

The Pillage and Devastation of Mesopotamia: Mosul - Another “Paradise Lost”?

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“God seems to have left the receiver off the hook - and time is running out.” Arthur Koestler, “Astride the Two Cultures”

Iraq is now threatened with a flood of biblical proportions. The Mosul dam, thirty miles north of Iraq’s ancient third city is likely to burst, due to the mismanagement and potential fraud relating to the \$27 million “donated” by the United States for its repair, according to a Report by Stuart Bowen, Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, released on Tuesday, 30th October.

In September 2006, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACE) stated: “In terms of internal erosion potential of the foundation, Mosul Dam is the most dangerous dam in the world If a small problem (at) Mosul Dam occurs, failure is likely.” The dam is the largest in Iraq and the fourth largest in the Middle East. Were the dam breached, the ACE estimate that Mosul city (2002 population 1.7 million) would be engulfed in a wall of water twenty metres (sixty six feet) high, which would flood all in its path down to Baghdad. In May this year, General David Petraeus and US Ambassador Ryan Crocker, wrote to “Prime Minister” Nuri Maliki, urging him to make the repair of the dam a “national priority”. Maliki’s U.S., puppet, corruption ridden, government is playing down the dangers - it is thought to avoid causing panic - and next to nothing has been done by way of action.

The Mosul region in Nineveh province, has been continually inhabited for eight thousand years and incorporates the ancient city of Nineveh, named after the god Nina and was capitol of the Assyrian empire, built around 3,700 BC. Jewellery, combs and the “oldest dice know to history”, have been found there.* The region and people’s stretch back to Mesopotamia’s dawn. Mosul is known variously as “The city of two springs” (Um Al-Rabi’ain); Autumn and Spring being so similar, when the fertile land nearby is carpeted with anemones, periwinkles, wild tulips and a vibrant tapestry of flora. It is also called Al-Faiha, (The Paradise) Al-Khadra (The Green) and The Pearl of the North. Al-Mosul means “The Linking Point”. It was long on history’s “Silk Road” from China to the West and now is connected by road to Syria (of whose capitol, Damascus, the Prophet, legend has it, turned his face from, saying: “No one should enter Paradise twice.”) and Iran (Persia) and Turkey, “Gateway to the Orient”.

Mosul is also known as “God’s City” and “City of the Prophets”, reflecting the wealth of places of worship and of Saints and Prophets believed lived and buried here. The Mosque of

the resting place of the Prophet Jerjis, was last renovated in 1393 AD., its eye-wateringly beautiful reliefs and its marble body were described by the explorer Ibn Jubair, in the 12th century. The Mujadidi Mosque, with its beautiful dome, dates back to the 12th century. The Prophet Jonah is believed buried in the mosque which bears his name, rising over Nineveh's ruins, where, it is said, a tooth of the whale who so tried him, is also hidden. Muslims and Christians alike paid homage here. Pre-invasion, the area teemed with vendors of everything from souvenirs to falafel and tiny glasses of cardamon flavoured coffee, hand-made artefacts - and families picnicked on the grassy slopes below, in the mosque's shadow, after school, taking photographs of a favourite day out.

The Great Mosque (known as the Nurid Mosque) was built in A.D. 1172, by Nuriddin Zangi. It is famed for its fifty two metre high, bent minaret, which towers above the trees; Iraq's leaning tower of Pisa, with its exquisitely patterned brick work and also named Al-Hadra - "The Humped". The Mashad (shrine) of Yabya Abdul Kassem is another 13th century gem, with conical dome, brickwork a delicate art form and calligraphy fashioned in blue Mosul marble. It has stood over eight hundred years on the bank of the Tigris, surviving and being even revered by Mesopotamia's occupiers. Will it survive Bush, Blair and Brown's "Christian soldiers" and their useless puppets?

Ancient churches include the 13th century Church of Simon Peter and that of Saint Thomas, thought to be from the same era. Saint Benham's Monastery (also called Deir al-Jubb - the Cistern Monastery) on the Nineveh Plain, where Nimrud flourished, also dates to the 12th or 13th century. A unique place of pilgrimage, as written of before in these columns, is the 4th century AD., Monastery of Saint Matthew, where he is believed buried and has eternal healing powers, where the sick are brought and laid by his tomb, in a tiny chancel, as candles are lit and prayers said - by all religious denominations.

But as the 13th century Black Palace, whose remains include the delicate arched twin entrances, surrounded by brickwork wondrously minute and fine, these are "modern" buildings.

Nineveh's walls still stand, testimony to architectural genius pre-dating Christ and the Prophet. In 619-626 B.C., Assur-bani-pal made the city the centre of the civilised world and filled it with gardens, orchards and imported rare trees. This was possible because before him, the ruler Sennacherib had brought water in an eighty km., canal and built a dam for water regulation. Unlike the present incompetents, the engineers of yesteryear also knew how to control it.

Nineveh's walls - so far - remain, testimony to their expertise.

The remains of Sennacherib's palace also still exist, with seventy-one chambers and halls and twenty-seven entrances, guarded by winged bulls and lions. The bas-reliefs on the walls were removed and taken to the British Museum, in the mid-Nineteenth Century.

Mesopotamia has suffered uniquely in the rape of her heritage, at the hands of invaders.

The second capitol of the region was Nimrud, where between 858-824 B.C., Shalmaneser III, constructed a ziggurat, similar to the great Malwiya of Samarra, now damaged as the result of U.S. soldiers using it as a snipers' eyrie. Unspeakable sacrilege - and a war crime under the Hague Convention.

Shalmaneser's creations also included the Temple of Ninurta. From Nimrud too, wonders look out across the millennia. The ivory head of a beauty, from 720 B.C., known as the "Mona Lisa of Nimrud". One building is the Temple of Nadu, God of Wisdom, Arts and Sciences (built sometime between 810-782 B.C.) As all Iraq, gems from the womb of history, abound, too numerous to mention.

Now, as the vandalism since 2003 continues, all are in danger of being swept away, with half a million souls, who have already suffered so unimaginably from the actions of America and Britain.

Mosul is where muslin, that most delicate of fabrics, was created. It is a region where the delicacy of all – architecture, ancient and modern, traditional dishes, dress, antiques, jewellery – strikes the visitor. A favourite hotel has the most delicate of fountains, a wonder to behold, in the reception area. The staff laughed, as I could never resist running my hand under the cool lace, that its patterns created. "It represents the eternity of the Tigris, Madam", I was told.

Under the West's watch, the revered Tigris now – potentially – threatens all in its path.

Meanwhile, the Pentagon is reportedly sending fifty thousand playing cards to troops (what is it about the Pentagon and playing cards?) with pictures of archaeological sites and tips as to how to protect them. (Tip from planet Earth: Don't build bases on them; don't drop bombs on or near them; don't use them to fire from. Guard them, don't loot them – and above all, treat them as the fragile, precious jewels that are the wondrous history of civilisation itself – utterly sacred.)

There is one imponderable. During the 1991 Gulf war, U.S. ally Turkey, reduced the flow of the Tigris by over fifty percent, from its own dams, at source, causing severe damage to agriculture. In Mosul the great river was so depleted that lorries drove in to collect silt and it was sometimes so low it could be near waded across. As a temporary measure, why cannot Turkey be asked to do this again, the lesser of the evils, taking to weight of millions of gallons, off the ailing Mosul Dam until a solution can be found.

Further, why are the U.S., and U.K. Engineering Corps unable to solve the problem, when under Saddam Hussein, even under the restrictions on materials under the embargo, had no such problems?

I put the questions to the (U.K.) Ministry of Defence ("Is Mosul in the north of Iraq?" they asked) who then said queries should be addressed to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, whose spokesman said that the Iraqi government seemed to: "...have taken a view that it may not be as bad as reported". Were they to make a request for help, it would, of course be considered. No urgency then – and protection of the population and history is incumbent, in international law, on the occupying forces.

Also sanguine, is Iraq's "Minister" of Water Resources, Abdul Latif Jamal Rashid, who said on Wednesday 7th November, that the ACE assessment of the Dam was: "exaggerated and swelled ..."

So, a people and a region of historic treasure, lauded through time and poetry (Kipling: "At one with Neneveh and Tyre"; Masefield: "Quinquireme of Nineveh, from distant Ophir ...") seems set, short of a miracle, to be left to Fate.

The region hosts the shrine of the Old Testament prophet Nahum, "Nahum the Elkoshite", in the Bible. He foretold the fall of Nineveh: "... their nobles shall lay in the dust. Nineveh laid waste, who is going to pity her?" Not, it seems, the new crusaders and their puppets.

"The legacy of Iraq is unassailable, legendary, glorious, immortal", wrote Henrietta McCall. Now to be another "Paradise Lost"?

Notes

* The indispensable "From Sumer to Saddam", Geoff Simons, Macmillan.1994.
<http://www.amazon.com/Iraq-Sumer-Saddam-Geoff-Simons/dp/1403917701>

Astride the Two Cultures: Arthur Koestler at 70
<http://www.alibris.com/search/books/qwork/470972/used/Astride%20the%20Two%20Cultures:%20Arthur%20Koestler%20at%2070>

Please also see "Iraq - The Bradt Travel Guide", Karen Dabrowska, 2002.
<http://www.amazon.co.uk/Iraq-Bradt-Travel-Karen-Dabrowska/dp/1841620270>

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http://www.amazon.com/Baghdad-Great-Cities-World-Nikki/dp/0836850491/sr=1-5/qid=1171018142/ref=sr_1_5/105-9176229-7042804?ie=UTF8&s=books

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