



Mass grave sites in Iraq

compiled by Ulrike Löw

South Iraq

Al-Hayaniya, a suburb of Basra

Corpses buried under a traffic island on the road towards Sa'ad-Square, approx. 40-60 victims (Shiite civilians). Eye witnesses saw army bulldozers bury the people dead and alive in 1991, when the mainly Shia people of Basra staged an uprising against Saddam's regime.

(John Sweeney, "Saddam's mass graves", BBC News, 23 February, 2003)

Neighbourhood of Al-Mishraq al-Jadid, near Sa'ad Square in Basra

Mass grave with approx. 300-500 victims (Shia civilians), reportedly buried after the 1991 uprisings. Exact spot not yet found.

(Human Rights Watch; Human Rights News, 11 May, 2003)

The yards of the Iraqi Oil Tanker Company near Basra University

Mass grave close to the university, visited by delegates from Amnesty International in May 2003. Reports say that "Chemical Ali", Ali Hassan al-Majid, had used the location as an execution site. According to an eye witness, approx. 20-25 men and 10 women were executed here in 1991. The total number of victims is unknown.

("Mass grave uncovered in Iraq", www.ananova.com, 9 May, 2003; Amnesty International, "Iraq mass grave field report", www.scoop.co, 22 May, 2003)

Outside the city of Basra

Mass grave with 33 corpses from the 1991 uprising against Saddam Hussein. Iraqi civilians excavated the site and found faded identity cards among the skeletons.

("Over 3,000 bodies exhumed from mass grave in Iraq", Beijing Time, 15 May, 2003)

*Outside the city of **Basra***

Mass grave with 150 corpses of Shiite Muslims, executed during Saddam's repression of a 1999 uprising after the killing of a prominent Shiite cleric. Many of the victims were bound and blindfolded.

("Mass grave may be among Saddam's largest", The Guardian, 14 May, 2003)

*Near the **Al-Andalous gas station** north-west of **Basra***

Mass grave, dug up in April by relatives, seeking their missing family members. According to an eye witness, 17 people were brought to the site in 1991, shot there, and their bodies thrown into a trench. Seven people could be identified so far.

(Human Rights Watch; Human Rights News, 11 May, 2003)

*Remote spot west of **al-Zubayr** near **Basra***

Mass grave, dug in spring 1999, with approx. 80-100 victims. An eye witness reports that three trenches were dug. Later blindfolded and handcuffed prisoners were placed one by another in the trenches. Then men in uniform began shooting at them with machine guns and pistols for several minutes. Afterwards a bulldozer covered up the mass grave. It was visited by Human Rights Watch in April.

(Human Rights Watch; Human Rights News, 11 May, 2003)

*25 miles west of **Basra***

Several artificial mounds, most probably mass graves, strewn with live mortar shells and other unexploded ordnance, therefore difficult to uncover. Visited by a team of Human Rights Watch. Number of victims unknown.

(Sama Zia-Zarifi, Olivier Bercault, "Mass graves hide horror of Iraqi past", Los Angeles Times, 27 April, 2003)

Al-Fadhiliyah** near **Abul-Khasib**, south of **Basra

Mass grave with hundreds of bodies, approx. 40 victims unearthed. It was investigated by delegates from Amnesty International in May 2003. They provisionally determined that it dates from 1991, as two Iraqi civilians say they have identified their fathers from the clothing on two of the corpses.

("Mass grave uncovered in Iraq", www.ananova.com, 9 May, 2003; Amnesty International, "Iraq mass grave field report", www.scoop.co, 22 May, 2003)

*Near the ancient city of **Ur***

Mass grave with approx. 150-200 victims (probably Marsh Arabs). Found by tomb raiders, who were digging for gold, but found corpses still with skin, hair and shreds of Arabic dress. The skulls had holes in the back of their head, as if they had been shot.

(John Sweeney, "Saddam's mass graves", BBC News, 23 February, 2003)

*Near **Samawa**, 170 km south of **Baghdad***

Mass grave, discovered in June 2003. Kuwaiti and U.S. experts are investigating whether it contains the remains of some of the 600 Kuwaiti prisoners of war missing since 1991.

(Will Dunham, "U.S. says mass grave in Iraq may hold Kuwaiti POWs", Lycosasia.com, Breaking News, 12 June 2003)

*20 km north of the holy city of **Najaf***

Mass grave at a farmland site with the bodies of 72 women and men. It was unearthed in early May 2003, apparently dating from the Shiite uprising in 1991. Some of the corpses were with blindfolds and hands tied. Bullet casings, combs, coins and watches lay among them. Some had identity cards in their clothes.

("Iraqis digging up Shi'ite mass grave", One News, nzoom.com [New Zealand], 5 May, 2003; "Mass grave maybe among Saddam's largest", The Guardian, 14 May, 2003)

Central Iraq

Al-Mahawil near Hilla, ca. 90 km south of Baghdad

Mass grave, yet with more than 3000 victims dug up, supposedly killed during the 1991 Shiite uprising against Saddam Hussein. It is the largest mass grave found in Iraq so far. A man who lives in the area, said the Mahawil executions lasted six weeks in March and April of 1991, and between 10,000 and 15,000 people were killed, sometimes 2000 persons per day. Some had apparently been buried alive.

People who live near Mahawil knew where the graves were and recently started excavating them. Unfortunately they dug them up with tractors and backhoes, often uncovering a dozen of corpses in a single scoop. Some of the victims were buried with identification cards in their wallets. Others were identified from their glasses, house keys, or other personal effects found among the bodies. About 65 individuals had been identified until 14 May.

(Human Rights Watch, Human Rights News, 14 May, 2003; Patrick E. Tyler, "An open secret is laid bare at mass grave in Iraqi marsh", New York Times, 14 May, 2003; Mass grave maybe among Saddam's largest", The Guardian, 14 May, 2003; "Troops keep distance at mass grave", CNN.com./world, 14 May, 2003; Christine Hauser, Hudja Majeed Saleh, "3,000 bodies dug out of mass grave in Iraq", www.rediff.com, 14 May, 2003; "Over 3,000 bodies exhumed from mass grave in Iraq", Beijing Time, 15 May, 2003; Peter Bouckaert, "Digging up the past in Iraq's killing fields", Human Rights Watch-Homepage, 16 May, 2003; Ilene R. Prusher, "Desperate and unchecked, Iraqis destroying evidence at mass graves", The Christian Science Monitor, 29 May, 2003)

Manahil, 90 km south of Baghdad

Mass grave at the farming community of Manahil, bearing more than 3,000 decomposed bodies. Most of the skeletons were garbed in civilian clothes, only some looked military. The bodies were found on top of each other. One had an artificial leg, another one had a T-shirt on which read "Paradise island". Several skulls were bound with a cloth across the eye sockets.

("Bodies unearthed in mass grave", One News, nzoom.com [New Zealand], 14 May, 2003)

Mohammad Sakran, ca. 40 km north of Baghdad

Name of a secret burial ground at the edge of a civilian graveyard, with numbered graves of more than 1000 killed individuals. One of the victims was Mohammad Sakran who gave the site its name. - Nearby villagers were told that the remains were those of people without known relatives. But files of the Iraqi intelligence agencies reveal that they were executed by the Iraqi government. One person found three of his cousins among the victims. Among the identified corpses are Iraqi Shiites

and Kurds, as well as some women. They were executed between 1979 and 1999, according to preliminary investigation conducted by Human Right Watch.

(Human Rights Watch, Human Rights News, 14 May, 2003)

Salman Pak, near Mada'in, ca. 30 km south of Baghdad

Mass grave at an abandoned military complex, containing the remains of political prisoners and army deserters. Four busloads of people were driven there and shot on 4 April, 2003. Local residents said they helped bury more than 100 bodies. The victims – young men - were killed five days before Saddam was toppled by U.S-led forces. That makes it the first grave found of such recent vintage.

Most of the victims were from Baghdad's Sadr City, a Shiite slum formerly known as Saddam City. Many of them were dressed in pieces of uniforms, others wore striped prisoners' pyjamas. Some had been blindfolded, others had bags tied over their heads. All of them had their hands tied and been shot in the back of the head. The site has been investigated by members of the British Inforce Foundation. Many of the dead had been dug up by family members before.

("New mass grave found in Iraq", BBC News 7 June, 2003; Michael Georgy, "Politics of death at suspected Iraqi mass grave", Yahoo News, 7. June, 2003; "Prisoners' mass grave found", News 24, 7 June, 2003; Ali Hamza, "Mass grave found in Iraq", Shia News.com, 7 June, 2003; "Mass grave discovered south of Baghdad", ABC online, 8 June, 2003; Agence France presse, "Mass grave found, may hold 100 bodies", www.news.com.au, 8 June, 2003; Sharon Waxman, "Experts: Mass grave in Iraq is recent", The Washington Post, 9 June, 2003)

Habbaniyah, outside Baghdad

Mass grave which supposedly contains some of the roughly 600 Kuwaitis missing since the 1991 Gulf War. Kuwaiti forensic teams are investigating that claim.

("Iraq: More mass graves found", www.news.com.au, 21 May, 2003)

At a Fedayeen camp in Baghdad

Mass grave, containing at least 21 political prisoners from al-Thawra district (Baghdad) as well as Amara and Basra, who were executed on 2 March 2000. The bodies were buried at night at the camp in Baghdad. Non of them was handed to their families.

(Centre for Human Rights, Iraqi Communist Party Shaqulawa (Arbil) – Iraq, "List of 223 victims, including 46 convicted with political charges", 5 April, 2000)

Al-Zahedi, on the western outskirts of Baghdad

Secret graves near a civilian cemetery with the bodies of almost 1000 political prisoners. According to an eye witness, ten to 15 bodies arrived at a time from the Abu Ghraib prison and were buried by local civilians. An execution on 10 December 1999 in Abu Ghraib claimed the lives of 101 people at one day. On 9 March, 2000, 58 prisoners were killed at a time. The last corpse interred was number 993.

(Centre for Human Rights, Iraqi Communist Party Shaqulawa (Arbil) – Iraq, "List of 223 victims, including 46 convicted with political charges", 5 April, 2000; David Bros, "Mass grave discovered", The Mercury News, 21 April, 2003)

Al-Anbar desert, west of Baghdad

Mass grave with thousands of victims. Eye witnesses report that Kurds were packed 200 at a time into trucks that would normally hold 12 to 15 people. No water or ventilation was supplied. They had been told they were to be "relocated", but those who survived the journey were murdered. Thousands of Shiite, too, were buried here. Some of them were lined up and machine-gunned before being covered with sand. Others were buried alive. The exact number of victims is unknown.

("Mass graves litter Iraq", The Evening Standard, 17 April, 2003)

A base in Muhaywir, northern part of Al-Anbar desert

Mass grave and execution place. According to eye witnesses men were lined up 3 km long. One officer asked each man his name and before he could reply another shot him in the back of the head. The exact number of victims is unknown.

("Mass graves litter Iraq", The Evening Standard, 17 April, 2003)

Tharthar, north-west of Baghdad

Large mass grave near Saddam Hussein's "green palace" with both Kurdish and Shiite victims. Thousands were bussed into the desert for the so-called "relocation" procedure. Many died on the way. Survivors were shot or buried alive in vast holes dug in the ground.

("Mass graves litter Iraq", The Evening Standard, 17 April, 2003)

In the area of Khan Dhari, west of Baghdad

Mass grave with the bodies of political prisoners from Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. 15 victims were executed on 26 December, 1998 and buried by prison authorities under the cover of darkness.

(The Iraqi Communist Party, Iraqi letter vol. 4, 12 March, 1999)

Jurf al-Sakhr, central Iraq

Mass grave with more than 430 victims uncovered.

("Iraq: more mass graves found", www.news.com.au, 21. May.2003)

Camp near Qaryat al-Marrajah, alongside Habaniya lake

Large mass grave on a training ground near a small Sunni Muslim village. A large trench runs for hundreds of yards and could contain as many as 4,000 bodies, according to an member of the Iraqi intelligence service. The site is investigated by U.S. military forensic teams. Until May 12 about 12 bodies had been unearthed. Eight of them were shot in the back of the head.

(Joshua Hammer, Adam Piore, "Digging up a grisly past", Newsweek Web Exclusive/MSNBC News, 12 May, 2003)

The holy city of Kerbala

Shiite mass grave near the holy shrine of Hussein, the grandson of the Islamic Prophet Mohammad. Suspected are as many as 5,000 corpses, 45 victims were unearthed until 16 May, 2003.

"Mass grave discovered in Iraq's holy city", The Iran Foundation, 16 May, 2003)

Southern edge of Babylon, 100 km south of Baghdad

Mass grave near the ancient ruins, believed to date back to the uprising after the 1991 Gulf War. 35 corpses were uncovered until early May 2003. The bones were found wrapped in stained blankets, and skulls with rectangles cut out of the back. US marines at the site suspect that they appear to have been cut open, maybe experiments were being made with the prisoners. Some others were shot. The bones included those of children aged about 10-12.

("Iraqis dig up Shi'ite mass grave", One News, nzzoom.com [New Zealand], 5 May, 2003; "Mass graves found in Iraq", Beaker's Corner, 3, May 2003)

North Iraq

*Industrial zone near the city of **Kirkuk***

Suspected mass grave, about 12 km on the road toward Tikrit, right behind a military camp. Actually, it is more like a collection of approximately 2000-2500 mounds and about a dozen unmarked concrete graves over an area of about 2 hectares.

According to the Patriotic Union for Kurdistan the site might be for the victims of Saddam Hussein's anti-Kurd campaign in 1988 which included the chemical gas attack on Halabja. During that period at least 100,000 Kurds were killed in Saddam Hussein's policy of ethnic cleansing in Iraq.

Eye witnesses said US soldiers dug up the remains of a woman in civilian clothes from one of the graves. Another woman was reportedly found wrapped in plastic and covered in dried blood. A third grave held a man with remnants of a Kurdish fighter's uniform. The concrete number of victims is yet unknown.

("Mass grave found in Iraq. Kurdish officials say they found a series of mostly unmarked graves that contain about 2,000 bodies outside the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk", BBC News, 17 April, 2003; "Possible mass grave near Kirkuk", One News, nzoom.com [New Zealand] 18 April, 2003; "Mass grave being examined", The Herald Sun, 18 April, 2003)

*City of **Kirkuk***

Mass grave at the edge of an industrial park, between a Pepsi-Cola bottling plant and the mansion of a cousin of Saddam Hussein. They are unmarked graves, nearly 1,600 in lines, stretched in rows for more than a quarter-mile. No one yet precisely knows what they hold. Only two skeletons had been uncovered in April 2003. One of them was a headless man in Kurdish dress, the other one wore a blood-stained track suit and still had wisps of long, light-coloured hair.

Some believe that they were civilians that the Iraqi army had randomly seized from Kirkuk's streets when they recaptured the city after an uprising in 1991. According to eye witnesses the soldiers grabbed anybody who was outside.

But some soldiers of the Iraqi army described being ordered to work here in 1988, as trucks with stacks and coffins brought more and more corpses. The soldiers were told that all of these people were hanged.

(C.J. Chivers, "Mass graves site raises questions, painful memories", The New York Times, 17 April, 2003)

*Near **Debs**, province of **Kirkuk***

Mass grave containing the remains of 200 Kurdish children, discovered on 30 May, 2003. The grave is dating from the Kurdish uprising in 1991 and differs from the

other mass graves since only child victims are buried here, some of them even having their dolls with them.

("Mass grave found in north Iraq", The Mercury News, 3 June, 2003; "Mass grave in north Iraq contains remains of 200 Kurdish children", Kurdistan Regional Government, 12 June, 2003)

Koreme, 4 km north Mengish, the district capital in Dohuk governorate

Mass grave from the time of the Iraqi Anfal-campaign against Kurdish civilians in 1988, investigated by a Human Rights Watch team in 1992. It consisted of several burial pits with 27 corpses tightly commingled. All of them were male and appeared to have suffered death by gunshot wounds.

(Human Rights Watch publication, "The Anfal Campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Destruction of Koreme", December 1992; "A new mass grave found in Iraq Kurdistan", The Kurdistan Observer, 11 February, 2003")

Jeznikam/Baharka cemetery, outside Erbil, near Iraqi military camps

Unmarked graves at the southern and western slopes of an older existing cemetery, reportedly containing the remains of forcible relocated Kurds who had died after being brought to the camps. For example, on September 24 1988, 250 Assyrians and Yezidis were ordered to report to the police station at Baharka. Those who did so were arrested, put on a military bus and never seen again. Among them were also women and children. The total number of victims is unknown. 85 of the graves at Jeznikam were investigated by a Human Rights Watch team in 1992, revealing that 71 victims seemed to have been of sub-adult age.

(Human Rights Watch publication, "The Anfal Campaign in Iraqi Kurdistan: The Destruction of Koreme", December 1992; Kurdistan Regional Government homepage, "The Amnesty and its Exclusions, 1998; "A new mass grave found in Iraq Kurdistan", The Kurdistan Observer, 11 February, 2003")

Near the village of Goptapa, Iraqi Kurdistan

Mass grave from the time of poison-gas attacks against Kurdish civilians in 1988, discovered by Kurdish authorities in the 1990ies. Number of victims unknown.

("A new mass grave found in Iraq Kurdistan", The Kurdistan Observer, 11 February, 2003")

City of Arbil, Iraqi Kurdistan

Mass grave near an asphalt factory, discovered by Kurdish authorities. Number of victims unknown.

("A new mass grave found in Iraq Kurdistan", The Kurdistan Observer, 11 February, 2003")

Khanaqin, north Iraq

Mass grave, number of victims unknown.

("Iraq: More mass graves found", www.news.com.au, 21 May, 2003)

Military camp in **Sardaw**, province of **Sulaimaniyah**

At least four mass graves inside an old Iraqi military camp. Three of them were known in the 1990ies, but the fourth was discovered only in February 2003. It contained the bodies of six Kurds wearing traditional Kurdish costume. Four of them are thought to be teenagers, and the other two were over twenty years old. Traces of blood on their clothes and bullets in the head of some were visible. According to Kurdish authorities they were executed in 1983, during the attack on Qushtapa camp in Arbil. The local people are expecting to find more mass graves in this camp. The investigations are ongoing.

(The International Alliance for Justice, The Coalition for Justice in Iraq, press release "A new mass grave found in Iraq Kurdistan", The Kurdistan Observer, 11 February, 2003")

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c/o Ursula Janssen, Salzburgweg 6, 48145 Muenster, Germany
International Bank Account:
IBAN: DE13 4005 0150 0134 5080 76 - SWIFT-BIC: WELADED1MST