

## **Obliterating Assyria and Assyrians: “Kurdistan’s” Crime of Cultural Genocide**

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The ongoing escapades of the “Kurdistan” Regional Government (KRG) under the auspices of Massoud Barzani aimed at terrorizing the Assyrians in their ancestral homeland have become lucid signs of ethno-cultural genocide perpetuated against Iraq’s indigenous people. A flagrant example is the recent destruction of the Assyrian heritage site of Khinnis, located approximately 50 km northeast of the ancient Assyrian capital, Nineveh.

The site was built around 690 BC by King Sennacherib. The canal is resplendent with wall reliefs and cuneiform inscriptions of ancient Assyrian kings decorating the cliff side.<sup>1</sup> The site is of particular importance since it is home to some of the most ancient artifacts remaining in Iraq belonging to the ancient ancestors of the indigenous Assyrians people.

In an attempt to provide shade for Kurdish picnic goers, the KRG has hired a contractor to detonate the ancient cliff site to accommodate the demands of the local Kurds in an effort to boost tourism in the area. This reckless act is one of many attempts of the KRG at eliminating the indigenous Assyrian presence from their ancient homeland, implementing continuous efforts of cultural genocide.

A recent trip by members of the Chicago-based Assyrian Academic Society (AAS) and the Washington-based Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project (ISDP) found the ancient Assyrian site in utter obliteration. The state of preservation of Khinnis has gone from bad to worse due to the shenanigans of local Kurds and the continued neglect by the “Kurdistan” Regional Government in safeguarding Iraq’s ancient Assyrian heritage sites.

Below is a selection of photographs that illustrate the destruction and neglect of the Khinnis site, taken during the recent trip by members of the Assyrian Academic Society and the Iraq Sustainable Democracy Project in April of 2006.

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<sup>1</sup> Deblauwe, Francis. *The State of Preservation of the Neo-Assyrian Reliefs at Khinnis/Bavian*. **Iraq War and Archeology**, Document 9. May 14<sup>th</sup> 2006: <http://iwa.univie.ac.at/bavian.html>



The Khinnis site where ancient Assyrian reliefs and inscriptions grace the hillside. Visible are also Kurdish picnic goers, with their vehicles by the canal below. ©Assyrian Academic Society, April 2006



Picture of an ancient Assyrian wall relief outlining royal figures fallen into the river bank due to careless dynamiting. ©Assyrian Academic Society, April 2006



An image of the famous Assyrian *lamassu* or winged bull dynamited and left in a state of deterioration from years of neglect and recent target practice by Kurdish militia (notice the bullet holes in the relief). ©Assyrian Academic Society, April 2006



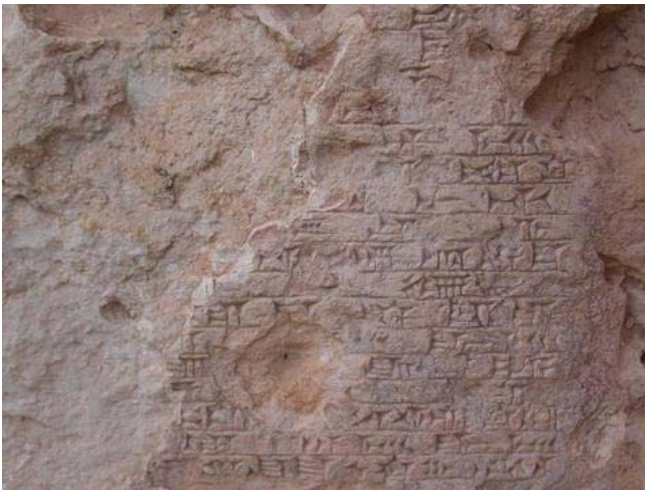
Assyrian wall relief at Khinnis. When examined closely, the figures of ancient Assyrian royalty can be seen. ©Assyrian Academic Society, April 2006



An image of where a wall relief once stood, bullet holes can be seen from constant methodical destruction as a result of the site being used for target practice by Kurdish militia who now comprise the “Kurdistan” Regional Government. ©Assyrian Academic Society, April 2006



In the distance, an ancient Assyrian relief (minus the bottom half) graces a rocky cliff. The site of Khinnis illustrates the rich and continuous Assyrian presence in North Iraq. ©Assyrian Academic Society, April 2006



The remains of cuneiform inscriptions desecrated by massive bullet holes. This photo illustrates the rampant disdain Kurdish authorities have shown for Khinnis and indeed all Assyrian heritage sites. ©Assyrian Academic Society, April 2006

## **Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage<sup>2</sup>**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage on November 16<sup>th</sup> 1972, to ensure the protection and preservation of endangered natural and cultural world heritage sites.

Iraq joined UNESCO on October 21<sup>st</sup> 1948 and ratified the Convention on March 5<sup>th</sup> 1974. Article 1 of the Convention defines cultural heritage as “architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*: <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/convention-en.pdf>

outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science.”<sup>3</sup> Relentless attempts have been made by previous Iraqi governments to eradicate the indigenous Assyrians from the Iraqi political, cultural and social fabric by stripping away their fundamental human rights. Such examples include but are not limited to, King Faisal II’s notorious Simele Massacre in 1933 where 6000<sup>4</sup> innocent Assyrian civilians perished and also under Saddam’s Baath Regime and Arabization policies which deprived Assyrians of their basic human rights for over three decades. Sadly, history is repeating itself with the rise of a new dictatorship in Northern Iraq which is instituting similar, if not identical policies to Saddam’s Baath regime under the auspices of the KRG.

### **C107 Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957<sup>5</sup>**

In addition to UNESCO’s *Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, Iraq is also a ratifying signatory to the International Labour Organization’s *Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention C107* adopted in 1957. Iraq became a member on July 16<sup>th</sup> 1986<sup>6</sup> and as such, is a binding state to the Convention’s measures in protecting the social, economic, and cultural rights of indigenous peoples as demarcated in Article 3.

The “Kurdistan” Regional Government under the auspices of the warlord Massoud Barazani of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KRG) is currently exercising cultural genocide against indigenous Assyrians residing in part of the heartland of ancient Assyria, today’s Northern Iraq. The destruction of Assyrian cultural heritage sites and artifacts, many dating back to the first and second millennia B.C. has become one of the many mechanisms used to expunge Assyrians from their ancestral homeland. The tactics of the KRG are rooted in their attempts at creating a homogeneous ‘Kurdish’ Northern Iraq, all in the process of establishing an independent “Kurdistan”.

### **Urgent Government Action**

In the final report of the 75<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights which took place on July 8<sup>th</sup> 2005, the situation of the Assyrians of Iraq was highlighted. It stated that “the history and current problem faced by the Assyrians of Iraq were raised. Recommendations for action included the creation of an Assyrian Administrative Region to safeguard the cultural, linguistic and religious rights of Assyrians, and an independent commission to handle claims and disputes concerning minorities in the Kurdish-controlled areas of northern Iraq.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Burchard Brentjes, *The Armenians, Assyrians & Kurds: Three Nations, One Fate?* (Campbell, CA: Rishi Publications, 1997) 64-65.

<sup>5</sup> International Labour Organization, *C107 Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957*: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/convde.pl?C107>

<sup>6</sup> ILO, <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/cgi-lex/ratifce.pl?C107>

We are appealing to the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) to take immediate action by implementing the proper and necessary measures for the protection of ancient Assyrian cultural and historic heritage sites such as the Khinnis site. Such measures must be instituted throughout Iraq and especially in the Northern region where many ancient Assyrian capitals once flourished such as Aššur and Nineveh, as it houses some of the most exquisite artifacts of Assyrian history.

The newly formed government of Iraq must, in coordination with the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), take all the necessary action in accordance with national and international law to protect Iraq's cultural and historical heritage sites. As a signatory to a multitude of Conventions, Iraq must comply with international legal standards for the protection of ancient artifacts as they remain a fundamental component of Iraq's history and more importantly, are an emblem of continuation and indigeneity for the Assyrians of Iraq.

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<sup>7</sup> UN Economic and Social Council, *Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities*. Report of the Working Group on Minorities on its Eleventh Session at the 75<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on Human Rights. July 8<sup>th</sup> 2005:  
<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G05/147/96/PDF/G0514796.pdf?OpenElement>