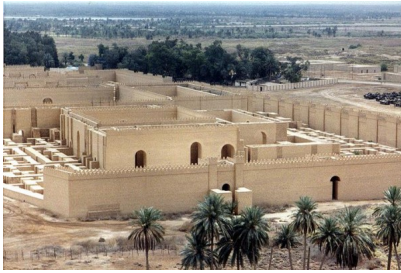


BABYLON WITHOUT TOURISTS: HERITAGE SITES AT THREAT OF DISAPPEARING



Babylon is one of the most prized heritage sites in the world. Often referred to as the cradle of civilization, the city is home to important historical sites such as the Ishtar Gate, the Hanging Gardens and the Tower of Babel. However, a visit to this historic city will reveal something unnerving - it is deserted. Despite the historical significance of Babylon, tourists hardly visit the site.

The lack of tourists in Babylon is saddening to the locals. Archeologists feel that the history of Babylon is now at threat. **Lack of tourists has had a negative impact on the local community that relies on tourism for economic growth.** Local archeologists also feel that it has led to a decline in the historical significance of Iraq. "The history of Iraq is now just in the books."

The decrease in revenue also means that there is very little money for maintaining and repairing historical artifacts in the city. Babylon's heritage sites, just like all the other sites in Iraq, desperately need maintenance. However, with only few schools and foreign delegations visiting the city due to the lack of security, this is not possible.

Babylon's heritage sites are also facing a threat from environmental hazards. Increased salt levels and humidity are a threat to the survival of ancient bricks of the city. Pollution is also another major environmental concern in Babylon. While funds have been provided by a private charity organization to clean up the sites, the amount is not enough and there is still litter all over. With little funds to maintain the sites, archeologists can only monitor the damage while hoping that help will arrive soon enough.

Looting is also a worrying concern in Babylon. The city used to be home to some of the most distinctive artifacts in the world, but most of them are no longer there. **Hundreds of artifacts have fallen into the hands of looters leaving the sites in a critical condition.**

Perhaps a more worrying threat to the survival of the heritage sites is the security threat from the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). On top of scaring off tourists, the armed group has embarked on a rampant destruction of heritage sites. Numerous artifacts and heritage sites under the control of this armed group have been destroyed, further endangering the historical significance of Iraq.

Babylon might be the cradle of civilization, but unless security, investment and protection is increased, it might soon fall like all the other heritage sites in Iraq. Archeologists in Babylon are desperately trying to save the city, but there is little they can do. They are therefore calling on the world to help. "The heritage sites belong to the world, and as such the world should help protect them."

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