

A Personal Account of the First UNESCO Cultural Heritage Mission to Baghdad, May 16–20, 2003

JOHN M. RUSSELL, PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY
MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF ART, BOSTON, USA

In mid-May 2003 I was invited to participate in the first UNESCO mission to Iraq to assess the impact of the recent war on cultural heritage. For security reasons, ORHA (the U.S. Pentagon Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance), which was in charge of administration in postwar Iraq, insisted that the group be kept small and that the mission be confined to Baghdad. The text that follows is cobbled together from the report I wrote for UNESCO after the mission and from the personal diary I kept there, and illustrated with my amateur trip photos. Although by now (August) there have been small improvements in some aspects of the situation as described here, the report is of interest as the first outside assessment of the condition of the Iraq Museum immediately after the war, and in most respects it reflects the situation still facing cultural heritage and people in Baghdad.

Wednesday, May 14th, and Thursday, May 15th

Here's a bit about my trip. I didn't know I was going for sure on Wednesday, and didn't really find out until 4:50 that afternoon, when the authorization for my Kuwaiti visa came through, just before the college fax machine closed. I'd been told we were flying into Baghdad from Kuwait, so had already made a reservation for that day to Kuwait. At 4:30, I'd decided there was no way I was going that day, but would wait until the following day, as it was just too late to go home and pack and get back to the airport to pick up my ticket by 7 p.m., when the Continental ticket counter closes. But at 5 p.m. I decided to try, and just made it to the ticket counter at 6:50, and then to my flight on Virgin later that evening.

The flight was fine and I got into Heathrow on schedule early Thursday morning, stood in line for an hour to check into my Kuwait Air flight, and went to the gate, only to find the UNESCO director of the mission, Mounir Bouchenaki, waiting there for Neil MacGregor, director of the British Museum, who was booked on the same flight. He had flown to London from Paris to tell MacGregor that our arrangements had changed and we were flying to Amman instead. By great luck, I was going through Heathrow, too, which no one knew since I hadn't had time to tell UNESCO my itinerary, but I recognized Bouchenaki and so saved myself an unnecessary trip to Kuwait! We retrieved our Kuwait tickets eventually and bought new ones for Amman on a flight at 5 p.m. and then killed time in the airport for the day. We got into Amman at midnight and learned that our flight the next day to Baghdad didn't exist and that we'd have to wait until Saturday morning to fly to Baghdad.

Friday, May 16th

We spent Friday morning on a great tour of Amman, courtesy of the UNESCO staff in Amman, and had a traditional Arabic lunch under a tent at a pretty nice place. Then we went back to the hotel, the Intercontinental, which was very plush, to rest and ran into Tony Wilkinson (professor of archaeology at the University of Chicago), who was just returning from his National Geographic tour of northern Iraq. He had dinner with our group and told

us about Nineveh, Nimrud, Mosul, and other sites. As we were unable to visit these areas ourselves, this chance meeting was another bit of good luck, since otherwise we'd not have gotten this information in such detail. His most significant observations were:

Mosul Museum: Sculptures in the Hatra gallery were smashed but apparently not stolen. In the Assyrian gallery, a few Assyrian inscribed bricks and some sections of bronze gate bands from Balawat were stolen. Condition of storeroom is not known. American military unit not far from the museum might be redeployed at front and back of the museum for protection. Museum needs a careful three-day assessment visit by qualified heritage professionals.

Nineveh: Sennacherib Palace site museum is near total destruction and needs immediate intervention. Museum is only guarded from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. by military, so plunderers come after dark—guard needs to be increased to 24 hour. Sheet metal roof needs to be replaced before autumn rains. Remaining sculptures and walls need comprehensive conservation treatment. Conservators could stay at nearby Nineveh palace hotel, which is safe and is currently being used by UN groups in the area.

Nimrud: Assurnasirpal II Palace site museum, summary of looting: sculptured slab B-13, top center fragment with winged disk was stolen; S-19, top of tree on corner slab was broken away to facilitate cutting free of head on S-20 (unsuccessful); slab I-9 had kneeling figure from upper register stolen. This last piece could be worth \$10 million on the legitimate market. Museum is now under 24-hour military guard, and this has stopped the looting.

Saturday, May 17th

I flew to Baghdad on Saturday on a small twin-prop passenger plane from Amman, Jordan (fig. 1). It had our group of six people plus the director of UNICEF. UNICEF is very busy here. We landed in the main airport but debarked at the cargo terminal, where the US military checked us in, and we got in our small convoy to drive to the camp. There are more tanks around Baghdad than I'm accustomed to seeing in Boston, for example. There were a couple of big tanks guarding the entrance to the airport, and there was another cruising along in front of us on the road, which we passed. These were real Abrams tanks, and there are two more parked in front of the museum and others scattered around the city (fig. 2). There are a lot of Iraqi tanks around, too, as well as other tracked vehicles and artillery pieces, but they're all blown-out shells (fig. 3).

On the trip from the airport we got into a huge traffic jam of people trying to get into the city. The main problem seemed to be that one or some of the main bridges are damaged, so traffic has to funnel into the others. Also, cars keep breaking down, and there are no traffic signals (no electricity) or traffic police, so drivers do very much as they please, driving every which way. Gas is a huge problem, with 8-hour lines at the gas stations, and when you get to the pump, you only get a certain amount. Even the UN apparently has to do this, as the US seems not to have allotted the UN any fuel to run its humanitarian programs, which is all it's trying to do now until some order is restored. The UN is anxious to protect its people, so we only go out in groups of two or more cars, each with at least two people in them, and all cars maintain radio



Fig. 1. Our suitcases being unloaded with a forklift at the cargo terminal in Baghdad (© J. Russell)



Fig. 2. One of the tanks in front of the Iraq Museum (© J. Russell)



Fig. 3. Destroyed Iraqi tank (© J. Russell)

and an air conditioner (fig. 5). The air conditioner has trouble beating the heat in the daytime, but it gets nice and cool at night. The shower is cold water only and in a trailer, which isn't too nice, but the toilets and sinks are in a regular bathroom in the hotel building. The first night I had a bit of trouble going to sleep since I heard some gunfire not too far away just after getting in bed. The food is cafeteria-style, and is cheap and good, and they have a satellite dish for Internet, so I can use email. They also have a generator, which some people complain is too loud but which I barely hear (much quieter than the one at Tell Ahmar!), so we have electricity when the rest of the city doesn't, which is a lot of the time. Next time, if there is one, I'd prefer to stay in a real hotel in town, since we're pretty isolated here, but this place is OK.

During the course of our mission, we met twice with Ambassador Pietro Cordone, the newly-appointed administrator of culture for ORHA. The first meeting was at the UN compound, where he met us shortly after our arrival. We described the UNESCO mission goals and shared initial concerns, particularly the following list of issues based in part on our interview with Tony Wilkinson the day before and in part on our own prior assessment of the general situation in Iraq. The points are ranked in order of urgency:

- pay the Antiquities Department staff, especially in the north, where they had not even received the \$20 interim payment given to staff in Baghdad
- establish stable telephone and email communication with museum
- procure vehicles for Antiquities Department offices throughout Iraq
- patrol archaeological sites and establish guards to prevent looting
- Central Bank of Baghdad vault: keep water pumped out, but do not open until appropriate security and conservation measures are taken to protect Nimrud gold
- antiquities return amnesty should be augmented with small monetary rewards, after staff salaries are stable



Fig. 4. UN vehicles in old and new colors (© J. Russell)



Fig. 5. Our tent, third from the left (© J. Russell)



Fig. 6. Sumerian gallery with display cases emptied for protection before the war (© J. Russell)



Fig. 7. Bassetki statue's display case, with its side smashed (© J. Russell)

seemed secure at the time of our visit, with two Abrams tanks parked out front, a military guard and razor wire at the gate, and soldiers living in the library. I could not tell how reliable the electricity supply was at the museum, or if there was a back-up generator—there seemed to be electricity when we needed it during our visits. There is no permanent communication system in the museum.

Upon our arrival at the museum, we met with Dr. Jaber Khalil (director general, State Board of Antiquities and Heritage [SBAH]), Dr. Donny George (director of research and studies, SBAH), and Dr. Nawala al-Mutawalli (director of museums, SBAH). They briefed us on the extent of destruction to heritage in Iraq resulting from the 2003 war and then took us on a tour of the public areas of the museum:

Public galleries: Most objects had been removed from the galleries to safe locations prior to the war (fig. 6). The only pieces that remained behind were those that were too large or fragile to move, such as the Akkadian copper statue from Bassetki, and those that were permanently attached to their displays, such as the Warka vase. We saw the smashed side of the display case that had held the Bassetki statue, which weighs several hundred pounds, and a trail of cracked steps where the looters had apparently dragged it down the stairs (figs. 7, 8). We also saw the remains of the foot of the Warka vase, still attached to its overturned pedestal (fig. 9). Other targets for theft were

- Khorsabad and Tell Billa: remove unexploded ordnance
- ensure that appropriate archaeological survey and salvage precedes all construction projects, including imminent construction to expand or improve the Tell Afar and Talil air bases
- Assur: seek low water level for proposed dam project or cancel it; mount appropriate archaeological survey and salvage operation

Ambassador Cordone was receptive, and in turn informed us that his first charge from ORHA was to investigate the extent of Baath party involvement of Antiquities Department officials, in order to determine who could remain in their government positions. He cautioned us not to enter into agreements with any Iraqi officials until this process was complete and the authority of these officials was confirmed by ORHA.

After our meeting with Ambassador Cordone, we drove to the Iraq Museum. Ascertaining the situation in the Iraq Museum was the primary focus of our mission, and we visited it three times. On the first visit we toured the galleries and administrative offices. The second visit focused on the conservation wing, the incoming objects room, the storage rooms, and the library. The third visit was to say goodbye and inquire about ways we might be of assistance. The building

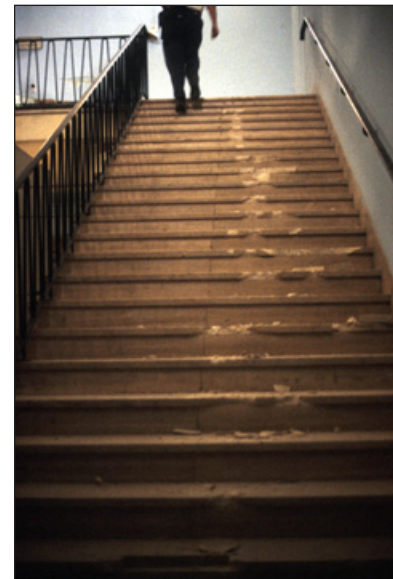


Fig. 8. Broken stairs where the Bassetki statue was apparently dragged down (© J. Russell)

the display of objects from the Ninhorsag temple at al-Ubaid, most of which were subsequently recovered, and the display of cuneiform-inscribed bricks, of which nine were stolen and are still missing (figs. 10, 11). A number of objects that weren't stolen were damaged, including a particularly fierce-looking



Fig. 9. Restored foot of the Warka vase, still attached to its display pedestal (© J. Russell)

including a particularly fierce-looking Harmal-type lion and a woman from Hatra, who suffered an attempted beheading with a blunt instrument (figs. 12, 13). According to the report submitted today by Colonel Matthew Bogdanos, the officer in charge of the military's investigation of the looting, 42 such objects were stolen, of which 9 were subsequently recovered, and 15 more were damaged. Also according to Bogdanos, some display cases (28) were broken, but the great majority (423) are intact. I did not try to confirm these numbers. [According to *Science* magazine (1 Aug. 03, p.

584), 40 objects were stolen from the public galleries, and 10 had been recovered as of July 28.]



Fig. 10. Objects from the Ninhorsag temple at al-Ubaid. Only a copper relief of a bull is still missing. (© J. Russell)



Fig. 11. Display of cuneiform-inscribed bricks (© J. Russell)



Fig. 12. Three terracotta lion statues, possibly from Tell Diniyah (© J. Russell)

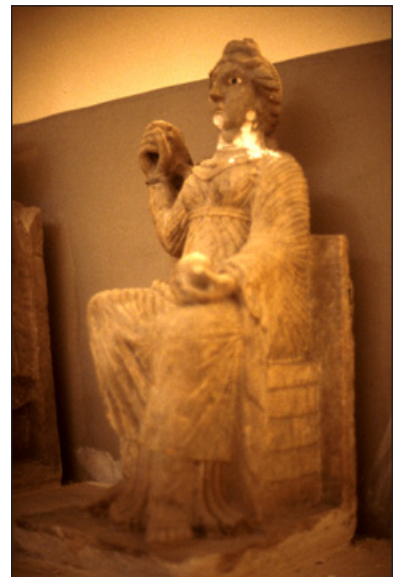


Fig. 13. Statue of a woman from Hatra (© J. Russell)



Fig. 14. Administrative office (© J. Russell)

George, establishing reliable satellite Internet and phone service, and restoring the administrative offices to a functional level are the most urgent priorities for the museum.

Sunday, May 18th

Our job is to assess the condition of museums and libraries in Baghdad itself, since the UN doesn't think it's safe for us to travel out of the city this trip. But it's not possible to focus just on antiquities with so much else going on. You probably can't imagine from the media—I know I couldn't—just how extensive the destruction here is. The talk of a clean campaign that would

leave the infrastructure intact to be handed over to the liberated Iraqis was a bunch of baloney. In every block are huge buildings destroyed by bombs, blasted by tanks, or burned out by looters (figs. 15, 16, 17). Most of these buildings are still standing to some degree, but they're all charred shells. This includes every government building, but also shopping centers, apartment blocks, the libraries, office buildings, just about every large building except the museum, which miraculously suffered little physical damage, and the Ministry of Oil, which looks brilliantly unscathed against the general backdrop of ruin (fig. 18). It's not like Hiroshima or Dresden, but does look a lot like any other bombed city you might have seen photos of. I don't think the media has come anywhere close to capturing just how bad it looks here.

I wouldn't blame the Baghdadis for being in despair or anger at the magnitude of the disaster. The result of all this destruction is that it is almost impossible to imagine how life can return to any

semblance of normality anytime soon, and this is a sense I share with the Baghdadis. Electricity is available, but only at a fraction of pre-war capacity, and despite the optimistic reports in the media, no one seems to know how to get it restored adequately. Several times we drove past a huge powerplant with four smokestacks, and every time only one smokestack was operating (fig. 19). The US might repair some malfunctioning part of a generator, but then the next night looters will



Fig. 15. Telecommunications(?) building, destroyed by pinpoint bombing (© J. Russell)



Fig. 16. Building destroyed by bombing(?) and shelling (© J. Russell)



Fig. 17. Building destroyed by looting and burning (© J. Russell)



Fig. 18. Ministry of Oil (© J. Russell)

disable it again, since the powerplants apparently aren't adequately guarded. Everyone seems to agree that the biggest problem is lack of law and order. I expect that is why Garner and his crew were replaced, because neither they nor the military could figure out how to begin restoring order, and if someone had to go, it wasn't going to be the military commanders.

One result of the chaos is that the office workers in the UN compound and everywhere else in town try to leave for home around 3 p.m. in order not to get caught on the streets when the looting starts. Most women won't come to work at all, since they feel vulnerable to kidnapping at any time. This is one of the problems at the museum, where female students are compiling the inventory under the direction of the museum director, but those who will come in will only stay for a few hours. Selma al-Radi, who was here from NY, and McGuire Gibson (University of Chicago) have arranged for a bus to transport these women back and forth, and they're anxious to see how that works. The UN has agreed to continue operating this bus after we leave.

This morning we returned to the museum for a second visit. Yesterday we walked through the public galleries to see what had been done to them, which was very sad, but that area has been pretty well covered by the press, although not with a specialist's eye. So we decided to re-

turn today and ask if we could go where no one had gone before, or almost no one, namely into the storage areas. Yesterday Colonel Bogdanos, who has been in charge of the military investigation into the museum, finished his tour there and filed his report. He's just about the only one besides the Iraqis who has seen the storage areas, so I thought it might be good to have another perspective besides the one being promoted by the military.

Conservation lab: This area is much larger than I expected—six or seven large rooms occupying one long hallway. All of it has been trashed by looters. Chemicals were stolen or dumped on the floor and portable equipment, such as microscopes, was stolen. The only equipment remaining is a scanning electron microscope that doesn't work, and four kilns for firing tablets. At present the temperature sensors on the kilns are inaccurate, which has apparently resulted in the destruction of at least one important archive of tablets. Muthena Muslim, the director of conservation, has cleaned up the mess, but the entire lab needs to be reequipped, and staff training brought up to date.

Incoming objects room: This room is normally used as the place where objects coming into the museum from excavations are processed and as a holding area for objects on their way to the conservation lab. It had also been completely trashed. At the time of our visit, it was being used as the temporary location for damaged objects that were still on display in the public galleries during the looting, including the harp from Ur (broken and stripped of its gold



Fig. 19. Powerplant (© J. Russell)



Fig. 20. Harp from Ur (© J. Russell)



Fig. 21. Skull from Ur (© J. Russell)



Fig. 22. Ivory carving from Nimrud (© J. Russell)

were stolen from shelves in this room. The upper store room is located directly above the first floor room and accessible only from it. It houses dozens, if not hundreds, of Torah scrolls and their boxes. The room has slit windows, which provided natural light that facilitated the work of the looters. One of these windows was the site of a sniper's nest. I photographed it and climbed up to look out (fig. 25, 26). It is not clear when this was used, but presumably after the storage area had been opened by the looters. [According to *Science* magazine (1 Aug. 03, p. 584), as of July 28 the number of items known to have been stolen from the old magazine stood at 2,703, of which 2,169 had subsequently been recovered.]

covering), the formerly bejeweled skull of a woman from Ur, and a number of Nimrud ivories (figs. 20, 21, 22). The famous marble face of a woman from Warka was stolen from this room.

Museum storage: Five of eight storage areas in the museum had been broken into, and items were missing from at least three of these. Two of these rooms comprise the "old magazine," a two-story area connected by a spiral staircase. We noticed no damage to the metal vault door to this area. In addition, there are five connected store rooms in the basement. Three of these had been entered by looters, who gained access not through an active door, but rather through an abandoned doorway that had been walled up. The looters opened the metal vault door (which seemed undamaged, although I didn't look closely) and broke a small hole at the top of the blocking wall, through which they climbed into the store room (fig. 23). There were three storage areas we didn't see that we were told were undisturbed—the other two basement rooms and a second-floor area in the old building where all the tablets are kept.

Old magazine: The lower room, entered from the first floor, had been cleaned up since the looting occurred. A number of metal footlockers on the floor contained finds from 2002 excavations at sites reportedly including Harba, Wilaya, Seleucia, and Aqar Quf (fig. 24). These objects, which had been registered but not yet put away, had been dumped on the floor by looters and plundered. No tablets or cylinder seals were in these boxes. Nawala al-Mutawalli, director of the museum, said these objects had been inventoried and returned to their boxes. Many other objects, including a considerable number of replicas and fakes,



Fig. 23. Basement storerooms, walled-up doorway breached by looters (© J. Russell)



Fig. 24. Old magazine, lower level, metal footlockers holding 2002 finds
(© J. Russell)

Basement storage: This area is arranged in three consecutive rooms. We had a lot of trouble getting access since the director of the museum, who was in charge of that area, had locked herself in there for the inventory. No one else in the museum had a key and of course there were no phones. Eventually someone got her attention and she came out and let us in. These rooms are windowless and the looters had only made a small hole in the blocking wall to crawl through, so this area was very dark. There were still a number of ash spots visible where the looters had used foam padding to set small fires on the floor in various locations to provide light for their work. This must have been a fleeting, dim,

and stinky light. This area had been cleaned up after the looting, so it was not possible to tell

how disrupted it had originally been. These rooms house many thousands of objects, so completing an inventory to determine what is missing will take months, if not well over a year. The first basement room was not badly disturbed, except near the door, where a considerable number of wooden trays of water-damaged Nimrud ivories were scattered on the floor. According to Muthena Muslim, the director of conservation, these ivories had suffered water damage during the 1990s while stored in metal footlockers on the floor of this room, when the sump pumps stopped working and the floor flooded to a depth of 10–15 cm. They were too saturated by water and mold for her to work with them, so she put them, untreated, in open wooden trays to dry out. These were subsequently overturned and scattered during the



Fig. 25. Old magazine, upper level, sniper's nest (© J. Russell)

looting of the storeroom, further aggravating an already major conservation emergency. Other litter in this area may conceal further damaged objects.

The second basement room seems to have been the most disturbed, with the theft of a still-unknown number of small objects, including jewelry and cylinder seals. The most serious loss from this room was the entire collection of cylinder seals accessioned into the museum prior to 1991, a total of 4,795 seals. Just prior to the 1991 war these had been moved to a secure facility for safety. In 2000 they were moved into the basement store room for eventual storage in locked cabinets (where seals accessioned after 1991 were already stored). They had not yet been put into the cabinets, however, and so were easy prey for the looters, who apparently had enough information about the collection to know where the seals were. The coin collection is also in locked cabinets here, but was reportedly undisturbed. According to Colonel Bogdanos's report, the looters had keys to the seal and coin cabinets, strong evidence that they were professionals with some inside knowledge, but they lost the keys in the dark and so were unable to open the cabinets. At the time of our visit, female students from Baghdad University were seated on the floor of this room carrying out the inventory of objects. This involves going through the entire card inventory, reportedly some 170,000 cards, and checking each card against the objects on the shelves to see what is missing. Object storage in this room, and everywhere, is in cardboard



Fig. 26. Old magazine, upper level, view of museum grounds and street from sniper's nest (© J. Russell)

boxes, which should probably be replaced with less reactive materials. The third basement room was opened, but little or nothing appears to have been taken. It contains mainly pottery. [In a presentation at the *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* in London on July 11, Colonel Bogdanos reported that as of July 8 a total of 10,337 objects was known to have been stolen from the basement storage area, and 671 had subsequently been recovered in a single seizure abroad. The number of objects known to be stolen is still rising as the contents of the room are inventoried.]

Museum library: The library was being used by American soldiers as living quarters, and as the place where recovered objects were spread out on a large table (fig. 27). Most of the ones on view were said to be among the 400+ objects contained in metal footlocker #175 and two cardboard boxes, which were seized by Chalabi's men from smugglers heading for Iran. The curious thing is that most of the objects in these boxes were forgeries and reproductions, as also seem to be most of the objects on display that the Americans claim to have recovered from looters. Apparently these objects were stored in the first floor storeroom and were stolen indiscriminately by looters along with genuine pieces. Dr. Jaber told us that he thinks objects from the museum are in the neighborhood. He has requested Coalition police cooperation in looking for these, but has received no assistance to date.

Monday, May 19th

This morning we left shortly after 8:30 to visit some building, the name of which I forget, but ran into terrible traffic downtown. Turns out that it was being caused by a huge peaceful demonstration in front of the Ahmadiya mosque, the major Sunni mosque. We tried to go a different way and ran into another huge demonstration in front of the Kadhamiya mosque, the main Shia mosque nearby, so we turned around and left. The paper today reported this was a peaceful anti-US imperialism rally, though what I saw was both groups rallying in favor of a legitimate representative government, not against the US specifically. I may have missed something.

Then we went to the National Library and Archives, which had both been in one building consisting of three floors and a basement (fig. 28). That place was really destroyed. The shell of the building was still standing, and we were able to walk through all but the basement. Except for the basement, most rooms had been burned during the looting, with huge piles of book ashes in some areas, and the building itself may well have suffered structural damage (fig. 29). In any event, it will take a considerable time to restore the structure. We toured the building with Dr. Muayad Damerji, advisor to the Ministry of Culture, who was the source of my information on the collections. He said that part of the book col-



Fig. 27. Museum library, recovered objects, viewed by UNESCO team members Ken Matsumoto, Roberto Parapetti, and Mounir Bouchenaki, and Director General Jaber Khalil (© J. Russell)



Fig. 28. National Library and Archives, exterior (© J. Russell)



Fig. 29. National Library and Archives, interior (© J. Russell)



Fig. 30. Bet al-Hikma, interior (© J. Russell)

that the library and archives should be relocated to buildings at al-Bakr University, which he said would soon be vacant. These buildings were not damaged in the looting and could be used soon.

Next we went to look at other historic Baghdad buildings. The Ahmadiya mosque suffered a large number of small-caliber bullet strikes to the interior decoration, but no serious damage. The clock tower out front was almost destroyed by shelling. The Bet al-Hikma ("House of Wisdom") was looted and burned (fig. 30). The roof has collapsed and the interior is completely gutted. The Abassid Palace, a beautiful courtyard building with an iwan, was architecturally intact, but all of the modern reproduction doors and windows were removed by looters (figs. 31, 32). The extent of damage to the Kushla, a beautiful arcaded courtyard building by the river, is not clear. We didn't go far into this structure as it was being looted at the time of our visit. Someone went off to fetch a couple of American soldiers and they went after the looters at the far end of the court, while more looters waited at the door for the soldiers to leave (fig. 33).

Finally, we went to the museum to say goodbye and then returned to our compound for a press conference. Although our group was confined to Baghdad, we did meet with members of the National Geographic group who had just completed a tour of the south, notably Andrew Lawler, archaeology correspondent for *Science* magazine, who I met with before the press conference, and Dr. Elizabeth Stone, of State University of New York at Stony Brook, USA, who sent me a report of her trip after my return. They reported evidence of looting at several sites they visited, most notably Larsa, where they observed large new holes. In addition,

during our final visit to the museum, our group met a German archaeologist, Susanne Osthoff, who had just returned from Isin, where she reported observing large-scale looting by a large group of diggers. Donny George added the information that looters were said to be working on a very large scale again at Jokha, a site that suffered massive damage from looting during the 1990s before the antiquities department reclaimed it by force of arms. [Subsequent visits to southern sites by McGuire Gibson in May and a second UNESCO mission in July confirmed that looting of sites there was widespread and uncontrolled.]

At present the department can do nothing to halt the looting, as all of the vehicles necessary

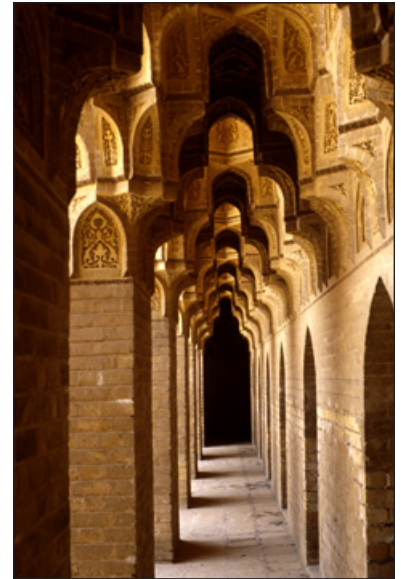


Fig. 31. Abassid Palace, arcade around courtyard, fortunately undamaged. (© J. Russell)



Fig. 32. Abassid Palace, view of iwan showing looted doors and windows. (© J. Russell)

to patrol sites were stolen by looters, and so is completely reliant on the Coalition to monitor and protect sites. There are a variety of possibilities for monitoring illegal activity at sites: satellite surveillance, aerial surveillance with an unmanned drone or from a helicopter, and land patrols, but stopping this activity once detected requires a military presence of some size, or an armed mobile Iraqi patrol force of sufficient size to discourage the looters, some of whom are reportedly armed.

After the press conference, we met again with Ambassador Cordone, this time to report on our findings. Again, the meeting with Ambassador Cordone was very productive. He shared with us two very important news items: first, an order had been issued that day authorizing payment of salaries to antiquities department personnel retroactive to April 1, and second, his office had decided to confirm Dr. Jaber Khalil (director general) and Dr. Donny George (director of research) in their positions and authority. He also reported that he was working on other ways to get things back to a functioning state in the museum, and that they were trying to figure out how to get the looting of sites in the south under control. We in turn reported briefly on our findings and recommendations. I reaffirmed the points on the list presented to him on May 17, and added the following urgent recommendations:

- restore the Museum's administrative offices to functional condition
- establish a grants and international programs officer position in the antiquities department



Fig. 33. Kushla, American soldiers in pursuit of looters. (© J. Russell)

Tuesday, May 20th

Some semblance of order is returning. Even while I've been here some of the traffic police have come back to work and are being assisted by volunteers, but there's no effective policing for crime except by the American soldiers, and they have no training for that. The soldiers drive around in Bradleys and Humvees, and there aren't enough of them to stop all the thieves, so people try to leave work by 3 p.m. in order to get home before the robbery and kidnapping begin, and many women won't come to work at all. That makes it difficult for workers to get as much done as they might if they could work full days. All of the Iraqis I spoke with agreed that their biggest need is restoration of law and order, so that people can do things without fear.

In addition to security, the Iraqis need a lot of other things: electricity, water, fuel, enough food, money. On the last two days we were in Baghdad, the neighborhood of one of our local UNESCO workers received a total of a half hour of electricity. The water supply is variable and difficult to pump without electricity. Gasoline is in short supply and motorists typically must wait in line eight hours for a partial tank of gas. Prices for fresh food have doubled since the war. Without their salaries being paid, workers don't have much incentive to risk their personal safety to come to work, and of course many of the office workers no longer have offices to work in. These problems probably won't be addressed in an effective way until the Iraqis get administrators who can organize things. That's why there's the sudden rush to get the de-Baathifying finished so that existing uncompromised administrators can be confirmed in their positions. That's why the news about Jaber Khalil and Donny George yesterday was so great, because it now means there are people in the Antiquities Department we can work with.

We packed and left the compound at about 9 a.m., drove around some residential neighborhoods, which seemed mostly undamaged, and stopped at a sweet shop famous for its manna. Next we drove by the Kadhamiya mosque, which the demonstration had prevented



Fig. 34. Mosaic portrait of Saddam (© J. Russell)

us from visiting yesterday, passing one of the few remaining pictures of Saddam, a tough mosaic that had survived being shot and burned (fig. 34). The mosque was undamaged. Then we drove to the airport, passing Saddam's huge unfinished (and perhaps unfinishable) mosque on the old racetrack, and departed Baghdad at mid-day for Amman (fig. 35). Walking to the plane across the Baghdad airport runway under the noon sun was about the hottest I've ever felt, and I wonder what it's going to be like in a modern concrete apartment building in Baghdad when summer really arrives and there is no power for air conditioning or fans.

In the evening in Amman we met with a large group of members of the diplomatic community to report on our findings. One of those attending was Dr. Fawwaz Khraysheh, director general of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities, who reported that Jordanian customs was conducting very thorough searches of those crossing the border from Iraq. Customs had seized 163 heritage objects, he reported, of which "fewer than 100" are archaeological. This was consistent with our own experience with Jordanian customs, which searched our luggage very thoroughly at the Amman airport when we returned from Iraq, and with accounts of several other recent visitors to Iraq, all of whom reported being carefully searched at the land border between Iraq and Jordan. By contrast, no one has reported being searched by occupation forces on the Iraqi side of the border when leaving Iraq, nor was my luggage searched when I entered the United States at Newark, even though my customs declaration card listed my visit to Iraq. From this it is clear that efforts to enlist the cooperation of customs services in countries bordering Iraq are essential if antiquities are to be interdicted leaving Iraq.



Fig. 35. Unfinished mosque on the racetrack. (© J. Russell)

Update (August 2003)

I have not been back to Iraq since the UNESCO mission in May, so this update relies entirely on reports from those who have been there more recently or are working there now.

Thanks to a grant from the Packard Humanities Institute, administered by the US Department of State (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2003/22232.htm>), an initial shipment of computers, furniture, and office supplies has been delivered to the antiquities department, and more are on the way. A local computer network is also being installed within the department, and staff offices are being refurbished. There is still a long way to go in preparing the Iraq Museum for reopening. In addition to refurbishing and furnishing the offices and galleries, the museum also needs a new security system and climate control for the galleries, storage, and offices.

A committee consisting of two department officers and three Coalition personnel has been formed to coordinate outside offers of assistance for antiquities and heritage. The British Museum and conservation centers in Italy and Japan are developing plans to restore the conservation lab in the Iraq Museum, to bring conservators to Iraq to assist with emergency conservation problems, and to update the training of Iraqi conservators. The US has announced that a wide range of federal agencies hope to assist with cultural reconstruction in Iraq (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2003/22388.htm>). Apart from the clearly targeted initiatives of the Department of State and the National Endowment for the Humanities, however, these plans are very short on specifics.

There is still no telephone or email communication between the antiquities department in Baghdad and the rest of Iraq or the outside world. It is not clear to me how or if the department in Baghdad is able to communicate with its offices throughout Iraq. Some private phone and email service in Iraq has been restored, however. The department is gradually tracking down all its employees throughout the country and getting them paid. This effort is hindered by the difficulties of communication and reliance on the Coalition to provide all the funds for salaries. In July, many employees were still waiting for their salaries for May and June.

At the time of my visit in May, the water flooding the vault of the Central Bank was slowly being pumped out. On June 1, the vault was opened and 616 gold objects from the tombs of Nimrud and Ur that had been stored there since 1990 were brought out, reportedly safe. On July 3, about 200 of these objects were put on display for two hours in a temporary “reopening” of the museum for the media. The museum then closed again and everything was put back into storage. On July 6, museum personnel told Coalition investigators the location of a secret vault where 8,366 objects from the public galleries, the vast majority of the display collection, were safely stored.

In his presentation at the *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* in London on July 11, Colonel Bogdanos reported that as of July 8 about 2,260 objects stolen from the museum had been recovered within Iraq thanks to an amnesty program and police work. Most of these are from the old magazine, and many are replicas and forgeries. None of the 10,337 objects stolen from the basement storerooms—all of them genuine and many of them extremely valuable and easily marketable—had been recovered in Iraq, which strongly supports his conclusion that the theft there was carried out by professionals. These thieves are unlikely to be impressed by the offer of an amnesty without rewards. The department would like to augment the amnesty program with small rewards to induce Iraqis to return objects stolen from the Iraq Museum rather than sending them out of the country, but so far the Coalition has been unable to provide the necessary funds.

There is still no effective policing for smuggled antiquities on the Iraqi side of the border. The Coalition is relying on the customs services of Jordan and other neighboring countries to intercept antiquities leaving Iraq. While Jordan is certainly doing its share, I have seen no reports of interceptions in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria, or Turkey, and these countries account for 95% of the length of Iraq’s border. According to Colonel Bogdanos, as of July 8 there had been only four seizures outside Iraq of antiquities from the museum.

There appears to be little real progress in the international effort to recover antiquities stolen from the Iraq Museum. Work on the inventory of objects stolen from the storerooms has apparently bogged down because the storerooms are too hot to work in during the summer. UNESCO and INTERPOL have reached an agreement whereby UNESCO will collect the results of the inventory and pass them on to INTERPOL for entry into its stolen art database, but to date UNESCO has apparently not yet started to do this. Independent of UNESCO, an Italian carabinieri assigned to the museum has been assembling information on the stolen cylinder seals and sending it to INTERPOL. Apart from the 30 objects still missing from the public galleries, which have been well publicized, I do not know how many, if any, of the roughly 10,500 objects still missing are in the INTERPOL database, which is only made available on CD. One law enforcement resource that is available is ICOM’s “Emergency Red List of Iraqi Antiquities at Risk” (<http://icom.museum/redlist>), which describes categories of Iraqi antiquities most at risk for smuggling.

Here in the US, two different bills have been introduced in the House and Senate to address the illicit traffic in Iraqi antiquities. The House bill, HR 2009, would permanently prohibit the import of stolen and looted Iraqi antiquities into the US, and would close a loophole in the current US law (the Convention on Cultural Property Implementation Act) that was taken advantage of by US dealers and collectors to trade massively in looted antiquities from Iraq and Afghanistan during the past decade. The Senate bill, S 1291, provides import restrictions for only one year and does not close the loophole. In order to succeed, HR 2009 needs a strong show of public support. Anyone concerned about this issue should write, call, and visit their congresspersons now. The dealers have already contacted theirs. To see if your Representative supports HR 2009, go to <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d108:HR02009:@@P>.

In a recent newspaper interview, Ambassador Cordone stated that looting of archaeological sites in southern Iraq is still a huge problem, and that the Coalition does not know how to get it under control. The extent of looting, if any, at sites in the north is unknown. The antiquities department still lacks vehicles, making it impossible for it to monitor archaeological sites. While gasoline shortages are somewhat less severe, carjacking is still a problem.

As Bechtel and other foreign companies gear up for massive infrastructure construction projects in Iraq, it is not clear what provisions, if any, have been made to ensure that appropriate archaeological survey and salvage are carried out ahead of the bulldozers. While Iraqi law requires permission from the antiquities department prior to commencing construction, and requires that the department supervise survey and salvage work if needed, it is not clear whether foreign companies and the Coalition will recognize this law, nor how such efforts would be coordinated, nor whether the department currently has the human resources to fulfill this role. There is the very real potential here for yet another archaeological disaster in Iraq.

Ambassador Cordone recently announced that a selection of the museum's treasures, including gold jewelry from Nimrud and the Warka vase, would soon travel to the US as a blockbuster loan exhibition. If so, then when the museum does reopen, some of Iraq's greatest national treasures—which have been in storage for 13 years and which many Iraqis have never seen—will be in the US being enjoyed by their liberators.

A photograph taken in Baghdad in July shows two smoking smokestacks at the powerplant.

FOR FUTHER READING

Many excellent resources on the cultural situation in Iraq are available online. My favorites are:

General news

<http://ctr.umkc.edu/user/fdeblauwe/iraq.html>

<http://listhost.uchicago.edu/pipermail/iraqcrisis>

"Mayhem in Mesopotamia," *Science* magazine, 1 Aug. 2003

<http://ctr.umkc.edu/user/fdeblauwe/lawler8103.pdf>

"Iraq Manuscript Collections, Archives, & Libraries Situation Report," 9 June 2003

<http://listhost.uchicago.edu/pipermail/iraqcrisis/2003-June/000200.html>

"Assessment of Iraqi cultural heritage Libraries and Archives," 6 July 2003

<http://www.ifla.org/VI/4/admin/iraq2207.pdf>

"Opening the Doors: Intellectual Life and Academic Conditions in Post War Iraq," 15 July 2003

http://www.lemoyne.edu/global_studies/opening_the_doors.pdf

"Iraq Post-Conflict Reconstruction Assessment Mission Report," 17 July 2003

<http://www.csis.org/isp/pcr/IraqTrip.pdf>

Colonel Bogdanos's reports

16 May 2003: <http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2003/tr20030516-0202.html>

11 July 2003: <http://listhost.uchicago.edu/pipermail/iraqcrisis/2003-July/000298.html>