

MODERN IRAQ



Fire Wood Is Scarce in Iraq.

Prepared by National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C.—WNU Service.

IRAQ, where American explorers recently discovered a complete historic township, dating from the early fourth millennium, is the modern name for the traditional Garden of Eden, historically known as Mesopotamia. Many historians hold that somewhere in Iraq—in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers—is to be found the cradle of civilization.

Upon the breaking up of the Turkish empire following the World War Mesopotamia became a British mandate which was erected into the Arab kingdom of Iraq with a Mohammedan prince from Mecca upon the throne. Such is the latest form assumed by the Phoenix among nations. In the last six thousand years Babylonian, Assyrian, Chaldean, Persian, Greek, Roman and Saracen civilizations have flourished in Mesopotamia, each rising from the ashes of its predecessor.

The great irrigation works which, throughout the centuries, had kept the Tigris-Euphrates valley green, rich and flourishing were destroyed by invading Mongols and allowed to decay by heedless Turks. The Garden of Eden became a treeless desert, except for a few date palms along the river banks. Cities like Baghdad and Basra fell into decay and seemed fast approaching the fate which had overtaken Ur and Babylon, where jackals howl above a lonely waste.

Then followed a rebirth during the throes of the great war. Once more boats crowded the swift and treacherous reaches of the Tigris. Once more the bazaars of Baghdad and Basra and Mosul hummed with world traffic. Marauding desert robber tribes were kept in perpetual peace by airplanes humming over their remote villages. Sanitary regulations and electric lighting made town and country both more safe and more healthful. Ice factories and soda water establishments helped alleviate summer days of 120 degrees in the shade. Levees were built to keep the flooding rivers within their banks and slowly bit by bit work was begun on repairing irrigation works and building railroads. Thus was modern Iraq born.

The new kingdom under British mandate embraces the valley of the Tigris-Euphrates between the Arabian desert on one side and the Persian uplands on the other. To the northwest lies the French mandate of Syria and to the north the Kurdish highlands of Turkey. Southward stretches the Persian gulf, the country's salt water outlet to the wide world. Within this strip of territory are barely 3,000,000 people where once flourished a population denser than that of modern Belgium.

What Baghdad Is Like.

There are three principal cities: Mosul, of oil fame, is in the north; Baghdad, the capital in the central part; and the important port of Basra in the south. Of the three Baghdad perhaps is most famous.

From the deck of a Tigris steamer Baghdad looms up boldly, its splendid skyline of domes and minarets reminding one of some "Midway" of World's fair memory. An odd pontoon bridge connects the two parts of the city, separated by the yellow Tigris. On the west bank is the old town, inclosed by date and orange groves. From here the Baghdad-Mosul railway starts on its long run across the trackless desert. East of the river, on the Persian side, is "new" Baghdad with its government offices, barracks, consulates, prisons, etc.

Beyond, as far as the eye can reach in every direction, stretches the vast, flat, treeless empty plain of Mesopotamia—a region once more populous than Belgium.

The traveler is paddled ashore from the steamer in a "goofah," a queer, coraclelike craft in use here since Jonah's day. A goofah is woven from willows about six feet in diameter, is circular and basket-shaped, and is coated outside with bitumen. Some say Moses was cut adrift in one of these goofahs.

Old City Mostly in Ruins.

Another strange craft at Baghdad is the "kelek," a Kurdish invention. The kelek is a raft made of inflated goat-skins, held together by poles and covered with a platform of straw mats. These keleks come down to Baghdad in hundreds from Mosul, bringing wool, pottery, grain and skins.

The present custom house at Baghdad is a wing of the old palace of Harun-al-Rashid; yards of scrawling Arabic characters, cut in marble panels, still adorn its historic walls.

Baghdad arteries of traffic are mere alleys, often so narrow that two donkeys cannot pass. Once Turkish soldiers tried to move artillery through Baghdad. The streets were so narrow the horses had to be unhitched, and men moved the guns about by hand.

A great wall encircles Baghdad, with guarded gateways, as in medieval days. Flat-roofed, huddled Moorish houses, many almost windowless and each surrounding its own open court, are a distinct feature of the older parts of Baghdad. On these flat roofs Arabs spend the summer nights with tom-toms, flutes, water-pipes, and dancing women. Facing the river, removed from the Arab town, are built the imposing foreign consulates, mercantile offices, and the sumptuous homes of rich Jews, Armenians, Greeks and Syrians—the men who make New Baghdad.

But the Baghdad of All Baba's day, with the splendor of Aladdin's enchanted age, is gone forever. The palaces, the mosques, and minarets are mostly in ruins. Even the tomb of lovely Lady Zobeida, favorite wife of Harun-al-Rashid, is tumbled down and decayed. It is into modern monuments to New Baghdad—into roads, bridges, public buildings, irrigation works, army organization, dredging the Tigris, etc.—that the Young Turks put their money.

Modern Baghdad is in safer hands; no dissipated royalty guards its gates. Sober, clear-headed men, drilled in the best schools of modern Europe, able to hold their own anywhere, administer its affairs. As late as 1830 the Tigris overflowed its banks, swept through Baghdad, and drowned 15,000 people in one night.

Till lately Baghdad, more than any other city in the Near East, has been slow to yield to Europe's influence. For centuries Baghdad kept close to the Bedouin life, under the sway of nomad customs. Even now Baghdad's famous bazaars, despite her evolution in other ways, are conducted as they were a thousands years ago. These Arab trading places have changed not one whit since Abraham's time. Here is barter and sale as Marco Polo found it, as it was in the days of the Three Wise Men who bought gifts for Bethlehem.

Basra is situated on the Shatt-el-Arab, a river formed by the union of the Tigris and Euphrates. Smaller centers of importance, such as Kut and Amara, follow each other at intervals the entire length of the valley. Most of the inhabitants are Mohammedan Arabs, though in the cities are many Jews, while in the mountainous north are settlements of Nestorian Christians dating from very early times.

City Arabs have taken readily to the ways of civilization and seem glad for the chance to work in ice and cotton cloth factories, and upon engineering and public works.

"Shower" in Philippines Holds World's Record

The heaviest 24-hour rainfall ever measured occurred at Baguio, the "summer capital" of the Philippines, in July, 1911.

Only brief accounts of it have been published until this year, when a detailed story of the shower and its effects was issued by Rev. Miguel Selga, director of the Philippine weather bureau, says Charles Fitzhugh Talman in his Science Service feature, "Why the Weather?"

"This torrential downpour attended the passage of a typhoon. More than 88 inches of rain fell during the four days, July 14-17, inclusive, the maximum fall in a 24-hour period being 46 inches from noon of the fourteenth to noon of the fifteenth.

"Two inches less than four feet of rain in 24 hours! This is more than falls in the whole of an average year at most places in the north-eastern United States and Canada."

—Literary Digest.

Train-Speeds

The fastest time ever made by a railroad train depends upon how performance is reckoned. The fastest train run on record was made over the Plant system between Fleming and Jacksonville, Fla., in 1901, when a train covered five miles at an average of 120 miles per hour. The London-Cheltenham flyer of the Great Western railway in England recently covered the 77 1/2 miles between Swindon and Paddington in 56 minutes and 47 sec-

onds, from start to stop, averaging 81.6 miles per hour. The highest speed reached was 92 miles per hour. This is claimed as a world mark for speed on a start to stop computation.

Lending for Protection

Hollywood thought a certain motion picture star had gone crazy when he began to lend money to certain of his friends. To be sure, the amounts were small, but the fact that he lent any at all was cause for consternation among the people who knew him real well.

"Don't you worry," grinned the star, when it was pointedly suggested that he needed a vacation and mental relaxation. "I haven't loaned a dollar more than I'm willing to pay to feel certain that I'll be left strictly alone. No one comes near you when they owe you money."

The African Goose

Nothing definite is known of the origin of geese, according to the leading writers on poultry. It is said that they were held sacred in Egypt, 4,000 years ago. They were domesticated many centuries before the Christian era. Italy is said to be the home of domestic geese. Scientists claim that the "graylag" is the ancestor of all domestic geese. This probably arises from the fact that all of the earlier geese were gray or gray and white.

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