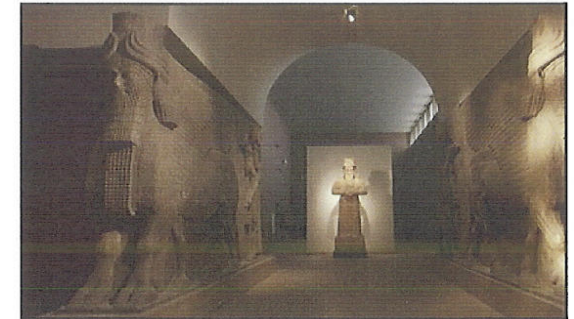


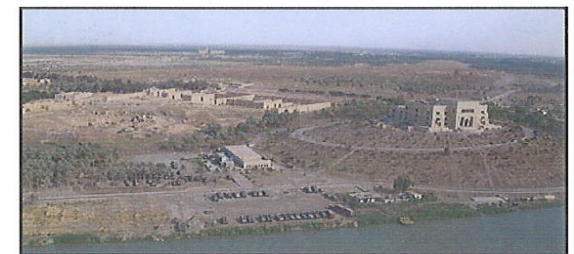


Iraqi Culture – A long Term Economic Driver

- Preserving and Developing Iraq's Cultural Heritage Holds Significant Long-Term Economic Promise
 - Post-Saddam Looting and Destruction
- Initiatives to Bolster Iraq's Cultural Antiquities
 - Greek Aid and Expertise for Iraq's Museums
 - Recovering Iraq's Stolen Antiques and Artifacts
 - Restoring the Baghdad National Museum
 - Development Around the Shrine of Imam Hussein
 - Iraq's Book Market Reopened
- The Future of Cultural Tourism in Iraq
 - Could Become the Second Biggest Industry After Oil



Baghdad's National Museum



Ancient City of Babylon

Assessment: Cultural preservation and reconstruction could be a boon to Iraq. Iraq is poised for development and must now continue to reach out for international investment and assistance to take advantage of economic potential.

Long heralded as the cradle of civilization, Iraq's borders contain a rich landscape of culture and history. Though much of this history has been looted and pillaged over years of conflict, recent gains in security and stability are allowing new opportunities to invest in preserving and developing Iraq's cultural heritage. Recent initiatives hold promise that Iraq's embattled historic cities, museums, and attractions can again be utilized for both the significant long-term economic promise for Iraq's tourism sector, and the overall benefit of humanity.

Currently, Iraq's tourism industry still suffers neglect, but there is still much hope for reviving this potentially lucrative industry. Five years after U.S. and Coalition Forces deposed Saddam Hussein, Iraq is still recovering from the catastrophic looting and destruction of historic antiquities that chronicled nearly 8,500 years of human history; attractions that could potentially draw in millions of adventurers and cultural enthusiasts alongside religious pilgrims every year. Coupling these events with the mass exodus of cultural curators, business savvy investors and other experts, Iraq was left with a once prolific historic landscape in dire need of cooperation to help regain what was lost and to assist in rebuilding what was broken.

Many projects and initiatives are beginning to take shape as Iraq gains allies in cultural reconstruction. In a noteworthy meeting in Athens on 27 January between Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari and Greek Foreign Minister Doro Bakoyanni, Greece committed to partnering with Iraq in an effort to reconstruct the countries war torn museums and archaeological sites by offering financial aid, as well as expertise. While it is difficult to tell how much Iraq could ultimately expand their culture based economic revenue, taking advantage of Greek aid and expertise will likely pay great dividends in the future. Greek cultural tourism provides nearly 30 billion dollars annually, or roughly 15 percent of the country's GDP, and they were the 16th most visited country in 2007.

Many notable initiatives to assist in boosting the cultural preservation and allure of Iraq are already in progress. The Iraqi Tourism and Antiquities Ministry announced a plan on 23 January aimed at regaining control of stolen Iraqi antiquities – including the some 14,000 priceless treasures were looted from the

Baghdad National Museum alone. Additionally, the International Relief and Development non-profit organization is providing 13 million dollars through the Iraq Cultural Heritage Project to develop the staff and infrastructure of Baghdad National Museum and other collections. Other initiatives include the 100 million dollar project to develop the area surrounding the Shrine of Imam Hussein, the World Monument Fund's project to help preserve and assist the development of the ancient city of Babylon, and the recent opening of the Baghdad Book Market 18 months after the historic intellectual center was destroyed by a massive car bomb.

According to UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization official, Philippe Delanghe, "cultural tourism could become Iraq's second biggest industry after oil"; with some of the most significant archaeological sites, cultural attractions, and monuments in the world. While Iraq will need much more international investment and assistance in order to preserve the country's rich history and create the infrastructure for Iraq's tourist market to take off, these initial projects could spur the requisite development to take economic advantage of Iraq's cultural and historic strengths.

In the long term, cultural preservation and reconstruction could be a boon to Iraq by helping create jobs, repair infrastructure, and diversify the oil-centric economy. While much work remains to be done, Iraq is poised for development and must now continue to reach out for international investment and assistance in order to take advantage of the economic potential contained within the historic "land between two rivers".