

Ala Younis
**Men of Bronze,
Homes of
Concrete**

01/06

Here
Men are made of bronze.
Homes are made of concrete.

The city is designed as a 1 km circle,
with rings of functional structures
along the inside of its walls.

It was not built before two astrologers
advised on the date and time.
July 30, 762 at 1:57 p.m.

*They say it is the revealing of the sky ...
If people listen to prophets,
No catastrophic ordeal sends its loud laughter ...
And the shabby odious myth rarely could
be related...
Centuries after centuries carried the bitter
poison...
Its bitter echo sparkles as if it were a furious
fire ...
Can this intolerant passion stop with the touch of
a cool hand? ¹*

This man
who happened to be a difficult person
sometimes,
and who sought to be recognized as an artist,
is Le Corbusier.

His name is linked to that of Saddam's
in a gymnasium built in Baghdad,
though both men never really met.

Online is a photo of a black cover of the
"Saddam Hussein Gymnasium" pamphlet,
published by the Iraqi Tourism Board in
the 1980s.

One can see from the spaces left between
the words
that someone used a felt-tip pen
to remove Saddam's name.
It happened in 2014 to a Wikipedia page created
in 2008.

A user succeeded in renaming the page of
Saddam Hussein Gymnasium
to "Baghdad Gymnasium."

A facsimile of a letter from Madhat Madhloom,
on a miniature desk of Le Corbusier in 1956.
"Dear Monsieur Le Corbusier,
I was delighted to meet you in Paris
Thank you for giving up so much of your time
to discuss the stadium project in Baghdad.
I am enclosing with this letter
two copies of the Scale of Charges
which you asked for as a guide to your fees.
It is normally accepted by the Government of
my country
on works of this size to pay fees at customary

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English rates.”²

1957 in Baghdad,
a miniature of Le Corbusier asking
a miniature of Iraq’s Director of Physical
Education nodding:
“A swimming pool with [artificial] waves?”
His arm is raised as if swimming the backstroke.
They have just discovered a mutual interest in
water sports.

“There is no doubt that Le Corbusier is an
exceptional architect,
but his services will certainly be expensive,
since they are greatly sought after ...
there is no certainty that he is an expert in the
building of stadia.
We might be able to arrange a meeting
to exchange views,
we would then be able to supplant
Mr. Le Corbusier
and make progress in gaining acceptance for
our bid.”³

On July 13, 1958, a confident Le Corbusier is
pleased
but not surprised to receive a telegram
informing him that his design had
been approved.⁴

On July 14, 1958, a military coup overthrows
Iraq’s monarchy.
A republic is announced.
Brigadier Abdel Karim Kassem is prime minister.

Miniature of Rifat Chadirji
leaving a hospital.
His visit to Kassem was to convince him
not to change the stadium’s location.
He showed him Baghdad’s new master plan by
Doxiadis.

Miniature of Kassem coming out to the crowds
a blue line photoshopped between his fists,
one arm is raised and the other is near his belt:
“This is our future water canal that will link the
Tigris to the Euphrates.”
The line looks like an arm support.
Kassem is recovering from a gunshot to his hand
that he received in a failed
assassination attempt.

*Sympathy for a bullet to cut open the depths of
my heart,
With its constrictive ice,
To burn up the bones like in hell.
I wish I could run to support those struggling,
To tighten both my fists and slap fate.*⁵

The Tigris and Euphrates also carry large
quantities of salt.
These, too, are spread on the land by excessive

irrigation and flooding.⁶

Miniature of Abdel Karim Kassem receiving the
news
that his face does not appear on the July
Revolution Monument.
He is relaying the message [and a request]
to a miniature of Rifat Chadirji.

Miniature of Chadirji shaking his head
denying the request to a miniature of [a worried]
Jawad Salim.
Chadirji and Salim are protecting [the future] of
the monument,
by keeping it free from any depictions of rulers.

Miniature of Jawad Salim almost falling to
his knees,
just like one of the hidden pieces in his mural.
He finishes the mural’s bronze parts,
but dies before it’s time to install it.
At the morgue, Khaled Rahhal is trying to make a
mould of Salim’s face.

Miniature of Chadirji blocking Rahhal’s access
to the monument construction site.
To [further] protect it from view,
the bronze parts remain covered [with gypsum]
until the day Kassem arrives
for the monument’s inauguration.
Here, no miniature for Chadirji,
as he travels the day before.

Magazines reports:
people claim to have seen Kassem’s face on
the moon,
and some saw it on an egg,
just after he was killed in a military coup in 1963.

*Desirous eyes tempt themselves straying to
the sky.
They looked about any hopeful way ...*⁷

“We have followed with great interest
the recent political developments that took place
in Iraq.
We would very much appreciate knowing
the position
of your ministry in regards to this important
project.
Very faithfully yours.”⁸

It is said that his regulations on oil killed the man
others say that it was the Nasserist
Arab union promise
1963 is said to be a difficult year,
after all these mega events
and the recession.
There were no recreational facilities in Baghdad,
there were only martial laws, then
nationalization,

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of all banks and over thirty major Iraqi businesses in 1964.
 To regain investors' confidence, the government pushed well-known individuals to have their own stake in the market. There were no amusement parks in Baghdad, until the founding stone of one was laid by Abdel Salam Aref in 1964.

President Aref, who is said to be against executing Kassem or airing his execution scenes on national TV, has been an ever-smiling man. He is keen on initiating and following up on development himself. No new master plans for Baghdad in his time, but many construction and infrastructure projects.

Miniature of Abdel Salam Aref in military dress emerging from a dust cloud whipped up by his helicopter's descent into a village. One hand is gesturing [to stop the cheering of the crowd, which has lasted for half an hour]. The other hand is folding the opposite arm's sleeve. His face signals [*Let's plan!*] to a miniature of Rifat Chadirji.

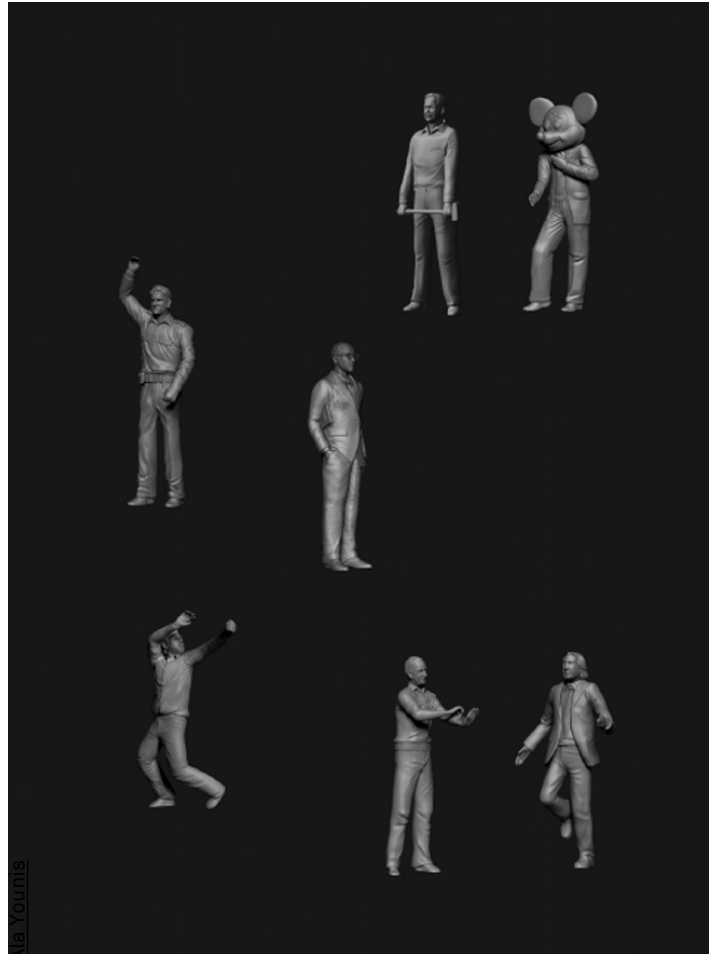
Le Corbusier drowns the same year.

Welcoming words, speeches, journalists, and tribesmen escort Aref to his Soviet-made helicopter which will take off and soon spin out of control. Hovering over palm groves and the Tigris, Aref escapes the crash and jumps but he falls at the dirt edge of the river, and dies.

Miniatures of actors, in blue collared shirts and overalls, standing in a small boat in the middle of the Tigris. Attentive, terrified, frozen, one is almost crying, while another is raising a sickle to an unknown danger hidden in Al-Ahwar.

"In the remote forgotten unknown land, and under the pressure of the hard natural circumstances, they rush on; men like the stones, like night, like thunder ... And where lies the magic of the primitive world, the mystery of its conditions,

also lies fear and hope and expectations." ⁹



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Of all the hazards of living in Iraq, dealing with venomous snakes may be the least discussed. Six species of dangerously venomous snakes are dangerous to Al-Ahwar natives.

The Baghdad Zoo opens in 1971. Some books wrote: it is considered the largest zoo in the Middle East. 1973's oil revenues gave Baghdad happiness like never before. The seventies are considered the city's golden age. To Le Corbusier's contractor, a lawyer from Baghdad writes: "If Mr. Le Corbusier died without any bodily heir and there was no competent evidence proving the existence of such heirs, the Iraqi Government shall be the sole heir and shall possess the amount of the deceased." ¹⁰

Saddam is a rising star as the strong deputy of the president. His surprise visits are aired on national TV;

he picks up phone calls to his office himself
to answer people's requests,
that phone does not stop ringing.
Miniature of Saddam Hussein in 1980,
a young president attending Baghdad's
conferences on architecture.
He has preferences, even regarding small details
like arches.
He sends notes to this effect to a miniature of
Rifat Chadirji,
who is about to be released from prison.
Participate in a grand project preparing Baghdad
to host a Non-Aligned Movement summit
in 1982!

The government spends more than \$7 billion
to give Baghdad a facelift.
Freeways and wider streets across the city,
five-star hotels,
modern shopping centers,
high-rises,
and several new bridges.
The city is adorned with historical and modern
monuments,
as well as pictures of the president.

The government spends 6.5 million dinars
to build the gymnasium,
in twenty-two months.

Miniature of Chadirji rushing
to the site of the Monument [to the Unknown
Soldier].
He just learned of Saddam's order to demolish it.
He takes a photo of himself near the rubble of
the monument he built in 1959.
The site soon hosts Saddam's statue
that is pulled down [in a possibly staged
moment] in 2003.

Khaled Rahhal designs
a new Monument [to the Unknown Soldier] at
another site.

*I feel I have crossed the expanse
To a world of decay that responds not
To my cry
If I shake the branches
Only decay will drop from them
Stones
Stones – no fruit
Even the springs
are stones.* ¹¹

Answering to Saddam's inquires
about how to identify the eras
to which historical sites belong,
archaeologists said:
"From the King's stamp on the bricks."
He "considered himself to be

the reincarnation of Nebuchadnezzar
and had the inscription
'To King Nebuchadnezzar
in the reign of Saddam Hussein'
inscribed on bricks inserted into the walls of the
ancient city of Babylon
during a reconstruction project." ¹²

On a wall, another mural
a miniature of Saddam Hussein [in military
dress]
[humbly] receiving
a palm tree,
handed over by a miniature of [a mighty]
Nebuchadnezzar.
A blue sky is behind them,
and below are scenes of desert battles
from different times.

*Oh, when will you come back?
Will you know, I wonder, when daylight fades,
how much the fingers' silence knows
about the flashes of the unseen
in life's darkness?
Oh, let me have your fists.
They fall as snow falls,
no matter where I look,
as snow descends upon my palms
and falls headlong into my heart.
How often have I dreamed about those fists,
as two flowers growing by a stream
unfolding where my loneliness wanders, lost.* ¹³

Miniatures of a happy audience
celebrating New Year's Eve 1990,
dancing to the music of Adel Oglia
at the Saddam Hussein Gymnasium.
Miniature of a man
wearing a Mickey Mouse costume
dancing on the [green] expanse
of the gymnasium's basketball court.
Other men in other character costumes
dancing too.
And a massive drawing
depicting Saddam in traditional garb,
with a big smile,
appears on the wall in the background.
The man dressed as Mickey climbs the stairs
to the officials' podium,
to [respectfully] shake the hand
of a ministry representative.
Sometimes, his face covers
the entire screen
in the video footage that was found later.

"When I lead my army against Baghdad in anger,
whether you hide in heaven or on earth,
I will bring you down from the spinning spheres;
I will toss you in the air like a lion.
I will leave no one alive in your realm;

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I will burn your city, your land, yourself.
If you wish to spare yourself and your venerable
family,
give heed to my advice with the ear of
intelligence.
If you do not, you will see what God has willed.”¹⁴

For their own safety,
Baghdad Zoo workers suspend feeding the
animals in early April 2003.
Fedayeen Saddam troops take up defensive
positions around the zoo.
Eight days after the 2003 invasion,
only thirty-five of the 650 animals in the facility
are still alive.

“Here is my letter to the US President
Dear Mr. President,
I know the President himself will be too busy to
read this,
but I hope one of his aides or advisors will read
and pass the message.
I am writing to you regarding the occupation
of Iraq’s People’s National Stadium in Baghdad,
which has been surrounded by tanks
and is currently being used as a base for
US forces.
The local population has time and time again
asked them to move
and with Iraq’s Olympic team hoping return to
international competitions,
the US presence at the stadium has disrupted
training for the current players,
who since the war have not train or participated
in any matches.
I call for the US forces to relocate their forces to
another position
that is not in anyway occupying the Iraq’s
People’s National Stadium.”¹⁵

Miniature of Rifat Chadirji in 2010
re-proposing the same Monument to the
Unknown Soldier
to be installed in its original location.
It is to replace an abstract [green] sculpture
installed by the “Survivors’ Group.”

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Ala Younis is a research-based artist
and curator based in Amman.

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1
Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, "Myths"
(1950), poem translated from
Arabic by Mohammad Mahmud
Ahmad.

2
FLC P4 2 22.

3
Nuno Grande, "Gulbenkian vs. Le
Corbusier," *Jornal
Arquitectos* 250 (May–August
2014): 414–17.

4
Mina Marefat, "Mise au Point for
Le Corbusier's Baghdad
Stadium," *Docomomo* 41
(September 2009): 30.

5
Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, "The
River and The Death," poem
translated from Arabic by Jamil
Azeez Mohammad.

6
"Rivers and Drainage in Iraq,"
Library of Congress Country
Studies
(US) [http://www.geography-
site.co
.uk/pages/countries/drainage
/iraq_drainage.html](http://www.geography-site.co.uk/pages/countries/drainage/iraq_drainage.html)

7
Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, "Myths."

8
Letter from Ph. Roulier and G. M.
Presente to the Ministry of
Public Works and Housing,
Baghdad, dated April 2, 1963.
FLC P4 7.

10
Letter from Advocate A. R. Al-
Saidi to Mr. Ph. Roulier, dated
November 7, 1973. FLC P4 013.

11
Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, "For I Am
A Stranger," poem translated
from Arabic by Mohammad
Mahmud Ahmad.

12
Michael L. Galaty and Charles
Watkinson, *Archeology Under
Dictatorship* (New York: Springer,
2004), 203.

13
Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, "Day Has
Gone," poem translated by
Adnan Haydar and Michael
Beard.

14
Letter sent from Hulagu Khan
(1218–1265) to Baghdad's last
Abbasid Caliph in 1258.

15
Posted by www.IraqSport.com to
www.aliraqi.org, June 6, 2003.

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