

## IRAQ

### The Impact of War on Iraq's Cultural Heritage

The war in Iraq already began during our preparations for the printing of our *Heritage at Risk Report 2002/2003*. The devastating consequences for the rich cultural heritage of this country with its witnesses of thousands of years of history in Mesopotamia, the "cradle of mankind", can not yet be estimated. The entire world is shocked about the shameless looting and destruction of museums, libraries and archives. Our next H@R will surely give another account of the situation of monuments and sites in Iraq. Therefore, this time we have restricted ourselves to the statements made by ICOMOS and Blue Shield before the war and are quoting from other reports and appeals. We are grateful to be able to use photographs of some important historic sites taken by Karl Weibl at the beginning of 2003:

*In connection with my artistic work "About the Origin of Time" UNESCO advised me to take up contact with ICOMOS and its president Prof. Michael Petzet. I was immediately taken to the idea of protecting monuments and sites world-wide by clearly pointing out imminent dangers. It seemed a logical decision that*

*my recently taken photographs of monuments and archaeological sites in Mesopotamia, present-day Iraq, should also be integrated into this report.*

*In my work I have been dealing with the phenomena of time and periods of time for a considerable while. I have been wanting to visualise the impressive periods of time involved in the Sumerian culture until today. Of particular importance for me has been the sustainability of this former civilisation.*

*Apart from the invention of the script the introduction of a sense of time has been the focus of my reflections. In former Mesopotamia, the beginning of chronology by astrologic discoveries 5000 years ago, the development of calendars and the introduction of a sexagesimal system (the division of time into minutes and seconds valid until today) can all be found.*

*To me the remains of the royal palaces of Nebuchadnezzar, the enormous ruins of many ziggurates all over the country as well as the foundations of the tower of Babel are the common cultural heritage of a global civilisation. Therefore, apart from humanitarian questions, we should also be very sensitive with regard to monuments and sites. I would like to thank Prof. Petzet for his great commitment to give these silent witnesses of history a voice.*

Karl Weibl  
March 2003



Inner courtyard of the Kazimain Mosque in Baghdad, one dome in the process of receiving a new gold coating



## Statement by the International Committee of the Blue Shield on the Impact of a War on Cultural Heritage in Iraq

The International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS) expresses its profound concern about the potential damage to, and destruction of, cultural heritage in the event of war in Iraq.

Whilst the ICBS is keenly aware that there are other compelling concerns at times of armed conflict, not least the loss of human life, the Committee urges all the governments concerned to work within the spirit of The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, to protect archives, libraries, monuments and sites, and museums, if war breaks out in Iraq and in the region.

The ICBS believes that, access to authentic cultural heritage is a basic human right. Damage to, and destruction of, cultural heritage represents an impoverishment, not only of the cultural life of the community directly concerned, but of humanity as a whole. This belief is expressed in several international conventions. Iraq is universally recognized to be especially rich in cultural heritage. The area is often described as the 'cradle of civilisation'. The loss of parts of that heritage would certainly represent a loss to all the peoples of the world.

The ICBS wishes to stress that international humanitarian law pro-

hibits the use of cultural property for military purposes or to shield military objectives.

In the aftermath of any war in Iraq, the ICBS calls upon all governments in a position to act to provide the necessary resources, human and financial, to assess the damage caused by the conflict to cultural heritage and to implement plans for the necessary repairs and restoration. In the case of looting of cultural property, detailed plans by trained experts should be prepared for the repatriation or restitution of the property concerned, with the involvement of Iraqi scholars and heritage professionals.

The ICBS is willing to respond to requests for technical assistance and co-ordination which may be required by providing advice and assistance within the resources available.

Meanwhile, the ICBS calls upon all governments which have not yet become party to The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols to do so.

Adopted by the International Committee of the Blue Shield,  
7th March 2003



Minaret of the Great Mosque in Samarra



## Communiqué du Comité International du Bouclier Bleu (ICBS) concernant l'Impact d'une Guerre sur le Patrimoine Culturel Iraquien

Dans l'éventualité d'une guerre en Iraq, le Comité international du Bouclier Bleu (ICBS) exprime son inquiétude profonde envers les dommages et la destruction potentiels du patrimoine culturel.

Bien que parfaitement conscient qu'il y ait d'autres sujets d'inquiétude en temps de guerre, en particulier la perte de vies humaines, le Comité demande instamment à tous les gouvernements concernés d'œuvrer dans l'esprit de la Convention de La Haye pour la Protection du patrimoine culturel en cas de conflit armé afin de protéger les archives, les bibliothèques, les monuments et les sites ainsi que les musées, au cas où la guerre éclaterait en Iraq ou dans la région.

L'ICBS a la conviction que l'accès au patrimoine culturel authentique est un droit fondamental de l'homme. Les dommages causés au patrimoine culturel et sa destruction représentent un appauvrissement non seulement pour la vie culturelle de la communauté directement impliquée mais pour l'humanité toute entière. Cette conviction s'exprime dans plusieurs conventions internationales. L'Iraq est universellement connu pour avoir un patrimoine culturel particulièrement riche. On décrit souvent cette région comme «le berceau de la civilisation». La perte d'une partie de ce patrimoine représenterait certainement une perte pour tous les peuples du monde.

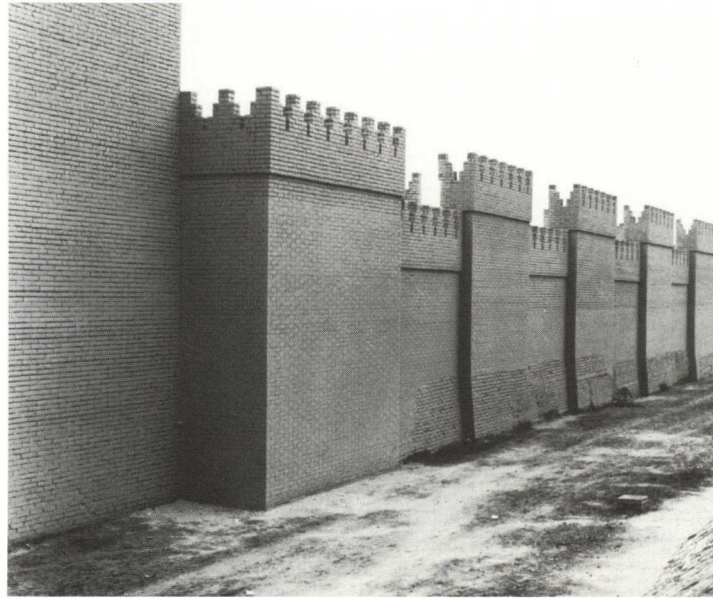
L'ICBS souhaite mettre l'accent sur le fait que le droit humanitaire international interdit l'usage de biens culturels à des fins militaires ou pour protéger des objectifs militaires.

Au lendemain d'un guerre éventuelle en Iraq l'ICBS appelle tous les gouvernements en position d'agir à fournir les ressources, humaines et financières, nécessaires pour évaluer les dommages de guerre subis par le patrimoine culturel et pour mettre en œuvre les programmes de restauration et de réhabilitation nécessaires. Dans le cas de pillage du patrimoine culturel, les experts auront pour tâche de préparer en détail un plan pour le rapatriement ou la restitution des biens concernés, avec la participation d'érudits iraqiens et de professionnels du patrimoine.

L'ICBS souhaite répondre aux demandes d'assistance technique et de coordination qui pourraient lui être faites en apportant conseil et assistance dans la limite des ressources dont il dispose.

Entre temps, l'ICBS appelle tous les gouvernements qui ne sont pas partie à la Convention de La Haye pour la protection du patrimoine culturel en cas de conflit armé à le devenir.

Adopté par le Comité international du Bouclier Bleu  
le 7 mars 2003



Reconstructed outer wall of the royal palace in Babylon



Excavation site in the outer palace in Babylon

Excavation site in the outer palace in Babylon





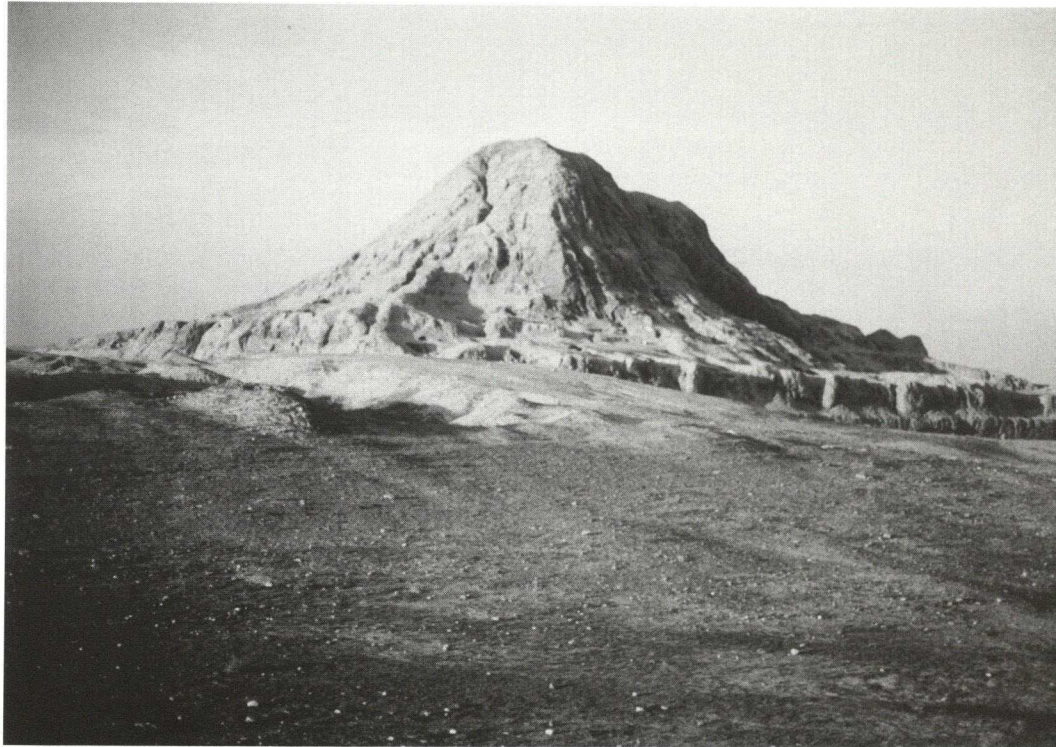


View from the Urnammu ziggurat in Ur to the south

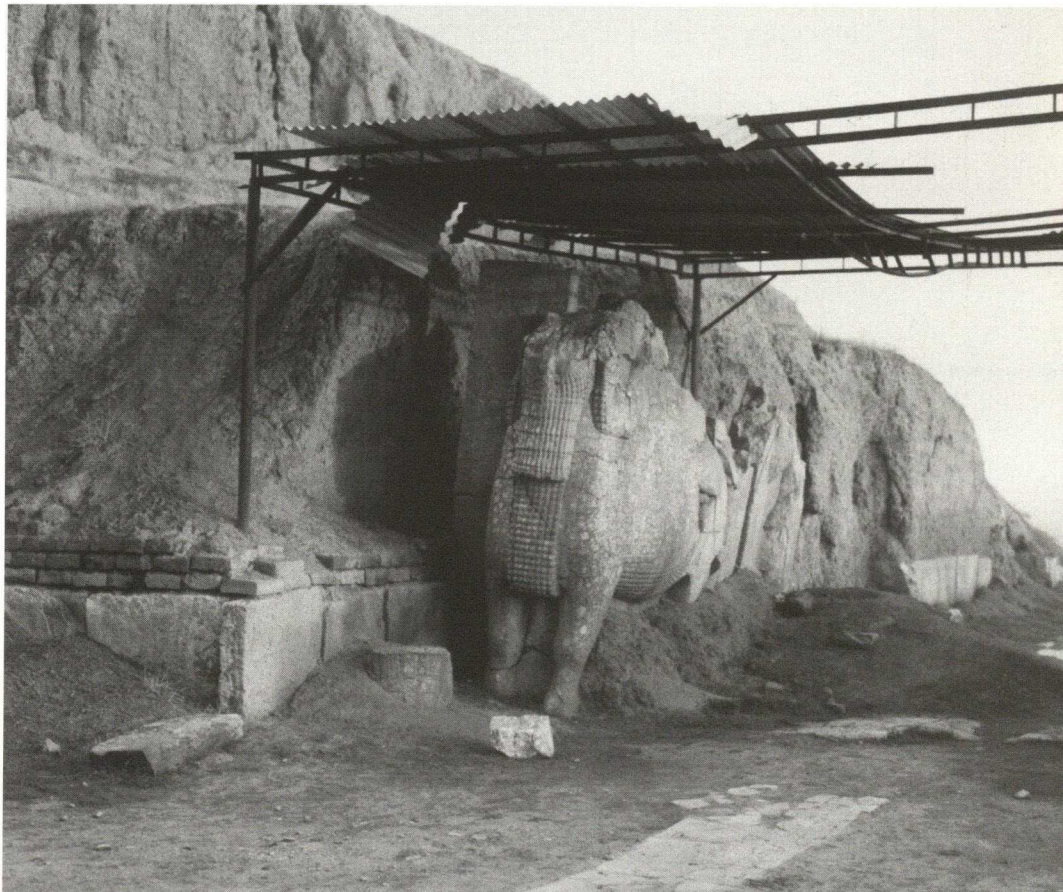


View from the ziggurat of Uruk to the south



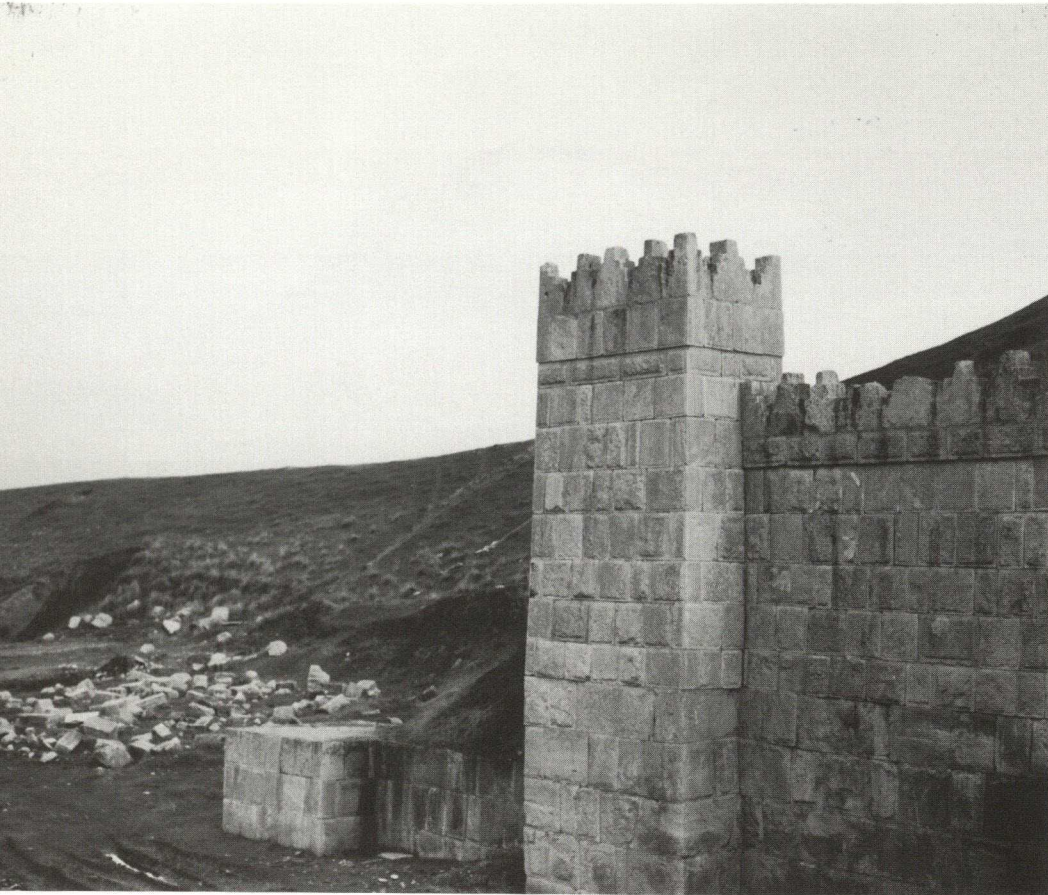


Assur ziggurat in Assur



Sculpture at the entrance behind the southern city gate in Nineveh





Southern city gate in Nineveh

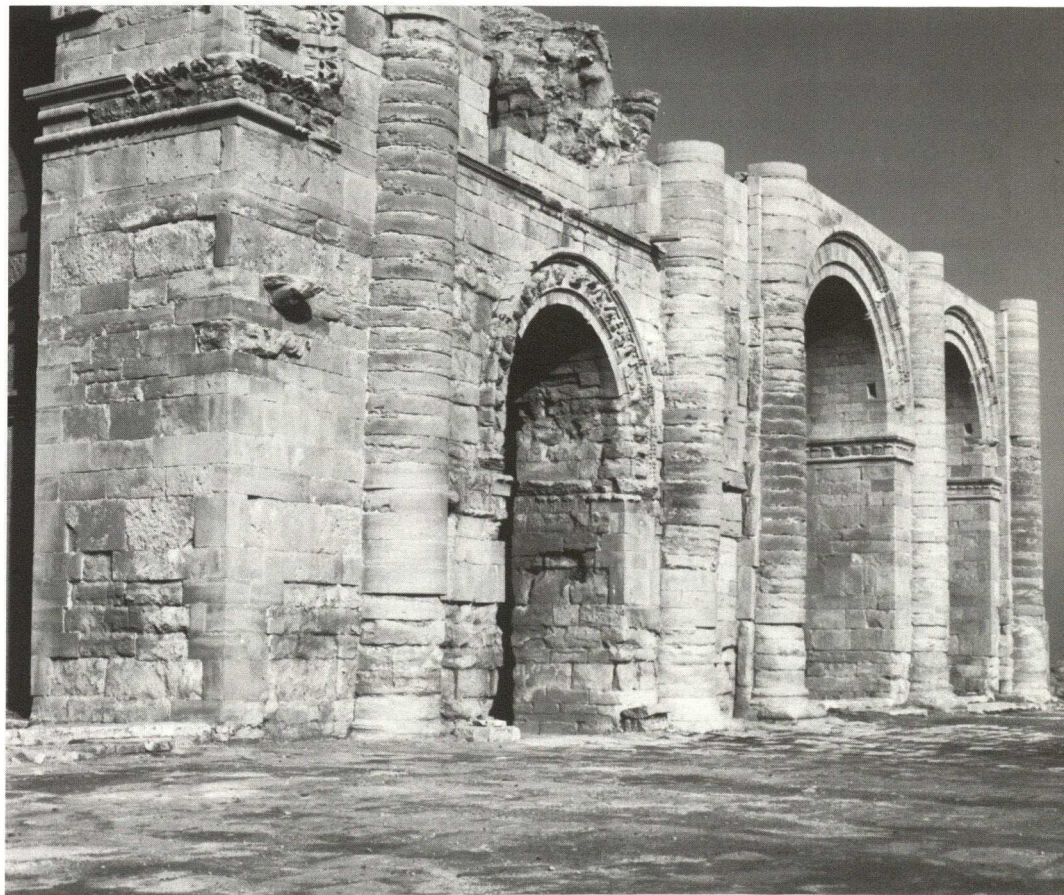


Entrance to the royal palace in Nimrud





Remains of the former palace walls  
in Nimrud



Middle iwan of the temple area in  
Hatra



## War in Iraq – Memory and Heritage of the World in Danger

ICOMOS asks all governments and international organisations to preserve cultural heritage of future generations from the devastation of war.

The General Assembly of the United Nations unanimously declared 2002, the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage. This conscious act of all nations to promote civilisation against barbarism was in part a response to such shocking acts as the wilful destruction of the giant figures of the Buddha in Bamiyan, Afghanistan, by the Taliban.

As an international non-governmental organisation of professionals from more than 120 countries of diverse cultures, ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) stresses the importance of respect for the diverse cultural heritage of the World as an essential foundation of peace and progress and expresses particular concern over the fate of cultural heritage in Iraq and the area.

### A cultural heritage and monuments of primary importance and vulnerability

Iraq is an ancient land whose history goes back for thousands of years. Scholars and citizens around the World recognise the area as one of the cradles of human civilisation. A succession of cultures and traditions gave Iraq and its region an incredible wealth of monuments of civil or religious architecture, artworks, historic cities, rural cultural landscapes as well as numerous archaeological sites. All of these bear witness to human accomplishments and aspirations recorded in stone, clay, wood and the land itself.

Yet, after years of neglect and looting, we fear that this irreplaceable heritage as well as the dedicated professionals who care for it, will also be victims of a possible war.

### International Conventions to be applied

ICOMOS asks all governments to act in the spirit and the letter of international conventions such as the World Heritage Convention of 1972, ratified by 170 countries, the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Properties in the Event of Armed Conflict (the Hague Convention), now ratified by 103 countries, and the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit

Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970), ratified by 97 countries. Iraq has ratified all three conventions.

Born from the ashes of the massive destruction of the Second World War, the Hague Convention prescribes the identification and protection of *monuments of architecture, art or history, whether religious or secular; archaeological sites; groups of buildings which, as a whole, are of historical or artistic interest; works of art; manuscripts, books and other objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest; as well as scientific collections and important collections of books or archives or of reproductions of the property defined above* and museums, archives, libraries and historic districts in cities. While stressing the need for international protection, it reminds us that *damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world.*

ICOMOS calls for all authorities to promote and apply such principles and the measures presented, and protect historic places of all types. We also call for such places not to be used as shields in the context of military operations or any activities that could be interpreted as such.

### Professionals to be protected

ICOMOS also wants to express its deepest concern for the lives and freedom of our Iraqi colleagues, archaeologists, architects, historians, artisans and scholars who dedicated their existence and talent to that rich cultural heritage and its preservation. We ask all sides to acknowledge these persons, protect them as humans, and enable them as professionals to carry on their conservation duty for the benefit of future generations, in particular under the terms of the 1954 Convention. They should be allowed to play a useful role at the service of cultural heritage, under whatever specific circumstances develop in the coming weeks and months, and years to come, to prevent destruction, decay or looting.

The cultural heritage of Iraq, an important part of the heritage of all the human family, has already been suffering for many years. ICOMOS, an international organisation of 7000 professionals and a founding partner of the International Committee of the Blue Shield together with museum, archive and library organisations, is ready to help.

Paris – 06.03.2003



## Guerre en Irak – Mémoire et Patrimoine du Monde en danger

ICOMOS demande à tous les gouvernements et toutes les organisations internationales de préserver le patrimoine culturel des générations à venir de la dévastation de la guerre.

L'Assemblée Générale des Nations Unies déclara unanimement l'année 2002, l'Année des Nations Unies pour le Patrimoine Culturel. Cet acte conscient de toutes les nations pour promouvoir la civilisation contre le barbarisme était en partie une réponse aux actes scandaleux de la destruction volontaire par les Talibans des statues géantes des Bouddha de Bamiyan en Afghanistan.

En tant qu'organisation internationale non-gouvernementale de professionnels de plus de 120 pays de cultures différentes, l'ICOMOS (Le Conseil International des Monuments et des Sites) souligne l'importance du respect pour le patrimoine mondial comme fondation essentielle de la paix et du progrès et exprime une inquiétude particulière sur le sort du patrimoine culturel en Irak et dans la région.

### Un patrimoine culturel et des monuments d'une grande importance et vulnérabilité

L'Irak se trouve dans une zone où l'histoire remonte à des milliers d'années. Spécialistes et citoyens du monde entier reconnaissent cette région comme étant l'un des berceaux de la civilisation humaine. Une succession de cultures et de traditions ont donné à l'Irak et à sa région une richesse incroyable de monuments d'architecture civile ou religieuse, des œuvres d'art, des villes historiques, des paysages culturels ruraux ainsi que de nombreux sites archéologiques. Tous ceux-ci témoignent des réussites et des aspirations humaines réalisées en pierre, en terre, en bois et qui s'inscrivent dans le paysage en lui-même.

Pourtant, après des années de négligence et de pillage, nous avons peur que ce patrimoine irremplaçable ainsi que les professionnels dévoués à sa préservation soient également les victimes d'une guerre éventuelle.

### Application des Conventions Internationales

L'ICOMOS demande à tous les gouvernements d'agir dans l'esprit et la lettre des conventions internationales tout comme la Convention du Patrimoine Mondial de 1972, ratifiée par 170 pays, et la Convention pour la Protection des Biens Culturels en cas de Conflit Armé (La Convention de La Haye) de 1954, maintenant ratifiée par 103 pays, et la Convention concernant les mesures à prendre pour interdire et empêcher l'importation, l'exportation et le trans-

fert de propriété illicites des biens culturels de 1970 qui a été ratifiée par 97 pays. L'Irak a ratifié les trois conventions.

Née des cendres des destructions immenses de la deuxième Guerre Mondiale, la Convention de La Haye prescrit l'identification et la protection *des monuments d'architecture, d'art ou d'histoire, religieux ou laïques ; les sites archéologiques, les ensembles de constructions qui, en tant que tels, présentent un intérêt historique ou artistique ; les œuvres d'art ; les manuscrits, livres et autres objets d'intérêt artistique, historique et archéologique ; ainsi que les collections scientifiques et les collections importantes de livres, d'archives ou de reproductions des biens définis ci-dessus* et les musées, les archives, les bibliothèques et les quartiers historiques de villes. En insistant sur la nécessité d'une protection internationale, cela nous rappelle que *les atteintes portées aux biens culturels, à quelque peuple qu'ils appartiennent, constituent des atteintes au patrimoine culturel de l'humanité entière, étant donné que chaque peuple apporte sa contribution à la culture mondiale.*

L'ICOMOS appelle l'ensemble des autorités à promouvoir et à appliquer ces principes et les mesures présentées et à protéger les lieux historiques de tous types. Nous appelons aussi à ce que ces lieux ne soient pas utilisés comme bouclier dans le contexte d'opérations militaires ou de n'importe quelles activités qui pourraient être s'apparentées à celles-ci.

### Protection des Professionnels

L'ICOMOS aimerait aussi exprimer sa profonde inquiétude pour les vies et la liberté de nos collègues Irakiens, archéologues, architectes, historiens, et spécialistes qui consacrent leur existence et leur talent à ce riche patrimoine culturel et à sa préservation. Nous demandons à toutes les parties de reconnaître ces personnes, de les protéger en tant qu'humains et de leur laisser en tant que professionnels la possibilité de continuer à exercer leur travail de conservation aux profits des générations à venir, notamment en référence aux termes de la Convention de 1954. Ils devraient être autorisés à poursuivre leur rôle efficace au service du patrimoine culturel, qu'elles que soient les circonstances spécifiques qui se développent dans les semaines, les mois, et les années à venir, pour éviter la destruction, le délabrement et le pillage

Le patrimoine culturel de l'Irak, partie importante du patrimoine de l'humanité, a déjà souffert depuis plusieurs années. L'ICOMOS, organisation internationale de 7000 professionnels et un des partenaires fondateurs du Comité International du Bouclier Bleu avec l'organisation des musées, des archives et des bibliothèques, est prêt à apporter son soutien.



## Guerra en Irak – Amenaza a la Memoria y el Patrimonio del Mundo

ICOMOS le pide a todos los gobiernos y organismos internacionales que protejan el patrimonio cultural de las generaciones venideras de la devastación de la guerra.

La Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas declaró unánimemente al 2002 el Año de las Naciones Unidas para el Patrimonio Cultural. Este acto de conciencia de todas las naciones para fomentar la civilización en contra de la barbarie, constituyó en parte una respuesta ante actos atroces tal como la destrucción intencionada de los megalitos del Buda en Bamiyan, Afganistan por los Talibanes.

Como organización internacional no-gubernamental de profesionales de más de 120 países con diversas culturas, el ICOMOS recalca la importancia del respeto por la diversidad cultural del mundo como cimiento esencial para la paz y el progreso, expresando a la vez su preocupación particular ante el futuro del patrimonio cultural de Irak y sus cercanías

### Un patrimonio cultural y monumentos de primerísima importancia y vulnerabilidad

Irak se encuentre en una zona cuya historia se remonta miles de años. Los estudiosos y los ciudadanos del mundo reconocen este área como una de las cunas de la civilización. La sucesión de culturas y tradiciones le ha proporcionado a Irak innumerables riquezas en cuanto a monumentos de arquitectura religiosa y civil, obras de arte, ciudades históricas, paisajes culturales rurales, así como numerosos sitios arqueológicos. Todos ellos dan testimonio de los logros y las aspiraciones humanas que fueron inscritas en la piedra, el barro, la madera y en la misma tierra.

Sin embargo, tras años de abandono y saqueo, el ICOMOS teme que este patrimonio irremplazable, así como sus tuteladas profesionales, sean víctimas de una posible guerra.

### Las Convenciones Internacionales a ser aplicadas

El ICOMOS llama a todos los gobiernos a que actúen dentro del espíritu y la letra de las convenciones internacionales, tales como la Convención del Patrimonio Mundial de 1972, ratificada por 170 naciones, la Convención de 1954 para la Protección de Bienes Culturales en Caso de Conflicto Armado (La Convención de La Haya), ya ratificada por 103 naciones, y la Convención sobre las medidas que deben adoptarse para prohibir e impedir la importación, la exportación y la transferencia de propiedad ilícitas de

bienes culturales de 1970, ratificada por 97 naciones. Irak ha ratificado las tres convenciones.

Nacida de las cenizas de la destrucción masiva de la 2a. Guerra Mundial, la Convención de La Haya exige la identificación y protección de *monumentos arquitectónicos, artísticos o históricos, ya sean religiosos o seculares; los sitios arqueológicos; los grupos de edificios que en su conjunto posean interés histórico o artístico; las obras de arte; los manuscritos, libros y otros objetos de interés artístico, histórico o arqueológico; así como las colecciones científicas e importantes colecciones de libros y archivos, o reproducciones de los bienes anteriormente descritos* y museos, archivos, bibliotecas y zonas urbanas históricas. Al recalcar la necesidad de la protección internacional, la Convención nos recuerda que *los daños a los bienes culturales de cualquier pueblo significan un daño al patrimonio cultural de toda la humanidad, ya que cada pueblo contribuye a la cultura del mundo.*

El ICOMOS llama a todas las autoridades a que promuevan y apliquen todos los principios y medidas aquí presentadas, y a la protección de los sitios históricos de todo tipo. También llamamos para que estos sitios no se utilicen como escudos en un contexto de operaciones militares u otras actividades que podrían interpretarse como tales.

### Los Profesionales a proteger

ICOMOS expresa así mismo una profunda preocupación por la vida y la libertad de nuestros colegas iraquíes – arqueólogos, arquitectos, historiadores, artesanos y estudiosos que han dedicado su existencia y talento a ese rico patrimonio cultural y su protección. ICOMOS llama a todas las partes en este conflicto a que reconozcan a estas personas, las protejan como seres humanos, y los ayuden como profesionales, en particular bajo los términos de la Convención de 1954, a que desarrollen sus tareas de conservación en beneficio de las generaciones venideras. A estas personas se les debe permitir que desempeñen un papel útil al servicio del patrimonio en la prevención de la destrucción, el deterioro y el saqueo, tanto durante los episodios actuales como en un futuro.

El patrimonio cultural de Irak, parte importante del patrimonio de toda la humanidad, ya viene sufriendo desde hace muchos años. El ICOMOS, un organismo internacional de mas de 7000 profesionales y miembro fundador del Comité Internacional del Escudo Azul junto con otros organismos de museos, archivos y bibliotecas, se declara listo para prestar su ayuda.

Paris – 06.03.2003





Temple of Alaat with animal reliefs in Hatra

## A Selection of Press Articles

### WASHINGTON POST, 12 April 2003

BAGHDAD, Iraq – The famed Iraq National Museum, home of extraordinary Babylonian, Sumerian and Assyrian collections and rare Islamic texts, sat empty Saturday – except for shattered glass display cases and cracked pottery bowls that littered the floor. In an unchecked frenzy of cultural theft, looters who pillaged government buildings and businesses after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime also targeted the museum. Gone were irreplaceable archaeological treasures from the Cradle of Civilization. Everything that could be carried out has disappeared from the museum – gold bowls and drinking cups, ritual masks worn in funerals, elaborately wrought headdresses, lyres studded with jewels – priceless craftsmanship from ancient Mesopotamia.

"This is the property of this nation and the treasure of 7,000 years of civilization. What does this country think it is doing?" asked Ali Mahmoud, a museum employee, futility and frustration in his voice. Much of the looting occurred Thursday, according to a security guard who stood by helplessly as hoards broke into the museum with wheelbarrows and carts and stole priceless jewelry, clay tablets and manuscripts. Left behind were row upon row of empty glass cases – some smashed up, others left intact – heaps of crumbled pottery and hunks of broken statues scattered across the exhibit floors. Sensing its treasures could be in peril, museum curators secretly removed antiquities from their display cases before the war and placed them into storage vaults – but to no avail. The doors of the vaults were opened or smashed, and everything was taken, museum workers said. That led one museum employee to suspect that others familiar with the museum may

have participated in the theft. "The fact that the vaults were opened suggests that employees of the museum may have been involved," said the employee, who declined to be identified. "To ordinary people, these are just stones. Only the educated know the value of these pieces."

Gordon Newby, a historian and professor of Middle Eastern studies at Emory University in Atlanta, said the museum's most famous holding may have been tablets with Hammurabi's Code – one of mankind's earliest codes of law. It could not be determined whether the tablets were at the museum when the war broke out. Other treasures believed to be housed at the museum – such as the Ram in the Thicket from Ur, a statue representing a deity from 2600 BC – are no doubt gone, perhaps forever, he said. "This is just one of the most tragic things that could happen for our being able to understand the past," Newby said. The looting, he said, "is destroying the history of the very people that are there."

John Russell, a professor of art history and archaeology at the Massachusetts College of Art, feared for the safety of the staff of Iraq's national antiquities department, also housed at the museum; for irreplaceable records of every archaeological expedition in Iraq since the 1930s; for perhaps hundreds of thousands of artifacts from 10,000 years of civilization, both on display and in storage. Among them, he said, was the copper head of an Akkadian king, at least 4,300 years old. Its eyes were gouged out, nose flattened, ears and beard cut off, apparently by subjects who took their revenge on his image – much the same way as Iraqis mutilated statues of Saddam. "These are the foundational cornerstones of



Western civilization," Russell said, and are literally priceless – which he said will not prevent them from finding a price on the black market. Some of the gold artifacts may be melted down, but most pieces will find their way into the hands of private collectors, he said. The chances of recovery are slim; regional museums were looted after the 1991 Gulf War, and 4,000 pieces were lost. "I understand three or four have been recovered," he said.

Samuel Paley, a professor of classics at the State University of New York, Buffalo, predicted whatever treasures aren't sold will be trashed. The looters are "people trying to feed themselves," said Paley, who has spent years tracking Assyrian reliefs previously looted from Nimrud in Northern Iraq. "When they find there's no market, they'll throw them away. If there is a market, they'll go into the market."

Koichiro Matsuura, head of the U.N.'s cultural agency, UNESCO, on Saturday urged American officials to send troops to protect what was left of the museum's collection, and said the military should step in to stop looting and destruction at other key archaeological sites and museums.

The governments of Russia, Jordan and Greece also voiced deep concern about the looting. Jordan urged the United Nations to take steps to protect Iraq's historic sites, a "national treasure for the Iraqi people and an invaluable heritage for the Arab and Islamic worlds." Some blamed the U.S. military, though coalition forces say they have taken great pains to avoid damage to cultural and historical sites. A museum employee, reduced to tears after coming to the museum Saturday and finding her office and all administrative offices trashed by looters, said: "It is all the fault of the Americans. This is Iraq's civilization. And it's all gone now." She refused to give her name.

McGuire Gibson, a University of Chicago professor and president of the American Association for Research in Baghdad, was infuriated. He said he had been in frequent and frantic touch with U.S. military officials since Wednesday, imploring them to send troops "in there and protect that building."

The Americans could have prevented the looting, agreed Patty Gerstenblith, a professor at DePaul School of Law in Chicago who helped circulate a petition before the war, urging that care be taken to protect Iraqi antiquities. "It was completely inexcusable and avoidable," she said.

The museum itself was battered. Its marble staircase was chipped, likely by looters using pushcarts or heavy slabs of wood to carry booty down from the second floor. The museum is in the Al-Salhiya neighborhood of Baghdad, with its back to a poor neighborhood.

Early Saturday, five armed men showed up at the gate: One was armed with a Kalashnikov, three carried pistols, one wielded an iron bar. The man with the assault rifle walked into the museum, accused journalists there of stealing artifacts and ordered them to leave. He claimed to be there to protect the museum from plundering. One of the men said he was a member of the feared Fedayeen Saddam militia. "You think Saddam is now gone, so you can do what you like," he raged.

Hamza Hendawi  
The Associated Press

#### UNESCO PRESS NOTICE, 12 April 2003

The Director-General of UNESCO calls for all measures to be taken to ensure the protection and surveillance of Iraqi cultural heritage and effectively fight against illicit trafficking. Following the acts of looting committed yesterday in the National Archaeological Museum of Baghdad, UNESCO Director-General Koichiro

Matsuura has contacted the American and British authorities and asked them to take immediate measures of protection and surveillance of Iraqi archaeological sites and cultural institutions. In a letter of 11 April 2003 addressed to the American authorities, the Director-General emphasized the urgent need to preserve collections and a heritage considered to be one of the richest in the world. He particularly insisted on the necessity of assuring military protection for the Archaeological Museum of Baghdad and the Mosul Museum. The same request was formulated to the British authorities concerning in particular the Basra region.

In order to prevent the illicit export of Iraqi cultural goods, the Director-General also undertook contacts with the authorities of the countries bordering Iraq and international police and customs officials to ensure respect of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. He again requested INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization, the International Confederation of Art and Antiquities Dealer Associations (CINOA), the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and the principal actors of the art market to join forces with UNESCO in a "comprehensive mobilization so that stolen objects should not find their way to acquirers".

#### THE GUARDIAN, London, 14 April 2003

##### Museum's treasures left to the mercy of looters

##### US generals reject plea to protect priceless artefacts from vandals

US army commanders have rejected a new plea by desperate officials of the Iraq Museum to protect the country's archaeological treasures from looters. Despite worldwide media coverage at the weekend of the waves of vandalism and plunder last week, no tanks or troops were visible there yesterday. A further plea for them to act comes from eminent British archaeologists in a letter to the Guardian today. With Iraqi police still absent from their posts – those at the museum fled as the looters arrived – the US remains the only potential policing presence in the city.

Abdul Rehman Mugeer, a senior guard, was shaking with anger yesterday at the destruction. He praised the US for at least parking four tanks in front of the museum when they took control of Baghdad last Wednesday. But they were later removed, leaving the museum to the mercy of rampaging Iraqis. "Gangs of several dozen came," he said. "Some had guns. They threatened to kill us if we did not open up. The looting went on for two days." The Americans returned with tanks at one point on Friday and sent the looters fleeing, but as soon as the tanks rumbled away, the gangs came back to finish the job. "I asked them to leave one tank here all the time but they have refused," said Raed Abdul Reda, an archeologist.

For months before the war began the archaeologist curators crated and stored some of the most valuable items in the building's basements. The museum escaped the bombing, but it has been stripped almost bare. "Eighty per cent of what we had was stolen," Mr Reda said, standing in the glass-littered compound. "They prised open the special chambers which are protected behind thick doors like safes. They came with crowbars and prised them open."

At more or less the time the world was watching Saddam Hussein's statue being torn from its plinth, looters were vandalising statues from the great civilisations of Nineveh and Babylon with equal energy. Heads of ancient stone now lie on the museum floor. The bodies from which they came have been pockmarked by powerful blows. "They were too heavy to move to the basement, and



stood there until the vandals came and laid into them with iron bars," Mr Reda said. It was clear from his description of the frenzy of destruction that these were not professional thieves with an eye on the auction markets of the world but people out for whatever they could get their hands on, and if it was too big to cart away, they smashed it to vent their frustration. Display cases are empty, pottery shards litter the floor. In the vault for archaeological fragments drawers that once held evidence of Sumerian, Assyrian and Babylonian culture have been pulled out and stripped.

"There were hundreds of looters, including women, children and old people. They were uneducated. We know who they are," Mr Reda said, in a way that left little doubt they were from the poor slums of the Shia quarter. Books seemed to have escaped, and in a remote corner a few Islamic manuscripts and even some Hebrew texts remained unscathed. So too do the items in basements the looters failed to penetrate. This is the only item of good news, though the museum staff were unwilling to say exactly what was saved, perhaps for fear of prompting more looting.

Iraq had the world's first known civilisations. The cities of Ur, Nimrud, Babylon and Nineveh were known to every ancient historian. Their remains have been plundered for centuries, and some of the best pieces are in the British Museum and other European capitals. In recent decades local looters have picked away at tiles and brickwork in unguarded ancient sites. In the turbulence and popular uprisings after the previous Gulf war about 4,000 objects went missing from local museums. But until last week the museum in the capital was untouched: a rare place where Iraqis could celebrate a past that preceded Saddam, although a small slab outside the entrance to the department of antiquities lauds "our wonderful president".

Now in the chaos of the post-Saddam era these priceless artefacts have been stolen, while the paean to Saddam remains strangely unscathed.

Jonathan Steele in Baghdad

#### THE GUARDIAN, 14 April 2003

*'The collection lies in ruins, objects from a long, rich past in smithereens'*

This is a tragedy with echoes of past catastrophes: the Mongol sack of Baghdad in 1258, and the fifth-century destruction of the library of Alexandria. For the loss is not just Iraq's but ours, too. Iraq has not been called the cradle of civilisation for nothing: 5,000 years ago it was the birthplace of writing, cities, codified law, mathematics, medicine, and astronomy. The House of Wisdom in ninth-century Baghdad kept classical scholarship alive and promoted a vigorous intellectual reaction to it while Europe was stumbling through the dark ages.

In 1976 – 10 years after its opening – the Iraq Museum published a catalogue with a mission statement. It read: "The relics of the past serve as reminders of what has been before, and as links in the chain of communication between past, present and future. The society which possesses many and fine museums has a correspondingly stronger historical memory than the society without them."

The catalogue described in loving detail many of the thousands of objects displayed in the 20 galleries, from 100,000-year-old

stone tools from the Kirkuk area to Sumerian jewellery and gold from the third millennium BC, from Babylonian cuneiform tablets and Assyrian ivories to Parthian sculpture, glassware and manuscripts from medieval Baghdad.

Ten years after the 1991 Gulf war the museum opened its doors again despite sanctions, which meant staff went unpaid, conservation materials were unobtainable, and contact with foreign colleagues was restricted. The launch party was attended by more than 60 scholars representing the global academic community.

The museum's galleries are laid out in a quadrangle on two floors around the central courtyard, very like the British Museum. They are cool and dark, with natural light filtering through the skylights at the top of the rooms. The first galleries one enters contain sculptures from the Assyrian palaces in northern Iraq: magnificent life-size carvings showing the rulers of the Middle Eastern world in the ninth to seventh centuries BC. A sequence of smaller rooms houses innumerable fragments of exquisitely carved ivory furniture from the same palaces. Further on are the Hatra galleries, devoted to the desert city which is Iraq's only Unesco world heritage site. Here are displayed the funerary statues of the men and women of Hatra: inhabitants of the border between the Roman and the Iranian worlds 2,000 years ago, who chose a glorious hybrid of eastern and western styles to commemorate their dead. The Islamic galleries house tilework from medieval mosques, priceless Korans, fittings and furniture from ninth-century palaces, and jewellery, textiles and coins.

There was not enough time to see everything when I visited the museum two years ago, and now I never will. Most of the collection lies in ruins, trampled and smashed by looters if not stolen. Many objects from Iraq's long rich past are in smithereens. After the previous Gulf war there was a project to document what had been lost to looting. It took five years to catalogue 4,000 objects, few of which have been recovered. This time the stakes are far higher and the problem immeasurably more difficult. Most immediately, the museum should be treated as a crime scene, both forensically and legally. Every reporter, photographer and sight-seer risks disturbing the destruction stratum (as archaeologists would describe it) which must remain intact if anything is to be pieced together again. If the debris is swept up into bin bags it will be impossible to reconstruct. Second, border security should be stepped up to prevent as much as possible from leaving the country. Iraqi antiquities, probably from the Mosul or Basra museums, also ransacked last week, have already been spotted on the Paris art market.

Auction houses and dealers worldwide must look out for artefacts coming on to the market. Such objects will almost certainly have been illegally acquired and any documentation of ownership is likely to be fraudulent. Police must prosecute.

Unesco is holding an emergency meeting on Iraq next week. The US authorities must allow it into the country as soon as possible to begin working with Iraqi archaeologists and curators to reconstruct the shattered remnants of Iraq's heritage and rebuild links in the chain between past, present and future.

Eleanor Robson

(Eleanor Robson is a fellow of All Souls, Oxford, and a council member of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq)



## For the attention of the ICOMOS National Committees

Paris, 16 April 2003

### Subject :

### The situation of cultural heritage in Iraq and ICOMOS action

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to you about the present situation in Iraq, a country with an exceptionally rich cultural heritage, which, as we all know, is experiencing a war with devastating consequences for both its civil population and its monuments and sites.

At the beginning of March, ICOMOS issued a communiqué stressing the diversity of Iraq's cultural heritage and its importance to all of mankind. We also stressed the need to acknowledge the 'neutrality' of cultural heritage and to offer protection to cultural heritage professionals in Iraq so that they could fulfil their responsibilities for conserving their heritage in these difficult circumstances.

ICOMOS also joined its partner organisations in the International Committee of the Blue Shield in publishing a joint statement with the museums, archives and libraries community. Finally, it should be recalled that UNESCO, as well as various institutions and scholars, directly informed the American and British Governments on the specific importance of Iraq's cultural heritage to enable them to plan their military strategies in full knowledge of what needed protection. We can only assume that this has helped to avoid some damage.

The recent images and description of the disgraceful looting of the National Museum of Baghdad and the Museum of Mosul, under the eyes of the Coalition forces, have shocked the entire world and revealed all too dramatically the vulnerability of cultural heritage.

ICOMOS has received appeals from all over the world. Several National Committees, notably ICOMOS UK, have voiced publicly their concern, asking their governments to act responsibly. The Director-General of UNESCO has asked us to participate at an extraordinary meeting he has convened on 17 April in Paris, to discuss the urgent issue of destruction, looting and possible traffic of Iraqi cultural property.

Furthermore, within the Blue Shield, ICOMOS is in contact with ICOM (museums), ICA (archives) and IFLA (libraries) to develop a joint strategy, in order to stress the strong inter-relationship between our fields of activity. Archaeological sites associated with museums or archives deposited in university libraries which have been looted are themselves the victims of that looting.

ICOMOS does not remain passive in the face of these events but our actions need the support of the whole ICOMOS family and not just the International Secretariat. I am therefore writing to you to ask for the participation of your National Committee.

In particular, in order to help protect Iraq's cultural heritage from further damage and to offer strong support for, and solidarity with, our Iraqi colleagues, I ask you to:

Write to your government to insist that they recognise the urgency of protecting cultural heritage in Iraq, in particular under the terms of the Hague Convention on the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict (1954) and the World Heritage Convention (1972), and to request that any international aid for the reconstruction of Iraq incorporates the need to protect cultural heritage. Further we would like you to offer the services of the ICOMOS network. In order to ensure that there is the widest understanding of what needs protecting and how this should be approached.

Establish, with the help of your members and colleagues who are knowledgeable in cultural heritage in Iraq, a list of contacts, in particular of Iraqi colleagues, who are experienced in the study and conservation of sites, monuments, towns, and in the archaeological, architectural and cultural landscape heritage of Iraq.

Finally, I would ask that you forward to the International Secretariat any contact lists you manage to establish as well as copies of your letters, and any newspaper articles published in connection with your actions.

It is in difficult times such as this that one sees how essential is the scope of ICOMOS as an international family of professionals and committees and how that family must show their strength and solidarity.

I would like to thank you in advance for your co-operation.

Prof. Dr. Michael Petzet  
President of ICOMOS



Palace with iwan in Ctesiphon



## A l'attention des Comités Nationaux de l'ICOMOS

Paris, le 16 avril 2003

### Sujet :

### La situation du patrimoine en Irak et l'action de l'ICOMOS

Chers collègues,

Je vous écris au sujet de la situation actuelle en Irak, lieu d'un patrimoine particulièrement riche et d'une guerre pleine de conséquences pour la population civile comme pour les monuments et les sites.

Au début de mars, l'ICOMOS a émis un communiqué soulignant la diversité et l'importance du patrimoine irakien pour toute l'humanité, l'importance de préserver sa neutralité militaire et la nécessité de reconnaître et de protéger les collègues irakiens pour qu'ils puissent remplir leur mission de conservation du patrimoine dans ces circonstances. L'ICOMOS s'est aussi associé à ses partenaires du Comité international du Bouclier Bleu pour publier une position commune avec les musées, les archives et les bibliothèques. Enfin, rappelons que l'UNESCO ainsi que plusieurs institutions et spécialistes réputés ont informé directement les autorités américaines et britanniques sur le patrimoine culturel en Irak afin qu'elles puissent planifier leurs stratégies militaires en toute connaissance, ce qui, peut-on croire, a pu aider à éviter que les destructions soient encore plus grandes.

Mais, les récentes images et descriptions du pillage honteux du Musée national de Bagdad et du Musée de Mossoul sous les yeux des armées de la Coalition ont choqué la planète et révélé une fois de plus la vulnérabilité du patrimoine. De partout, l'ICOMOS a reçu des appels. Plusieurs Comités Nationaux, notamment ICOMOS UK, ont manifesté publiquement leur préoccupation, exigeant de leur gouvernement un comportement responsable. Le 17 avril, à Paris, le Directeur Général de l'UNESCO nous a convoqués à une rencontre extraordinaire sur la question de la destruction, du pillage et de l'éventuel trafic du patrimoine irakien. Par ailleurs, au sein du Bouclier Bleu, l'ICOMOS est en liaison avec l'ICOM (musées), l'ICA (archives) et l'IFLA (bibliothèques) afin de développer une stratégie commune car, il faut le dire, nos

domaines sont très interreliés; par exemple, lorsqu'un site archéologique est associé à un musée ou à des archives déposées dans les bibliothèques universitaires, elles aussi victimes du pillage. C'est donc dire que l'ICOMOS ne reste pas passif devant ces événements

Dans ce contexte, je vous écris pour demander aux Comités Nationaux de participer à cette action qui appelle toute la famille ICOMOS et non seulement le Secrétariat international. Pour nous aider à protéger ce patrimoine et à rejoindre les collègues irakiens qui méritent toute notre solidarité, je vous demande donc de :

- Écrire à votre gouvernement pour insister sur l'urgence de protéger le patrimoine en Irak notamment aux termes de la Convention de La Haye sur la protection des biens culturels en période de conflits armés (1954) et de la Convention du patrimoine mondial (1972) et pour demander que l'aide internationale et les fonds pour la reconstruction de l'Irak assurent cette protection, en veillant à ce que le réseau de l'ICOMOS soit associé à cet effort;
- Dresser, à partir de vos membres ou collègues qui connaissent le patrimoine en Irak, une liste de contacts et de collègues irakiens dans les domaines de l'étude et de la conservation des monuments, des villes et, en général, du patrimoine archéologique, architectural et paysager en Irak.

Je vous demande enfin de transmettre au Secrétariat international des copies de vos lettres et les listes de contacts que vous auriez pu identifier ainsi que des copies d'articles de journaux traitant du sort du patrimoine en Irak et notamment des actions de votre comité ICOMOS sur ce sujet.

C'est en ces temps difficiles qu'on constate à quel point l'ICOMOS et sa famille internationale de professionnels et de Comités sont essentiels et doivent être encore plus forts et solidaires.

Je vous remercie à l'avance de votre collaboration.

Prof. Dr. Michael Petzet  
Président de l'ICOMOS

Palace of Ctesiphon (Al-Mada'in) on the eastern shore of the river Tigris, 30 km south of Baghdad

