



ASSYRIA COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
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Press Release

## Treasures of ancient civilization in North Iraq are threatened – Modification of historical landscape must stop.

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There are many examples for changing the cultural nature of North Iraq into a Kurdish dominated one: The ruined site at Khenis (also known as the Gomel Gorge) is one example. It clearly demonstrates the neglect of the Assyrian and Iraqi cultural heritage by the Kurdish Regional Government.

The site was built around 700 BC by the Assyrian King Sanharib. Wall reliefs with carvings and cuneiform inscriptions are decorating the cliff side. The carvings show images of King Sanharib, the winged bulls Lamassu and other figures that tell the story of the canal system. The reliefs and the gorge water diversion projects were part of the massive system of water works needed to feed the Khosr River running through Nineveh.

The photographs below illustrate the destruction and neglect of the Khenis site. A few years ago the ancient cliff side was detonated reportedly on behalf of the KRG. As if this was not bad enough, observers told that Kurdish militia regularly practise their shooting exercises on ancient sites like these. Figures of the ancient wall relief are now lying in the river bank; bullet holes have desecrated the figures and the remains of the cuneiform inscriptions.

A 'Kurdification' of North Iraq aimed at changing the cultural and historical landscape has been running for many years now. This is also evident in the attempt to change the historical name of Arbil (Akkadian: 'four Gods') into the Kurdish 'Hewlar'. Even among Kurdish inhabitants ancient cultural sites don't seem to be accepted as seen in the rejection of the Lamassu figures in Khenis by local inhabitants.

It is in the interest of all Iraqi citizens to preserve these testimonials of civilization in Iraq. The Kurdification of North Iraq must stop. Therefore the Assyria Council of Europe calls upon

the KRG and Kurdish authorities

- to stop destroying the cultural heritage in North Iraq,
- to organize and fund the restoration of the Khenis site;

the Iraqi Government, the EU, the UNESCO and the international community

- to strictly condemn these acts of vandalism,
- to call for the restoration of the ancient site.



Assyrian wall relief at Khenis: An image of the Assyrian Lamassu, a winged bull, lies dynamited and left in a state of deterioration from years of neglect at the riverbank.



The winged Lamassu bull: Bullet holes from Kurdish militia target practice can be seen.