Its prices are competitive, as the price of one bar of soap is IQD 2,000 (\$1.40).

Government data indicate that the country was industrially prosperous in the seventies, sixties, fifties and even the forties of the last century, and the volume of industrial sector production met the needs of the local market as well as exports abroad. The industrial sector constituted 23% of the volume of GDP before 2003.¹²

After 2003, more than eighteen thousand industrial sites in Iraq were suspended for various reasons.



Younis owns a soap production factory © yalla.net



A View from Inside the Factory © yalla.net



Drying stage © algrbiaalhaddath

¹² <https://www.aljazeera.net>

Some private industrial companies have revived their factories by establishing new production lines, but they still face an important challenge represented by the difficulty of marketing locally manufactured goods in internal markets, in addition to the pressures of imported products.

Saleh's soap one of these companies. He tries to overcome those obstacles by producing a distinguished product with competitive prices.



Packaging Process © algrbiaalhaddath

He urged unemployed young people to insist on looking for work, start their own business, and not surrender to the country's circumstances and the absence of government employment for graduates.

He concluded by saying, "failure is the beginning of success".

6. Najaf – Ashura ... A Saga of Endless Devotion

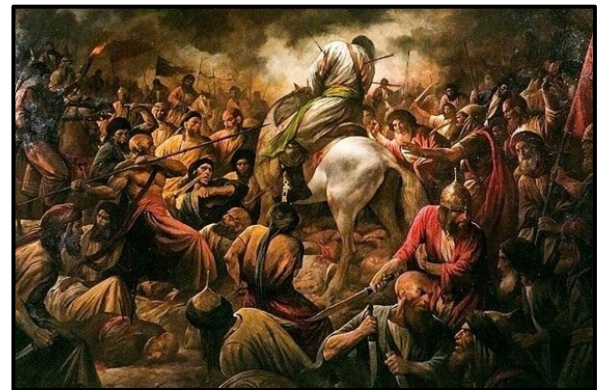


"I smell the sorrow in the air and hear the echo of crying children, is it Ashura already?" goes the opening line of popular poem chanted during the starting days of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

The tenth of Muharram (Ashura, means the tenth day of the month in Arabic) marks the tragic day of the battle of Kerbela (10 October 680 AD) between the army of the second Umayyad Caliph Yazid and a small army led by Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad PBUH.

"It is the most solemn and significant date on the calendar," said Dr. Jawad Al-Hakim, a Kufa university professor in Islamic history commenting on the event to Najaf DSO. Shiites and Sunnis commemorate Ashura alike, and the tenth of Muharram is an official holiday in all Islamic countries.

Every year and for the first ten days of Muharram, in Najaf, Kerbala, and many other cities in Iraq and around the globe, a number of events are held to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn.



The Battle of Kerbala by Italian painter Giordano Macellari, courtesy of his gallery

The events, which are hosted in homes or in specialized buildings, include congregations known as “matams,” which is a type of mass mourning ritual lasting for thirteen days.

“We annually hold these events to show our condolences to the prophet PBUH and his family,” says Mahdi Al-Kabi, age 53, a farm owner and member of a local congregation team that has organized and coordinated these events for decades.

Matams and the outdoor commemoration of Ashura, which concludes with intercession processions and theatrical presentations using urban spaces, transform the streets of Najaf into spaces of devotion.

Ruqayya, a 12-year-old girl loves these theatrical presentations. “I see the battle with my own eyes and feel the pain of Imam Hussain’s children,” as she weeps in sadness. People, and even walls, are covered in black as a visual mourning sign that extends to Safar, the second month of the Islamic calendar.

Ashura stimulates the other four senses with the widespread aroma of smoke from pots of Qima (a traditional Iraqi dish), the humming sounds of women weeping in matams, and poetry played by loudspeakers in streets and moving cars. The touch and taste of freshly baked bread, which is distributed for free to visitors along with black tea.

“My family prepares food at our house and my brother, who is a taxi driver, brings it to the matam to distribute among pilgrims,” said Ali Oda a 75-year-old retired clothes merchant who has managed a matam for more than 58 years.

The pinnacle of the events concludes by visiting Kerbala city on Ashura, where Najaf serves as a starting point or pass-through point for visitors from Iraq and other countries.

Poetry is the sister of sorrow they say, and lamentation poetry is an integral part of Ashura, as shown by the poetry competition events and the continuous introduction of new literary forms and contemporary artistic content. Consequently, the impact of the tragedy spilled over to stamp the Iraqi songs with sad tones as some Iraqi art critics argue.



A procession of more than forty Christian clergymen visited Karbala to perform Muharram ceremonies ©aliraqnet.net



Shiite pilgrims commemorate Hussein in Karbala ©dw.com/ar



Pilgrims march towards Karbala carrying flags for the occasion ©m.annabaa.org



Iraq Resident Coordinator Office (RCO) & UNAMI Development Support Office (DSO)



The community in Najaf, supported by the government, provides various kinds of free services needed by visitors such as rest places, food, drinks, medical care, communication, logistics, and provide safe places for lost persons.