

Calls for emergency protection to save Iraq's treasures

On 7 March the International Committee of the Blue Shield issued a statement urging the governments concerned to do all they could to avoid damage to and destruction of cultural property during war in Iraq. Yet on 13 April news broke of widespread looting in Baghdad. What wasn't stolen from the National Museum of Antiquities collection was extensively damaged. Then the National Library and Archives and the library of Korans at the Ministry of Religious Endowment were set alight.

Paul McGeough writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* described it as a 'cultural catastrophe'. Robert Fisk, in his article in *The Independent* (15 April) said it was the 'final chapter in the sacking of Baghdad'. And Martin Sullivan, the head of the United States presidential cultural advisory committee has resigned in protest at the failure of the coalition forces to prevent the widespread devastation. How, and why it was allowed to happen we will probably never know. But what now?

The International Committee of the Blue Shield, representing NGOs in the fields of archives, libraries, monuments and sites, and museums urges all parties concerned to do everything in their power to prevent further losses.

Aghast at reports of widespread looting of archives, libraries and museums and the destruction of precious artefacts and documents, the committee's president, Ross Shimmon said: 'The destruction of so many priceless records of the past

represents an irreplaceable loss, not only to Iraq, but to the memory of the world.'

UNESCO called an emergency meeting on 17 April in Paris to discuss what can be done. Some thirty attended the meeting, and issued the following statement:

The meeting deplores and is deeply shocked by the extensive damage to, and looting of the cultural heritage of Iraq caused by the recent conflict. It calls on the coalition forces to observe the principles of the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two Protocols.

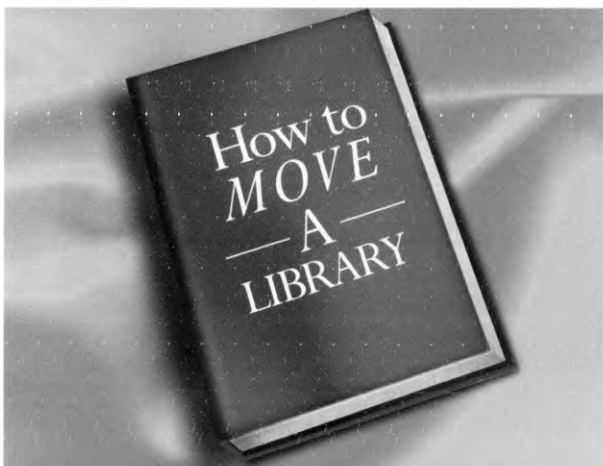
The meeting agreed on the following recommendations to those responsible for civil order in Iraq:

- 1 That all museums, libraries, archives, monuments and sites in Iraq be guarded and secured immediately by the forces in place.*
- 2 That an immediate prohibition be placed on the export of all antiques, antiquities, works of art, books and archives from Iraq.*
- 3 That an immediate ban be placed on the international trade in objects of Iraqi cultural heritage.*
- 4 That a call be made for the voluntary and immediate return of cultural objects stolen or illicitly exported from Iraq.*
- 5 That there be an immediate fact-finding mission under UNESCO co-ordination to assess the extent of damage and loss to cultural property in Iraq.*
- 6 That there be the facilitation of international efforts in assisting cultural institutions in Iraq.*

Director general of UNESCO, Mr Koichiro Matsuura said: 'Libraries and archives must be protected as essential parts of the rich heritage of Iraq ... all measures [must] be taken to ensure the protection and surveillance of Iraqi cultural heritage and effectively fight against illicit trafficking'.

The International Committee of the Blue Shield has called upon the coalition forces and other parties concerned to do everything they can to protect cultural institutions, their collections and the heritage professionals charged with their care. The committee also welcome initiatives by religious and other local authorities to urge the return of looted items and to provide temporary safe havens for them.

References: 'Rich past stripped as future in tatters', Sydney Morning Herald, 14 April by Paul McGeough; 'Library books, letters and priceless documents are set ablaze in final chapter of the sacking of Baghdad', The Independent, 15 April, by Robert Fisk; 'The trashing of civilisation', The Age, 15 April, by Eleanor Robson; 'Pentagon knew risk to priceless antiquities', The Age, 15 April, by Guy Gugliotta. See also the IFLA website: <http://www.ifla.org/VI/4/admin/statement-iraq.htm> and UNESCO: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php@URL_ID=11416&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html.



We wrote the book

At Chess we have the industry expertise and the specialist equipment to make your next library move fast, simple, secure, and 100% reliable.

- Fully enclosed trolleys safeguard against loss
- Fixed height shelving prevents damage to books
- Rapid access contents during transport if required
- Efficient relocation and reinstallation
- Sequentially numbered trolleys preserve your library numbering system.

Phone Australia wide

13 14 69

Branches Australia wide


Chess

00114165 WILEY2006