

**HISTORICAL
SURVEY**

The «land between the rivers», as the name **Mesopotamia** might be translated, was a fabulously fertile country. Because it was surrounded by desert and mountainous regions, it was always a tempting prize for peoples inhabiting these less rich neighbouring areas. Its history was one of successive conquests and defeats, now told by the ruins of great and famous cities - Babylon of the Hanging Gardens, Ur of the Chaldees, Nineveh and others.

Many different peoples have been attracted to this ancient land.

The earliest settlers known by name were the Sumerians, about 3500 B.C.

People called Semites began to move into the land before 2300 B.C.



Jewellery typical of the period circa, 2600 B.C. — Iraq Museum

Gradually the Semites and the Sumerians intermixed. About 1750 B.C. they were brought under the rule of the celebrated **Hammurabi**, the law-giver, a Semitic king who established his capital in Babylon.

The Babylonian Empire was succeeded by the Assyrian Empire, about 1400 B.C. The Assyrians were skilled hunters and fighters and among the first to use horses. Their stone

carvings show a proud people who delighted in hunting.

With the advent of the Chaldean Empire, power shifted from Nineveh, the great capital of the Assyrians, back to Babylon. Under King Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldean Empire reached its height, about 570 B.C.

Babylon was an enormous city filled with magnificent palaces, temples and other buildings. Life, for prosperous people, was already almost as refined and as luxurious as that of comfortable and prosperous people to-day. Such people lived an orderly and ceremonious life in beautiful and beautifully furnished and decorated houses and wore richly decorated clothing and lovely jewels; they had feasts and festivals, entertained one another with music and dancing, were waited upon by highly trained servants, and cared for by doctors and dentists. Boating excursions were common summer pleasure on the Euphrates.

The Babylonians were excellent architects, and had an extensive knowledge of art and letters, as well as an elaborate system of law.

Babylon is specially remembered for its **Hanging Gardens**, built by Nebuchadnezzar to please his Median queen, when she sighed for the trees of her native uplands. It is counted one of **The Seven Wonders of the World**.

The Chaldean Empire was replaced by the Achaemenian Persians, 538—331 E.C. who were defeated by **Alexander The Great**, from 331 — 323 B.C. Alexander set about preventing the decline of Babylon. His successor, Seleucus, moved the capital to Seleucia on the Tigris. Only then did Babylon finally start to lose its cultural and political dominance over the country and crumble into the sad ruins of to-day.

The Seleucids were followed by the Parthian Persians 135 B.C. — 226 A.D. These were replaced by another Persian, dynasty — the Sassanids, whose rule was not broken until the Arab Conquest in 637 A.D.

Over a hundred years later, **Baghdad** was founded by the Abbassid Caliph, Al-Mansour. The «Round City» and its suburbs were served by elaborate network of waterways, radiating from major canals. There followed one of the most brilliant periods in the history of Iraq, a period that reached a dazzling peak in the time of **Haroun Al-Rashid**, the celebrated Caliph of **The Thousand And One Nights**. Baghdad became one of the world's most renowned cities, the capital of a great empire, famous for its buildings, its luxury and as a seat of learning.

In the 13th century Baghdad was overrun by the Mongols and for the next six hundred years Iraq was a country of little importance. In the 16th century the Turks conquered it and their rule was not broken until the First World War. From 1921, Iraq was under a British Mandate. In 1932 the Mandate ended.

Another dark period began under a corrupt pseudo-constitutional monarchy. For almost forty years, and until July 14, 1958, the political history of Iraq was filled with a series of revolutions and national uprisings against corruption and foreign influence.

On **July 14**, 1958, the triumphant Iraqi Revolution, under the leadership of Major-General **Abdul Karim Qassim**, emerged, carrying the torch of freedom, justice and equality. The Army's will merged with the will of the nation, thereby realising the greatest transformation in Iraq's modern history. The Republic was declared and the Republican Regime settled in the good soil and in the hearts of the entire nation.

The Revolution of July 14 was more than a political revolution. It was a radical revolution which blew up the system of rule, ideas, values and philosophies which served and tried to justify the interest of the old regime.

The foreign policy of Iraq is summed up in the following extract from a speech by the Prime Minister and Leader of the country, Major-General Abdul Karim Qassim :

«Our foreign policy is based upon **positive neutrality** and

non-alignment with either the Eastern camp or the Western camp. Our international policy is decided by the interests of the Iraqi people in particular and the Arab nation in general.

We adhere to the United Nations Charter, and recognise the principles of international justice. We abide by the principles of the Bandung Conference for consolidating peace in the world and developing friendship with all the peoples and states on the basis of mutual interests ».



A scene from July 14 Celebrations.