



## CULTURE AND HERITAGE IN IRAQ

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### **Abstract**

Iraq has one of the world's oldest cultural histories. Iraq is where the Ancient Mesopotamian civilizations were, whose legacy went on to influence and shape the civilizations of the Old World. Culturally, Iraq has a very long and rich heritage. The country is known for its poets and its painters and sculptors are among the best in the Arab world, some of them being world-class.

### **Introduction**

Iraq has one of the world's oldest cultural histories. Iraq is where the Ancient Mesopotamian civilizations were, whose legacy went on to influence and shape the civilizations of the Old World. Culturally, Iraq has a very long and rich heritage. The country is known for its poets and its painters and sculptors are among the best in the Arab world, some of them being world-class. Iraq is known for producing fine handicrafts, including rugs and carpets. The architecture of Iraq is seen in the sprawling metropolis of Baghdad, where the construction is mostly new, with some islands of exquisite old buildings and compounds, and elsewhere in thousands of ancient and modern sites across Iraq.

Unlike many Arab countries, Iraq embraces and celebrates the achievements of its past in pre-Islamic times. What is now Iraq was once the Cradle of Civilization in Ancient Mesopotamia and the culture of Sumer, where writing and the wheel were invented.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> In the 8th and 9th centuries, the Islamic Abbasid Caliph's presided over what was then one of the world's richest civilizations.

While Iraq's first film projection took place in 1909, cinema was not truly regarded as a cultural activity or pastime until the 1920s. The first cinemas, like the famous al-Zawra cinema on Baghdad's bustling thoroughfare al-Rashid, played mostly American silent films for British citizens.

In the 1940s under the rule of King Faisal II of Iraq, a real Iraqi cinema began. Supported by British and French financiers, movie production companies established themselves in Baghdad. The Baghdad Studio was established in 1948, but soon came apart when tensions between the Arab and Jewish founders flared up. For the most part, the product was purely commercial, fluffy romances with plenty of singing and dancing often set in small villages. The World of Arts (Dunyat Alfann) studio, which was founded by actors, reached for more serious fare. In 1955, they produced Haidar Al-Omar's *Fitna*

wa Hassan, an Iraqi retelling of Romeo and Juliet, that received international attention. But for the most part, the strong-fist rule of the state discouraged any socially relevant films.

In 1959 when King Faisal II's government was overthrown, the Cinema and Theater General organization came into existence with the purpose of promoting the political goals of the new regime both in documentaries and features. Typical were documentaries like the 1969 *Al Maghishi Project*, which showcased the government's irrigation campaigns and the 1967 *A Wedding in Heaven*, which celebrates the air force and their weapons system. The 1968 revolution that put the Ba'ath party in power further solidified the government's control of film material, and the state's need to make all films validate its power.

Saddam Hussein's ascension to power in 1979 pushed the Iraqi cinema in a slightly different direction. The drain on national resources from the 1980 Iraq-Iran war brought film production to a near halt. The few films put into production were mainly intent on glorifying a mythic Iraqi history or celebrating Hussein's rule. In 1981, the government commissioned Egyptian filmmaker Salah Abouseif to make *Al-Qadisiya*, a period epic recounting the triumph of the Arabs over the Persians in 636 AD. Likewise Mohamed Shukri Jameel's melodramatic *The Great Question* (*al-Mas' Ala Al-Kubra*) cast British actor Oliver Reed as the vicious Lt-Col Gerard Leachman who is righteously killed in the 1920 Iraqi revolution.

In 1980 Hussein promoted his own mythology with the autobiographical 6-hour epic *The Long Days* (*al-Ayyam al-tawila*), the saga of Hussein's participation in the 1958 failed assassination attempt on Prime Minister Abd al-Karim Qasim, and his subsequent heroic escape back to Tikrit. The film was edited and partially directed by Terence Young, the British director who made his name helming the early James Bond films *Dr. No* and *Thunderball* (film). Hussein is played by Saddam Kamel, a cousin and son-in-law of Hussein's, who eventually ran afoul of the dictator and was murdered in 1996.

## **Literature**

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Iraqi literature is, and has been, deeply marked by Iraq's political history.

In the late 1970s, a period of economic upturn, prominent writers in Iraq were provided with an apartment and car by Saddam Hussein's government, and were guaranteed at least one publication per year. In exchange, literature was expected to express and galvanise support for the ruling Ba'ath Party. The Iran–Iraq War (1980-1988) fuelled a demand for patriotic literature, but also pushed a number of writers into opting for exile. According to Najem Wali, during this period, "[e]ven those who chose to quit writing saw themselves forced to write something that did not rile the dictator, because even silence was considered a crime."

From the late 1980s onwards, Iraqi exile literature developed with writers whose "rejection of dominant ideology and [whose] resistance to the wars in Iraq compelled them to formulate a 'brutally raw realism' characterized by a shocking sense of modernity" (N. Wali).

Late 20th century Iraqi literature has been marked by writers such as Saadi Youssef, Fadhil Al-Azzawi, Mushin Al-Ramli, Salah Al-Hamdani, Abdul Rahman Majeed al-Rubaie and Sherko Fatah.

## **Iraqi Sport**

Football is the most popular sport in Iraq. The Iraq national football team were the 2007 AFC Asian Cup Champions after defeating Saudi Arabia in the final, held in Jakarta, Indonesia. In 2006, Iraq reached the football final of the 2006 Asian Games in Doha, Qatar, after defeating former FIFA World Cup semi-finalists South Korea and eventually finished as runners-up, winning silver. The football tournament at the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, Greece, saw Iraq finish in fourth place, with the Italy national football team claiming bronze from a single goal.

The Iraqi Football Association is the governing body of football in Iraq, controlling the Iraq national football team and the Iraq Super League (also known as Dawri Al-Nokba). It was founded in 1948, and has been a member of FIFA since 1950, and the Asian Football Confederation since 1971.

Al-Shorta (Police Club) are considered the biggest club in the history of Iraq, having won the league in 2012–13 and 2013–14 and they also have an Arab Champions League title to their name which they won in 1982. Other big clubs include Al-Quwa Al-Jawiya, Al-Zawraa, Erbil SC, Duhok SC, Al Talaba and Najaf FC. Basketball, swimming, weightlifting, bodybuilding, boxing, kickboxing, and tennis are also popular sports.

The Iraqi Football Association (Arabic: الاتحاد العراقي لكرة القدم) is the governing body of football in Iraq, controlling the Iraq national football team and the Iraq Super League (also known as Dawri Al-Nokba). It was founded in 1948, and has been a member of FIFA since 1950, and the Asian Football Confederation since 1971.

## Cuisine

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**Iraqi cuisine** or **Mesopotamian cuisine** has a long history going back some 10,000 years – to the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Ancient Persians.<sup>[1]</sup> Tablets found in ancient ruins in Iraq show recipes prepared in the temples during religious festivals - the first cookbooks in the world.<sup>[1]</sup> Ancient Iraq, or *Mesopotamia*, was home to a sophisticated and highly advanced civilization, in all fields of knowledge - including the culinary arts.<sup>[1]</sup> However, it was in the Islamic Golden Age when Baghdad was the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate that the Iraqi kitchen reached its zenith.<sup>[1]</sup> Today, the cuisine of Iraq reflects this rich inheritance, as well as strong influences from the culinary traditions of neighbouring Persia, Turkey, and the Syria region.<sup>[1]</sup>

. Some popular dishes include *Kebab* (often marinated with garlic, lemon, and spices, then grilled), *Gauss* (grilled meat sandwich wrap, similar to *Döner kebab*), *Bamieh* (lamb, okra, and tomato stew), *Quzi* (lamb with rice, almonds, raisins, and spices), and salad in *pita*, *Kubbah* (minced meat ground with bulghur wheat, or rice and spices), *Masgûf* (grilled fish with pepper and tamarind), and *Maqluba* (a rice, lamb, tomato, and aubergine dish). Stuffed vegetable dishes such as *Dolma* and *Mahshi* are also popular.<sup>[2]</sup>

Contemporary Iraq reflects the same natural division as ancient Mesopotamia,<sup>[3]</sup> which consisted of Assyria in the arid northern uplands and Babylonia in the southern alluvial plain.<sup>[3]</sup> *Al-Jazira* (the ancient Assyria) grows wheat and crops requiring winter chill such as apples and stone fruits.<sup>[3]</sup> *Al-Irāq* (Iraq proper, the ancient Babylonia) grows rice and barley, citrus fruits, and is responsible for Iraq's position as the world's largest producer of dates.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Cultural heritage

Iraq is a country of a wide and varied heritage, home to Muslims. As such many have contributed to the wide spectrum of Iraqi Culture.

Traditional music consists of instruments such as ouds, flutes, violins, drums, and tambourines. Now however, there are many young artists generating pop, rap, and wider types of musical genres. Kulthum and Fairouz are two woman singers renowned for their voices and especially loved in Iraq.

Tea houses are scattered throughout Iraq, and in the afternoon, it is a habit for shopkeepers to retreat into the back with close friends to sip tea over gossip, an Iraqi "siesta".

Arab rites of passage in Iraq are primarily centered on children being educated to correctly read the Quran. The Quran is a difficult text to read properly for various reasons, among them: the depth of meaning and various uses of a large number of distinct and indistinct words, the various schools of thought concerning tajwid or what exactly makes a "proper" recitation, and the complex sounds Arabic demands from human vocal cords. A child (or any person) who has completely memorized the Quran is called a "hafiz", or "guardian". There is usually a large celebration in the child's honor if he has reached this level of excellence.

### **Cultural institutions**

Some important cultural institutions in the capital include the Iraqi National Orchestra (rehearsals and performances were briefly interrupted during the Occupation of Iraq, but have since returned to normal) and the National Theatre of Iraq (the theatre was looted during the 2003 Invasion of Iraq, but efforts are underway to restore the theatre). The live theatre scene received a boost during the 1990s, when UN sanctions limited the import of foreign films. As many as 30 movie theatres were reported to have been converted to live stages, producing a wide range of comedies and dramatic productions.

Institutions offering cultural education in Baghdad include the Academy of Music, Institute of Fine Arts, and the Music and Ballet school Baghdad. Baghdad also features a number of museums including the National Museum of Iraq - which houses the world's largest and finest collection of artifacts and relics of Ancient Iraq civilizations; some of which were stolen during the Iraq War.

### **References**

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