

## **Conference in Brussels on “Archaeological sites in Iraq before and after the war”**

**4-5 December 2003**

The conference was organised by the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Brussels. In the evening of Thursday 4 December there was a reception in the Royal Academy in Brussels where an exhibition of photographs had been mounted, mainly of reliefs in Sennacherib's Palace at Nineveh. There were also some small pieces of original relief. A booklet was available in various languages about the conference and the exhibition. The first sentence reads: “The responsibility for the cultural heritage, which was assigned to Italy in the provisional allied Administration of Baghdad, represents an efficient division of tasks”.

On Friday 5 December, the conference, held in the Royal Academy, started with speeches of welcome from Pailuisa Bianco (Director of the Italian Cultural Institute in Brussels), Donny George (substituting for the Iraqi Minister of Culture), and Giuseppe Proietti (Director-General of Antiquities of Italy).

Mario Bondioli Osio (head of cultural affairs in the Coalition Provisional Authority) started his presentation by asking for one minute's silence for the two Japanese diplomats who had been killed on their way to Kirkuk to ascertain what Kirkuk Museum needed, as they were also proposing to help provincial museums. He said that the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Culture would be located in renovated buildings on Haifa Street. The new National Library would be in what used to be the Republican Guards' headquarters. There were currently two million books, and future donations would take the total to three million within 10 years. He said that the Ottoman archives, the Kingdom of Iraq archives and most of the book collection had been saved. Other projects included the theatre and cinema complex. He then moved on to the protection of archaeological sites. Organised looting was ongoing. It had been stopped in Nasiriya, but had increased in neighbouring provinces. They were proposing to introduce a “facility protection system” of the type developed in Italy for protecting banks, embassies, etc, by guards specifically trained for the purpose who were not police or army.

Francesco Caruso (permanent UN representative for education, science and culture) described all the actions taken by UNESCO to save the Iraqi Cultural Heritage. He referred to Resolution 1483 article 7, which gave UNESCO a mandate to take responsibility for the Iraqi cultural heritage. The morning session after the coffee break was concerned with archaeology in Iraq before the war. The first speaker was Giorgio Gullini (University of Turin) who detailed the various projects he had initiated.

John Curtis (Department of the Ancient Near East, British Museum) described the British excavations at Nimrud 1845-1989.

Paolo Fiorina (University of Turin) talked about the Italian excavations in Fort Shalmaneser at Nimrud in the late 1980s.

At the beginning of the lecture of McGuire Gibson (Oriental Institute, University of Chicago) the projector broke down and he gave the lecture without slides. Firstly, he reviewed the American excavations at Nippur from 1889 onwards; secondly, he explained that the Oriental Institute of Chicago has spent the last 13 years documenting archaeological sites from survey and satellite images. Five-thousand had been noted to date, which is a fraction of the true number; thirdly, he expressed the view that for at least the next decade archaeologists will be preoccupied with reconstruction, and excavation at large sites will not be possible for the conceivable future.

Antonio Invernizzi (University of Turin) talked about Seleucia on the Tigris, and Beatrice André Salvini (Louvre) described the French excavations at Tello since 1877. Margarete Van Ess

(German Archaeological Institute, Berlin) described the results of recent geophysical survey work at Uruk that was interrupted by the war. Lastly in this session, Roberta Venco Ricciardi (University of Turin) described her excavations at Hatra between 1995 and 2000.

After a buffet lunch in the Royal Academy, Pietro Cordone talked about his stint as cultural adviser. He was proud that a number of the projects started during his tenure are now making headway, and he referred specifically to the work of Dr Proietti, the British Museum, UNESCO and the Italian carabinieri. Mr Ugo Zottin (head of the carabinieri) was with him for a month and did an excellent job. Thanks to Nawalla al-Mutawalli, 8,000 objects representing 80% of the artefacts exhibited in the Iraq Museum had been deposited in a sealed store, and were now safe, and Cordone thought she deserves recognition for this. Amongst the positive outcomes of his tenure were the recovery of the Warka vase, the Warka head, and the Bassetki statue-base.

Mr Franco Frattini (Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs) said that Italy has an important role to play in the reconstruction of the Iraqi cultural heritage. Italy was well suited to this, and was playing a leading role, first under the direction of Ambassador Cordone and now under the direction of Ambassador Bondioli Osio. This was a great honour for Italy but also a great responsibility. The carabinieri had also made an important contribution.

Mounir Bouchenaki (Director of the Archaeological Culture section of UNESCO) said that UNESCO had been given the responsibility of co-ordinating the international rescue effort.

**The following projects had already been identified and funding secured from various sources:**

- 1) Rehabilitation of National Humanities Institute (\$57,000).
- 2) Rehabilitation of Institute of Popular Art (\$25,000 in cash taken to Baghdad).
- 3) Rehabilitation of School of Music and Ballet (\$300,000).
- 4) Databank (\$500,000).
- 5) Laboratories in Iraq Museum (\$1,200,000).
- 6) Training of border guards and site protection (\$192,000).
- 7) Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh (\$35,000).
- 8) Electric generators and climate control in the Natural History Museum (?) (\$70,000).
- 9) Rehabilitation of storage spaces in the Iraq Museum (396,000 euros).
- 10) Restoration of the Children's Museum (\$135,000).
- 11) Rehabilitation of the National Library and Archives (\$1,000,000).

The following projects were awaiting approval, not yet confirmed:

- 1) Air conditioning in the Iraq Museum (\$380,000).
- 2) Regional Centre (\$452,000).
- 3) Rehabilitation of Makkam (?) Institute (for oral and intangible heritage) (\$500,000).
- 4) Training of Iraqi colleagues, in Jordan if necessary.

Ugo Zottin (Italian carabinieri) gave some general information about the carabinieri organisation and paid tribute to the four policemen of the six-man team who had been killed.

Donny George (Iraq Department of Antiquities and Heritage) said that \$1,700,000 had now been allocated for the refurbishment of the Iraq Museum. Contracts were now being signed for air conditioning, windows, doors and rehabilitating the children's museum. The Babylon museum had already been restored, as had the Baquba Museum but the latter had subsequently been destroyed by a bomb in the next-door police station. The French cultural attaché had promised to build a museum in Samarra. The latest position with the Iraq Museum objects was that 14,000 had been stolen, 4,000 returned, there were 1000 in the USA and 200 in Jordan. By the 27 April 12 cases of material had been seized in Jordan. There was no information from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Syria or Turkey. No tablets had been stolen from the Iraq Museum. In terms of personnel, 20 young Iraqi archaeologists were going to the USA for training and 10 were going to France. Work had already started on the refurbishment of the laboratory in the Iraq Museum with Italian and Japanese support. M. Bouchenaki had been organising talks in Paris about the installation of the laboratory involving the donors and the Iraqis. Three Iraqi conservators were

going the UK for two months, and an international team of conservators organised by the British Museum would be going to Iraq soon thereafter. The Iraq Museum library had been completely saved. Donations of books should be made through the British Museum and the Oriental Institute in Chicago. Lastly, he expressed his support for Ambassadors Cordone and Bondioli-Osio and appreciation for what they had done.

Fawas Khreisheh (Director of Antiquities of Jordan) said that between 1991 and 1998, 1065 objects were confiscated and returned to Iraq in 1998. Amongst objects confiscated recently have been tablets, gold jewellery, figurines, seals, glass vessels, an ivory panel from Nimrud (a bed-head) and some fakes.

**Fawas suggests that the main problems confronting the Jordanian authorities are:**

- 1) The identification of fakes.
  - 2) How to identify other heritage items such as musical instruments.
  - 3) Whether rewards should be offered to the police.
- He suggested a comprehensive two-year training programme which should encompass the following topics:
- 1) Training.
  - 2) Protection of sites.
  - 3) Recovery of objects. This should be discussed by the neighbouring countries (UAE, Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia).
  - 4) More focus on restoration.
  - 5) Programme on archaeological site management.

Helga Trenkwalder (University of Innsbruck) described how she had been in Iraq in April-May, when Austria had been able to provide some immediate ad hoc assistance, and again in October. During the latter visit she was struck by the fact that the museum perimeter was still not being properly safeguarded. Also, at Babylon she saw archaeological deposits being removed by shovel to create earthwork defences. This was happening in spite of the protests of Dr Miriam who was now in charge of Babylon. At Borsippa a small amount of work was ongoing. Paolo Battino (Italian-Iraqi Institute in Baghdad) described how the new laboratory was a complex of six rooms, and he said the installation work should be completed by the end of the year.

Roberto Parapetti (Director of the Italian-Iraqi Centre for the Restoration of Monuments) said he was involved in trying to prepare exhibitions for the reopening of the Iraq Museum. He wanted to set up a "minimum visit" in the museum in order to give people the idea that things were getting back to normal.

After a break, the last session was devoted to the "Nineveh project", which is an Italian initiative to record and restore the reliefs in the Palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh. Dr Giuseppe Proietti (Director-General of Antiquities of Italy) said that equipment for the Iraq Museum laboratory will be sent on a military flight to Baghdad Airport as soon as it reopens. He reported that he last visited the Palace in September and found it badly damaged, mostly by vandalism. Then members of the team gave their reports. Stefano d'Amico (Central Institute for Restoration, Italy) described the technical process of stereophotogrammetric survey, Mrs Giuseppa Maria Fazio (Central Institute for Restoration, Italy) said there have been severe losses since 1990 when Russell photographed the slabs, and Ruggero Martines (Superintendent of Heritage and Culture, Lazio region) discussed what sort of superstructure would be most appropriate for the reliefs. Lastly, Antonio Invernizzi made some general comments about Assyrian narrative art.

The conference was brought to a close with some concluding remarks from Pialuisa Bianco