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Iraq: ancient Babylon archaeological site damaged by military activity



Babylon Temple: update on damage assessment

9 July 2009 – The ancient site of Babylon – home to the Hanging Gardens, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World – has been significantly damaged due to its use as a military base by coalition forces in Iraq from 2003-2004, according to a [report](#) released by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) today.

Digging, cutting scraping and leveling resulted in considerable damage to the archaeological city, with the Ishtar Gate, the Processional Way and other key structures also being harmed, the Final Report by UNESCO's International Coordination Committee for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq (ICC Iraq) said.

“Without pointing fingers, we now have a clear picture of the situation,” [said](#) Mohamed Djelid, director of UNESCO's Office for Iraq.

The report, launched at a press conference in Paris, “provides the starting-point for the major challenge of restoration and conservation,” he added.

Babylon was the capital city for two famous kings of antiquity: Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC), who introduced one of the world's first law codes, and Nebuchadnezzar (604-562 BC).

Partially excavated over the last century, much of ancient Babylon, which lies 90 kilometres south of Baghdad, remains undiscovered.

According to a 2005 British Museum report, the use of Babylon as a camp by the Multi-National Force between April 2003 and December 2004 by coalition forces is “tantamount to establishing a military camp around the Great Pyramid in Egypt or around Stonehenge in Britain.”

The Final Report noted that the Iraqi Government's 1978-1987 restoration project rebuilt several buildings, erected modern facilities and undertook new landscaping, in part to create a new palace for Saddam Hussein, "to the great detriment of the site."

Babylon was plundered during the 2003 war, when contents from the Hammurabi and Nebuchadnezzar museums and from the Babylon Library and Archive were stolen and destroyed. The new study noted that no new "malicious" or accidental damage has been reported since December 2004, and currently problems are due to neglect and maintenance and buildings previously restored are in poor condition.

Experts behind the Final Report called for a conservation plan to be implemented with the ultimate goal of nominating Babylon to join nearly 900 other sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

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