

Archaeological Institute of America

Located at Boston University
656 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02215
Tel 617.353.9361 • Fax 6550
www.archaeological.org



April 18, 2003

The document reproduced on pages 2-3 was sent on April 9 to officials in the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the White House and the military urging security for museums and archaeological sites as the combat phase of the war was winding down and before the looting of the Baghdad museum began.

Archaeological Institute of America

Located at Boston University
656 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02215
Tel 617.353.9361 • Fax 6550
www.archaeological.org



April 9, 2003

On behalf of the Archaeological Institute of America and the American Association for Research in Baghdad, we want to commend the efforts of the United States and British military in protecting and avoiding the targeting of archaeological sites, museums and other cultural monuments in Iraq. As active hostilities draw to a close, however, we want to express the concern of our membership and urge that the United States and Britain undertake emergency measures to protect the cultural heritage of Iraq from destruction through the looting of archaeological sites. These sites, located throughout Iraq, are now presumably unguarded unless the Coalition forces immediately provide the necessary security.

Iraq, the land of Mesopotamia located between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, is the home of some of the world's oldest and most significant archaeological and cultural sites. One of the areas of initial agriculture and animal domestication, Iraq was the center of the development of cuneiform writing on clay tablets in ca. 3200 B.C. Numerous archaeological sites relating to Biblical history and the Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian and Babylonian Empires are located in Iraq, including Babylon, Ur, Ashur, Nineveh and Nimrud. Iraq's museums, particularly the national museum in Baghdad and the regional museum in Mosul, are repositories for countless irreplaceable sculptures, inscribed tablets, reliefs, cylinder seals and other cultural objects that record this history.

While neither the United States nor Great Britain is a party to the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, both nations have accepted the principles of this Convention as a matter of customary international law. It is these principles that the Coalition forces followed in avoiding intentional damage and destruction to cultural sites during the present hostilities. However, the Convention equally imposes the duty to "prohibit, prevent and, if necessary, put a stop to any form of theft, pillage or misappropriation of, and any acts of vandalism directed against, cultural property." (Article 4) Just as our allies and other nations will judge the conduct of the war in part by how Coalition forces treated cultural sites during the hostilities, so our efforts to establish peace in Iraq will similarly be judged.

We therefore call upon the Coalition forces to provide immediate security, where necessary, for museums and major archaeological sites; to make public statements condemning the looting of sites and museums and warning that cultural objects removed from Iraq are stolen property; and, where necessary, to make appropriate shows of force to stop looting until a revived Department of Antiquities can reestablish normal controls. Helicopter flights over archaeological sites would probably serve to halt much of the looting. Even now it is likely that looting of sites is underway and that if protective action awaits the formation of a new government in Iraq, immeasurable harm will be done in the interim to the cultural heritage of Iraq and of all the world.

The Archaeological Institute of America and the American Association for Research in Baghdad are available to provide technical expertise and information that may be useful in accomplishing the goals of archaeological and cultural heritage preservation.

Archaeological Institute of America

Located at Boston University
656 Beacon Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02215
Tel 617.353.9361 • Fax 6550
www.archaeological.org



Sincerely,

Jane Waldbaum,
President, Archaeological Institute of America

McGuire Gibson
President, American Association For Research in Baghdad