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## The Ancient Edge

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### Islamists Erase Jewish Identity from Ezekiel's Tomb in Iraq

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Cutting Edge contributor



Ezekiel's Tomb  
advent of Islam.

The Iraqi news agency *Ur news* has revived fears that under pressure from Islamic political parties, the original Hebrew inscriptions and ornamentation on the walls around the tomb of Ezekiel are being (or have been) removed, this under the pretext of restoring the site. According to sources, the Antiquities and Heritage Authority in Iraq has been pressured by Islamists to historically cleanse all evidence of a Jewish connection to Iraq—a land where Jews had lived for over a thousand years before the

Four months ago a German-based Iraqi journalist tipped off the *Association of Jewish Academics from Iraq in Israel* that plans were afoot to build a mosque on the site of the shrine of the Jewish prophet Ezekiel at al-Kifl, this was first reported on the "Point of No Return" news blog. The rumors were investigated by an Iraqi Shi'a university lecturer. They were denied by the shrine's director. Now a report by *Ur News* revives fears that in the absence of Jews on the ground, nothing, not even UNESCO (*United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization*), stands in the way of politically-motivated plans to erase all Jewish traces of this ancient holy site.

Drastic changes taking place currently at the tomb of Ezekiel will change its character and prompt UNESCO to delete it as a protected site on the World Heritage List, similar to what happened to the historic city of Babylon, where old buildings were demolished and new layers of construction added.

Prof. Shmuel Moreh, the Chairman of the Association of Jewish Academics from Iraqi, *Israel Prize* Laureate in Arabic Literature and emeritus Professor at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has indicted that the Arabic news stories have tipped him that the Archeological Authority in Iraq has started a campaign to erase the Jewish aspects of the tomb of the prophet Ezekiel and the original inlay Hebrew inscriptions have been destroyed and covered by new Arabic inscriptions and Islamic symbols.

An extract, paraphrased from an Arabic translation of the *Ur News* agency, reports:

The officials of the Department of Antiquities and Heritage say that their restoration programme will continue until 2011 and is designed to carry out essential maintenance and prevent the dome and roof from collapsing. But their hidden purpose, sources say, is the removal of features that emphasize a historical connection with the Jews who built the shrine and lived in the city for hundreds of years after the Babylonian exile.

Hebrew writings will or already have been erased from the site and from the room that houses the shrine. Restoration work includes skimming the walls, 3 metres high in the yard, 2 metres high inside the shrine. Sources say that the media are not allowed to take pictures and visits to the shrine are limited to pilgrims.

The city of Kifl contains tens of thousands of acres of land belonging to the Jewish community before their displacement from Iraq in the last century. The majority of tenants' shops around the shrine still pay rent to their original Jewish owners through accredited mediators.

Iraq - the Biblical *Mesopotamia* - is almost as rich in Jewish history as the Land of Israel. The tomb of

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the prophet Ezekiel dates back to the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BCE. It was there in Iraq that Abraham discovered monothesim, and it is where the prophets Ezra, Nehemiah, Nahum, Jonah and Daniel are all buried.

*Cutting Edge contributor Shelomo Alfassa is the US Director of Justice for Jews from Arab Countries.*

[Back to \*\*Features\*\*](#)