



IRAQ

MESOPOTAMIA & THE JEWELS OF ASSYRIA

October 19 - November 02, 2024

Led by Professor Miklos Sarkozy, Historian, and Associate Professor of Iranian and Middle Eastern Studies at the Karoli University of Budapest, Hungary

Mesopotamia-the land between the great rivers Tigris and Euphrates-was the home to the world's earliest civilization. To walk on such sites as Eridu, Uruk, Ur of the Chaldees, and Babylon is to trace the history of the first cultures to build cities, invent writing, develop the wheel, and rule the known world. Some have claimed that the Garden of Eden was located in Iraq, and biblical history touches this land too. When it became an independent country in 1932, Iraq had been home to ancient Sumer, Babylonia, and Assyria and had been conquered by Persians, the Macedonian army of Alexander the Great, the armies of the Islamic conquest, the Mongol hordes, and the Ottoman empire of Turkey. At many points in its history, Iraq could be said to have been at the center of the civilized world, and you will see elements of this ancient history along with remnants of more recent times, including the regime of Saddam Hussein and the Coalition occupation. For the first time in our history selling tours to Iraq, we are now pleased to visit sites that we have never been able to see before the Assyrian ancient cities of the north: Nimrud, Nineveh, Hatra, and Khorsabad. With many of them having suffered heavily under the occupation of ISIS in the last few years, and now that ISIS has been mostly pushed out of this region, there are multiple international projects focusing on restoring part of the glory of those ruins.

Ihab Zaki
Managing Director

Saturday, October 19

Arrive in Basra (IRAQ)



Upon arrival in **Basra**, meet and transfer to *Horizon Hotel* or similar for check-in and overnight.

Note: Standard check in time is 3:00 pm. if you arrive on October 18 or early morning of October 19 an extra hotel night needs to be booked.

Sunday, October 20

Basra



After breakfast, head out for sightseeing in the old city along the stretch of the canal lined with Ottoman **Shen-ashil Houses**. It is a sad shadow of Basra's former glory as most of them are unoccupied and falling apart. Possibly visit one of them, which a wealthy Greek merchant owned in the 19th century. Then visit one of Saddam's deserted opulent palaces. Continue to **Ali's Steps**, a mosque with an original minaret from 635. enjoy lunch, then head to ride on a boat on the **Shatt Al-Arab**, the river following the merge of the Euphrates and the Tigris. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight **(B,L,D)**

Monday, October 21

Basra - Nasiriya



In the morning, head to visit the ancient Mesopotamian town of **Al-Qurnah**, which claims to be the site of the **Garden of Eden** and contains **Adam's Tree**, also known as the Tree of Knowledge. Continue to the **Marshes** for a canoe ride. This immense wetland at the entrance of the Shatt Al-Arab, the river formed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, is one of the largest ecosystems in the world. A rare aquatic landscape in the desert, it is home to **the Marsh Arabs** and provides habitats for important wildlife populations. The Marsh Arabs, descendants of ancient Sumerians, live in secluded villages of elaborate reed houses that often are reachable only by boat, and practice fishing, buffalo breeding, and reed

weaving. As shown in Sumerian bas-reliefs, this region was already inhabited 5,000 years ago. The Marshes are being rehabilitated after the aggressive drainage policy of Saddam Hussein. Then continue to **Nasiriyah**, the capital of the province of Dhi-Qar, near the ruins of the ancient city of Ur on the Euphrates River. In the afternoon, stroll around the **souk** of Nasiriyah before dinner. Transfer to *Sumerian Hotel* or similar for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, October 22

Nasiriya (Ur, Al, Shatrah & Tello)



In the morning, drive to the **Ziggurat of Ur**. Its architectural characteristics are similar to the Tower of Babel mentioned in the Bible, and there are towers of a temple complex dedicated to the lunar god Nanna. Tour the archaeological city of Ur, believed to be the birthplace of prophet, Abraham. In the afternoon, visit the ancient site of **Girsu** (today, Tello), the former capital of the State of Lagash. The city was developed primarily at the end of the 3rd millennium BC, between the archaic dynastic period and the end of the Ur III dynasty. The major area of interest is not the architectural remains; it is the crucial archives and the objects discovered on the site, including 2,000 tablets from the archives of the domain of the goddess Ba'U and the **Stele of the Vultures**. Return to the *Hotel* in Nasiriya for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, October 23

Nasiriya - Uruk - Najaf



In the morning, drive towards Al-Muthana province to visit the ancient Sumerian site of **Uruk**, where the first written script was discovered. Tour the excavated site dating back to 4,000 BC. Proceed to Najaf, one of Iraq's holy cities and home to Imam Ali shrine, Prophet Mohammad's cousin, son-in-law, and the fourth caliph. Imam Ali was the spiritual founder of the Shi'ite sect and is revered as a

martyr and saint, and the shrine has been an essential Shi'a pilgrimage site since his death in 661. One legend claims Adam's body was buried on the site. Najaf is the hub of Shiite political power, not just for Iraq but also for the entire world. Visit the Mosque and the neighboring historical covered bazaar and then transfer to *Royal Eagle Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, & overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, October 24

Najaf (Kifl & Kufa)



Begin the day with a visit to the **Great Mosque of Kufa**, dating from 670 AD; it is one of the earliest surviving mosques in the world and where Imam Ali was fatally wounded while praying. It contains the tombs of Muslim ibn 'Aqil (Imam Ali's cousin), Hani ibn 'Urwa (his companion), and the revolutionary Mukhtar al-Thaqafi. Islamic tradition says it is the place where Noah lived and built the Ark. Also, visit the **Al-Imara Fort and palace**, and see the outside of **Imam Ali's house**. Visit the town of **Al Kifl** with its shrine dedicated to the 6th century BC prophet Ezekiel. The shrine was originally a place of Jewish pilgrimage until 1316, when it passed into Muslim guardianship. It remained a Muslim pilgrimage site until the early 19th century, when it was converted back into a Jewish site. In the afternoon, return to Najaf, visit the artificial Al-Najaf Lake, and continue touring the old city. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, October 25

Najaf - Ukhaider - Karbala



Begin the day with a visit to **Ukhaider Palace**, an Abbasid fortress erected by Isa ibn Musa, nephew of the Abbasid caliph As-Saffah in 775AD. Located some 31 miles south of Karbala, it represented architectural innovation in the structures of its courtyards, residences, and mosque and was an important stop on the regional trade routes. The British explorer Gertrude Bell conducted Excavations in the late 19th century. Proceed to **Karbala**, one of the holiest sites in the world for Shi'a Muslims, as it is home to the shrine of Imam Hussein ibn Ali, who was defeated and killed here in 680. He was the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and the son of Fatima, the Prophet's daughter. Although Muhammad made statements before his death that appeared to name Ali as his successor, three others were chosen before Ali became caliph in 656. Rebellions marked his rule, and he was assassinated four years after taking office. Today, more than 15 million Shi'ites visit the shrine each year. Transfer to *Baron Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Saturday, October 26

Karbala - Babylon - Baghdad



Depart after breakfast for the city of **Babylon**, a key kingdom in ancient Mesopotamia from the 18th century when the Amorite king Hammurabi built Babylon into a major city, to the 6th century BC. It is estimated to have been the largest city in the world at various times, but it waned, was destroyed, was rebuilt, came under the rule of multiple civilizations, and was pillaged numerous times. The original remains of Babylon are broken mud and debris, and the Babylon of today was rebuilt under Saddam. The entire central palace of Babylon is made of 20th-century fired bricks, but it is fascinating to reflect that Alexander the Great died in the throne room, surrounded by his mourning generals. The famed Ishtar Gate is displayed at the Pergamum Museum in Berlin, but you can see the processional way with its magnificent carvings. One of the most impressive **Palaces of Saddam** is situated just behind Babylon, with beautiful views over the Babylonian ruins and the Euphrates and may be visited if the authorities allow it. It has been looted to the last light bulb and filled with graffiti. The sheer size and cost of this palace and the fact that he most likely never was there symbolize the extent of his madness and waste. Continue to **Baghdad**, and upon arrival, transfer to *Noorland Hotel or similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Sunday, October 27

Baghdad (Ctesiphon)



After breakfast, head to the **Archaeological Museum** of Iraq for a visit, and in the afternoon, visit **Ctesiphon**, an ancient city some 20 miles southeast of Baghdad. Founded in around 128 BC, it was the winter capital of the Parthian Empire and then the Sasanian Empire until the Muslim conquest of Persia in 651, after which it fell into decay. The only visible remaining structure of the ancient site is the **TaqKasra**, a majestic, vaulted hall that was part of the royal palace of the Sasanian philosopher-king, Khosra I. The archway is one of the most extensive single-span vaults of unreinforced brickwork worldwide. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Monday, October 28

Baghdad



Enjoy breakfast, then begin the day with a visit to the **Martyr's monument**, constructed between 1981 and 1983, with its official opening in 1983. The rest of the site consists of parks, a playground, parking lots, walkways, bridges, and the lake. At the center of the two half-domes is a twisted metal flagpole emerging from the underground museum. On the pole is an Iraqi flag, apparently lightly fluttering in the breeze. The flag and pole appear

floating in space when viewed from the museum below. A spring of water runs nearby to symbolize the blood of the fallen. The structure includes references to Iraq's ancient art tradition in the form of a marble slab with Qur'anic in ancient Kufi script. In the afternoon, visit the **town of Dur Kurigalzu**, founded by the Kassite King Kurigalzu I in the late 15th or early 14th century BC and is situated along an east-west-trending limestone ridge between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. The city served as the capital of Babylonia during the Kurigalzu reign and also as the capital or at least an important city during the period after. It was occupied continuously until the fall of the Kassite Dynasty in the 12th century BC when it was largely abandoned. The temple area, at least, was known to be active in the 7th century BC and the Neo-Babylonian period. Until recently (mainly between the 9th and 14th centuries AD), there have been smaller occupations at parts of Aqara Quf, with areas of the site being used for burials and Arab settlement. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Tuesday, October 29

Baghdad



Begin the day with a visit to **Al-Mutanabi Street**, named after the 10th-century classical Iraqi poet, and explore **Souk al-Safareen**, the famous copper market. Then visit **El-Mustansariyya School** (Madrassah), one of the world's oldest Islamic institutions of higher learning, established in 1227 by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustansir. In 1235, a monumental water-powered alarm clock located in the entrance hall announced the hours of prayer day and night. Following expansion and restructuring in 1927, the madrassah has continued to function and is now part of Al-Mustansiriya University. In the afternoon, enjoy another sightseeing day in the Baghdad tomb of the 12th-century **Sufi saint Abdel Kader Jilani**. The shrine remains the de facto center of Baghdad and the symbolic heart of the Sufi world. The splendid medieval building has a beautiful blue and white dome and is encircled by a large complex to house and feed pilgrims. Some free time for shopping. Return to the *Hotel* for dinner and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Wednesday, October 30

Baghdad (Samarra) - Mosul



Enjoy an early breakfast, then start the day by driving to Mosul with a stop in **Samarra**. In medieval times, Samarra was the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate and the only remaining Islamic capital that retains its original plan, architecture, and artistic relics. Visit The **Great Mosque of Samarra**, a 9th-century mosque commissioned in 848 and completed in 851 by the Abbasid caliph Al-Mutawakkil

who reigned (in Samarra) from 847 until 861. We proceed to visit the **Love Palace**. Then, we continue to **Ashur (Qal'at Sherqat)**, located on the Tigris River in northern Mesopotamia in a specific geo-ecological zone at the border between rain-fed and irrigation agriculture. The city dates back to the 3rd millennium BC. From the 14th to the 9th centuries BC, it was the first capital of the Assyrian Empire, a city-state and trading platform of international importance. It also served as the religious capital of the Assyrians, associated with the god Ashur. The Babylonians destroyed the city but revived it during the Parthian period in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Continue to **Mosul**, and upon arrival, transfer to *Nergal Motel or Similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Thursday, October 31

Mosul (Hatra)



Begin the day with a morning drive to visit **Hatra**, a ruined city in the Al-Jazirah region of present-day northern Iraq, 180 miles northwest of Baghdad and 68 miles southwest of Mosul. The Parthian empire's religious and trading center flourished during the 1st and 2nd centuries BCE. The city survived several invasions before being razed in 241 CE. It is an important archaeological site with well-preserved ruins. Then return to Mosul and tour the city and **Al-Noory Mosque**. It was famous for its leaning minaret, which gave the city its nickname "the hunchback." Tradition holds that the mosque was first built in the late 12th century, although it underwent many renovations. The mosque withstood various hostile invading forces over its 850-year history until it was destroyed with its distinctive minaret in the Battle of Mosul in 2017. enjoy the sightseeing of the old city of Mosul and then transfer to *Modern Plaza Hotel or Similar* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Friday, November 01

Mosul - Nineveh Nimrud - Erbil



Enjoy breakfast and then head to visit **Nineveh**; it is located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River and was the capital and largest city of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the largest city in the world for several decades. Today, it is a common name for the half of Mosul that lies on the eastern bank of the Tigris, and the country's Nineveh Governorate takes its name from it. Continue to **Nimrud**, an ancient Assyrian city located 20 miles south of Mosul in the Nineveh Plains in Upper Mesopotamia. It was a major Assyrian city. The name Nimrud was recorded as the local name by Carsten Niebuhr, the Biblical name of Kalhu (the Biblical Calah). Stop at **Monastery of the Martyrs Mar Behnam and Marth Sarah**; it was a Syriac Catholic monastery in northern Iraq in the village of Khidr Ilyas, close

to Beth Khdeda. It was destroyed on March 19, 2015, by Daesh. Then Continue to **Erbil** and transfer to *Erbil International Hotel* for check-in, dinner, and overnight. **(B,L,D)**

Saturday, November 02

Erbil - USA OR Kurdistan



Enjoy breakfast, then transfer to the airport for your flight back to the US OR continue to **Kurdistan**. **(B)**

“We reserve the right to change the order of activities/visits or sites due to unexpected events such as flight cancellations or changes of schedule, or any other reasons beyond our control. We will do our best to ensure that any necessary changes when/if needed to meet the needs of our clients”.

Special Notes on Travel to Iraq:

During this trip, there will be a few checkpoints between provinces and cities, and your patience is appreciated whenever they delay us a little bit longer than expected to verify documents.

Accommodations have developed and improved a lot in the last few years, and now most of the hotels we use are very comfortable and with western standard services. You also must understand that our guides cannot compare to the “classical” definition of guides in well-touristy places like Europe or Turkey or Egypt, and Morocco; they act primarily as tour managers and coordinators as the country does NOT have any official and licensed expert guides in the real sense of the word.

Everyone joining must be in good health, with an open mind and a sense of adventure. Please note that although this trip is not necessarily physically demanding by exertion, the remoteness of some locations, the back roads we sometimes have to take, and the delays can be quite a different experience. The security arrangements may change throughout the trip, and any sudden changes in the itinerary or hotels due to unforeseen conditions are possible. Keep in mind that Iraq’s weather is hot even in the ideal months of November to March, so you should protect yourself from dehydration, sunstrokes, etc. Our tours always include an abundant supply of bottled water on your vehicles every touring day.

The tour includes the area north of Baghdad covering the ancient ruins of Assyria: Nineveh, Khorasabad, Hatra, and Nimrud - all the regions under ISIS occupation for many years and are now liberated. We still monitor any security issues, and if there is any need to alter the itinerary due to difficulty accessing the sites, Spiekermann Travel reserves the right to make any changes to the itinerary if needed. Travelers should be able to accept and adapt to sudden changes graciously.



Tour Cost (Land Only):

6 - 9 travelers: \$8,950.00

10 - 14 travelers: \$7,950.00

Per person sharing in double occupancy

Single Supplement: \$945.00

Price based on group size minimum of 6 participants and maximum of 14 participants

Trip Grade: II Lodging Level: ***-****

ern languages written in the cuneiform alphabet (namely Old Persian and Akkadian - the primary language of Mesopotamia before the Hellenistic period). His studies included classes of classical Arabic and Persian languages as well. Besides classes on Islamic history and Shi'i studies, he currently teaches ancient near Eastern history in Budapest, focusing on the history and architectural heritage of ancient Mesopotamia and Persia. He is fluent in Persian, English, Italian, German, Russian and Hungarian and has published many papers in several of those languages. Dr. Miklós Sárközy has been leading for over two decades more than forty specialized and scholarly tours to Turkey, the Caucasus, Iran and Central Asia.

About your lecturer, Miklós Sárközy... He is an associate professor of Iranian and Middle Eastern Studies at the Karoli University of Budapest, Hungary. A graduate of the State University of Budapest (with a Ph.D. in Iranian Studies), he is a renowned expert of Near Eastern history, religious studies, and archaeology of Middle Eastern cultures. He has studied in Tehran, Naples, and London (Institute of Ismaili Studies) as well. Dr. Sárközy currently specializes in the history of Shi'i Islam of Iraq and Iran, Middle Eastern History, and languages.

Dr. Sárközy has a keen interest in Middle Eastern languages and for many years, he had studied ancient Middle East-



Tour Includes:

- Airport / Hotel Airport transfers.
- 14 nights' accommodation in Superior 4* & some 5* accommodations in centrally located hotels.
- Travel by modern & air-conditioned motor coach.
- Meals as mentioned in the itinerary (B: Breakfast, L: Lunch and D: Dinner).
- Entrance fees to all mentioned sites and museums.
- Escort of lecturer throughout the trip (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).
- English Speaking local guide.
- All activities described in the tour.
- Gratuities to guide, drivers, and porters (provided minimum number of travelers is reached).

Trip Grade:

II Active - Some hikes, slightly more demanding walks at or to sites, few elevations, comfortable but busy schedule and some long rides and extensive drives.

Lodging Level:

*****Superior**: Lodges and hotels with additional amenities, refined service, and comfort level acceptable to western standards. (3 or 4 stars)

******Luxury**: Regular style- usually large- hotels, typical western standard with ample venues, and full amenities. (4 or 5 stars)

Tour does not include:

- International airfare into Basra and out of Erbil.
- Iraq Visa (obtainable upon arrival for \$77.00 in cash - Subject to change).
- Beverages with or without meals.
- Items of a personal nature (camera fees, laundry, emails, excess luggage, etc.).
- Transfers if not arriving/departing on tour dates.
- Dayroom/overnights necessitated by changes in airline schedules.
- Trip surcharge to operate below required minimum participants.
- Gratuity to your tour Lecturer (optional).
- Travel protection insurance (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)

