



Background Paper

*UNITED NATIONS / WORLD BANK
JOINT IRAQ NEEDS ASSESSMENT*

Iraq's Cultural Heritage

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL
ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In line with its constitutional mandate in the field of culture and following several actions to alert the international community to the risk of damages to the cultural heritage of Iraq, three meetings of high-level international experts on the cultural heritage of Iraq were held by UNESCO on 17 April 2003 in Paris, 29 April 2003 in London, and 1 August 2003 in Tokyo, to respond to the alarming situation affecting the cultural heritage of Iraq as a result from the conflict.

1.2 The meetings had the following objectives: (i) to assess the situation of cultural heritage at risk and identify the most urgent needs; (ii) to devise an emergency safeguarding plan; (iii) to define urgent measures and medium - and long-term actions for the protection and the rehabilitation of the Iraqi cultural heritage; (iv) to formulate guidelines for a consolidated strategy in the field of post-conflict intervention and rehabilitation of the cultural heritage of Iraq; (v) to coordinate the international efforts for the safeguard of Iraqi cultural heritage and therefore call for the establishment of an *International Coordination Committee for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of Iraq* under the auspices of the future Government of Iraq and UNESCO to ensure that international assistance be carried out to the highest international standards

1.3 At the same time, UNESCO co-chaired the one-day session of the INTERPOL meeting in Lyon 5-6 May 2003 on the illegal trafficking of stolen objects and was actively present at the symposium on the protection of Iraqi cultural heritage in Vienna in June 2003, at the 49th International Congress of Assyriology and Nearer Eastern Archaeology at the British Museum in London in July 2003 and at three meetings focusing on illicit traffic of Iraqi cultural property in Bonn and Berlin in May 2003 and Amman-Jordan in June 2003. The latter was organized by the Jordanian authorities in cooperation with the World Customs Organization

1.4 Two experts' missions to Iraq in May and June 2003 with the aim of assessing the actual conditions of archaeological sites, heritage and cultural institutions, museums, archives and libraries were organized. The first mission focused on carrying out a preliminary assessment of the conditions of Iraqi cultural heritage, evaluating the most urgent needs of the Iraqi museum, monuments, sites and cultural institutions in Baghdad.

1.5 The second mission aimed at assessing the state of conservation of major archaeological sites in the country, to the North, Mossul, Ninive, Erbil, Hatra and Ashur, and to the South, Babylon, Kish, Isin, Nippur, Ur, Uruk and Basra. The mission assessed also the conditions of museums, historic buildings, archives, libraries and cultural institutions outside Baghdad to prepare accordingly a prioritised plan of action including proposals for rescue interventions

1.6 Moreover, the mission aimed at completing the assessment of the Iraqi Museum initiated during the first UNESCO expert mission, with regard to the conservation laboratories and storage areas to finalize a plan of interventions for the Iraqi Museum in Baghdad.

1.7 It is thanks to the result of these two mission and the observations made on the field that a thorough needs assessment on cultural heritage could be successfully completed.

1.8 Therefore, following the experience gained in Cambodia, the Balkans and more recently in Afghanistan where the successful implementation by UNESCO of projects for the salvage of the local cultural institutions and monuments helped preserve local identities and re-establishment mutual understanding and reconciliation among communities, also in the case of Iraq, cultural heritage shall be in the focus of the reconstruction process and agenda.

1.9 The crucial role of culture in the reconstruction of identity and governance is of paramount importance. The protection of cultural identity is directly implicated in the rebuilding of broken societies.

1.10 At the same time, the rehabilitation of the cultural institutions for which Iraq was well known and through which its culture spread outside its borders shall reaffirm its position in the international scene as a country with an important cultural tradition and will help the local population through reopening and re-functioning of local heritage institutions.

1.11 The reopening of international excavation and restoration campaigns at archeological and historical sites and monuments will help prevent further looting and contribute towards stopping the trade in artifacts and the irreparable loss of cultural information about the country history and identity. These urgent measures will also encourage well controlled and targeted tourism after decades of seclusion, communicate and spread cultural knowledge and contribute to the improvement of the socio-economic conditions of the entire country.

1.12 Five large areas of intervention were identified within the sector of culture as follows:

- Archaeological sites.
- Museums
- Libraries and Archives.
- Cultural institutions
- Historical buildings

1.13 Almost all of them were severely harmed during the recent armed conflict. Looters and vandals burnt libraries, archives, cultural buildings and their cultural contains, stole all fixtures, appliances, equipment and materials of possible use. Items of unique value are gone forever. And not just old archives, historic manuscripts, books and documents, but also school records, library cards, suffered major damage during the war and neglect during the years of the economic embargo.

1.14 Severe damage was inflicted on the history, the past and the identity of a country, which had already suffered during a decade of international sanctions and which needs now to look for its root in order to retain its own strength. This is why culture is as important in the reconstruction process as any other major field of assistance.

2. CURRENT STATUS AND NEEDS

Archaeological sites

2.1 Archaeological sites are spread all over the territory. There are sites known and excavated and sites not yet excavated and studied, but clearly visible on the ground There are more than 10.000 registered archaeological sites in Iraq but much more according to archeological surveys. Over 1500 of them have been investigated.

2.2 The major sites in the north are Assur, Ninive, Khorsabad, Nimrud, and Hatra.

2.3 In the centre, there are Kish, Larsa, Lagash, Aqar Quf, Tell Hermel, Al-Ukhaidir, Samarra, Ctesiphon and Isin.

2.4 In the South are Ur, Uruk, Eridu and Borsippa.

Major concerns

2.5 The assessment carried out by UNESCO during two missions on the field pointed out five types of “violations” of archaeological sites in Iraq, as a result of the events of wars, decades of sanctions and collapse of infrastructures since 1980, forms of violation have been identified:

- looting and illicit digging
- illicit trade in archaeological artefacts
- military bases
- accelerated decay
- controversial reconstruction work

Looting and illicit digging

2.6 Looting in particular takes place in the central Southern region of Iraq, from Hilla in the North to Nasiriyah in the South. Around twenty important or named sites are documented to have been or are in the process of being looted, in some cases by several hundreds people working in shifts as is the case of the sites of Isin and Adab which might be considered 50% lost. In particular, medium to large sites and cemeteries seem to be targeted for looting, and also the looting technique appears similar. No assessment has been provided yet for the thousands of smaller tells existing in Iraq.

Illicit trade of archaeological artifacts

2.7 Judging by the type of artifacts and cuneiform tablets sold through dealers in Europe and America, and as reported by the two UNESCO missions in Iraq it could be said that targeted sites are mostly cemeteries where there is easier to find large numbers of artifacts to be circulated in the illegal market. Looting means final loss of any information that might be gained from the find. It is thus the ultimate destruction of the past and must be stopped by all means. Isolated artifacts of unknown provenance have very limited value.

Use of sites as military bases.

2.8 Several sites have been used before and after the war for military bases and posts (i.e. Ur, Babylon, Hatra and Kish). On the one hand, it can be said that the presence of military bases may have protected the site against looting, but army related activities might have caused damages as well (i.e. digging to set up positions; traffic using heavy armed vehicles, helicopters generating vibrations, ...). Another cause of damage is the lack of briefing to soldiers on the Iraqi cultural heritage identification and urgent conservation issues.

Accelerated decay of exposed edifices.

2.9 In Ninive for example, all exposed stone reliefs from the Sennacherib palace as well as the slabs and winged bulls of the city gate at Abi Yunus are made of local limestone. This fragile material is decaying rapidly due to exposure to the elements. The lightweight roof erected by the Antiquities Department, which provided a measure of protection has been stolen. The decay is also due to lack of maintenance through out the decades. These archeological landmarks are in serious threat of disappearance.

Controversial restoration works

2.10 This is for example the case in Babylon where reconstruction was carried out despite the lack of precise information and sufficient documentation on the past aspect of town and because

of a presidential palace built on top of a hill within the Babylonian city complex. These were the reasons for the exclusion of this important site from the World Heritage Tentative list of sites.

Needs and priorities

- Prepare a national archaeological survey and database/GIS
- Provide emergency conservation measures to prevent collapse, significant deterioration or looting in major monuments and sites damaged or endangered further to the conflict.
- Encourage rescue excavations of sites threatened by infrastructure projects and looting.
- Re-establish the traditional guard system by paying local guards and sheikhs and training them to watch over the sites and put an end to the plundering of humanity's past.
- Provide regular and frequent inspections of sites
- Bring to justice professional dealers and syndicates of smugglers in Iraq and neighbouring countries
- Stop the open trade in Europe and America of artefacts looted from sites in Iraq
- Brief the military forces in the region in order to direct their attention to the plundering and looting problem by distributing pamphlets or folders describing the sites, artefacts, etc..
- Train police borders patrol on the identification of historical and archaeological artifacts to stop illicit trafficking of cultural property
- Train in methods of protecting exposed monuments, site restoration, preservation of deteriorated limestone and stabilizing brick and mud structures.
- Organize seminars on focal problems of cultural heritage, such as appropriate restoration principles and techniques, as well as conservation issues
- Revise the current legislation for protection of cultural heritage sites and monuments.
- Prepare management and conservation plans for selected properties in particular those at risk
- Develop long-term internationally coordinated projects for research, protection and tourism for some of the major archaeological sites and monuments of Iraq
- Prepare WH nomination dossiers for sites inscribed in the WH Tentative List
- Prepare management plans for sites inscribed in the World heritage List and included in the Tentative List of Iraq.

Museums

2.11 Main archeological museums are located in the North (Mossul, Tikrit, Dohuk and Kirkuk), in the center (Baghdad) and in the South (Nasiriyah and Basrah). In addition, there are three site museums, two in Babylon and one in Nimrud.

Major concerns

2.12 All were damaged after the war. Also as result of neglect and total lack of maintenance during the decades that preceded the war, many of the museums' vital facilities are in need of major rehabilitation. Mosul Museum was bombed and looters removed 30 copper fragments, a marble statue head and four cuneiform tablets from its galleries.

2.13 The assessment carried out by the staff at the Iraqi Museum in Baghdad shows that approximately 40 objects were missing from the display area, while about 13000 objects seems to be at this stage missing from the storage-rooms. The Iraqi National Museum also shows large-scale damage in its conservation laboratory and the administrative offices. Damage from artillery

or gunfire is real, but limited. It appears that the key Museum inventories have all survived, which will make checking holdings possible, if labour intensive.

2.14 Within its constitutional mandate UNESCO operates in the field of its actions to combat illicit traffic of cultural property. In this spirit, on April 1999 UNESCO and INTERPOL signed a Cooperation Agreement, which recognizes, among others, the cooperation of the two Organizations in combating illicit traffic in cultural property and crime, in their respective fields and mandates. With reference to the Iraqi cultural heritage, this cooperation has been reinforced since the looting of the Iraqi Museum in Baghdad in April 2003 and UNESCO has committed itself to develop a database on Iraqi stolen cultural property in order to respond effectively to the problem of illicit traffic.

2.15 UNESCO has already initiated three projects for the complete rehabilitation of the laboratories and stores and to provide securing the building of the Museum in Baghdad. Both projects have capacity building elements in the form of training programmes for the staff to be carried out in house and in Amman.

Needs and priorities

2.16 Beside the above-mentioned projects already in progress at UNESCO, the most urgent needs are:

- Restore the buildings of the museums, providing fixtures where missing, infrastructures, equipment, security and air-conditioning systems
- Restore and re-install conservation laboratories where needed
- Complete the cataloguing and inventories of objects, according to international standards
- Restore selected threatened objects and objects of particular value.
- Train local personnel on preventive conservation measures for objects and on other museum related subjects
- Recover the missing artifacts and return them to the museum of origin
- Identify and provide immediate measures to ensure appropriate environmental storage conditions of the museum's collections

Libraries and Archives

2.17 Iraq began establishing public libraries in all Governorates in the mid forties of the last century. The National Library, situated in Baghdad, was built in 1977. The Iraqi Centre for Manuscripts, also in Baghdad has 47000 titles. There is also a National Archives and a special Children's Library. Every university has its own library. In addition to the state libraries in most of the major towns of Iraq, some towns have private libraries as well.

Major concerns

2.18 After the war, the National Library in Baghdad was looted, burnt and about 70% of its books estimated to one million two hundred thousand volumes, and all of its inventory records were destroyed.

2.19 At present, the collections removed before of the war are stored on different sites: about 300 000 volumes are stored in a mosque and about 200 000 volumes seem to have been stored in a building of the Board of Tourism, in Baghdad

2.20 The National Archives, located in the second floor of the National Library building were destroyed by fire. A part of the collection seems to have been moved before the destruction occurred. Inventories and catalogues available in the reading room and in technical services were also burnt.

2.21 The Awqaf Library building was totally burnt and probably looted. Only the outer walls are still standing. About 40 % of the manuscripts as well as 90 % of the printed books, were destroyed by fire and looting,. According to a visual evaluation, the building cannot be reused.

2.22 The Central Public Library in Basra has been totally destroyed by fire, and probably looted before. Outer walls are still standing but the structure is damaged and not restorable.

2.23 The Islamic Library in Basra, depending on an association founded in 1950 was looted but not destroyed. Many University libraries suffered the same fate.

2.24 The Centre for Manuscripts, which recorded a main part of Iraqi patrimony, is safe as is the Central Public Library in Mosul but its laboratory and restoration unit were totally looted.

Needs and priorities

2.25 The most urgent needs are the following:

- Find temporary buildings to host the collections
- Encourage personnel to resume work.
- Restore or rebuild libraries buildings, provide infrastructures, furniture and equipment
- Provide to the inventory of collections to determine the programme of acquisitions to reconstitute destroyed collections.
- Provide training of professionals in particular training of trainers, abroad, and staff, locally in librarianship and conservation
- Prepare preventive conservation programmes
- Establish restoration and digitisation programmes
- Ensure training and qualification for technicians

2.26 In particular new premises are needed in Baghdad to house the National Library, Iraqi Centre for Manuscripts and the National Archives. The library in Mosul is in need of restoration. The Basra library needs new premises.

Cultural Institutions

2.27 The Ministry of Culture has five teaching cultural institutions. They are all located in Baghdad. They are:

- Melodic Studies Institute.
- Iraqi Maqam School.
- Baghdad Opera Institute.
- School of Music and Ballet.
- Heritage Institute.

Major concerns

2.28 All Institutes suffered damage during and after the war. Looters forced their way into the premises, and plundered them. Doors, windows, floor tiles, works of art, office and classroom furniture, air-conditioners, computers, teaching material, instruments, even chalkboards and other items of equipment and fixtures.

Needs and priorities

2.29 The last institute is currently being rehabilitated by UNESCO in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture. Through another UNESCO project, the School of Music and Ballet is being equipped with musical instruments to replace the looted ones.

2.30 Considering the essential role these institutes play in the propagation and diffusion of traditional skills and material culture, it is necessary to restore their buildings, equip their premises, re-install course, train the teacher and possibly establish similar centers in the northern and southern regions of the country.

Historical Buildings

2.31 The historical buildings of Iraq belong to two periods, late Abbasid and Ottoman. The former includes mosques, palaces, *madrasahs* (educational institutes), khans (caravanserais) and mausoleums. The latter is made up mainly of civic buildings. A number of Abbasid monuments, throughout Iraq, one Ottoman Complex in Baghdad and the citadel town of Erbil in north Iraq have been carefully assessed by UNESCO.

2.32 Among the surveyed historic buildings is Bayt-al-Hikma in Baghdad which was built in 1721 as a madrasah, and which became in 1938 the seat of Iraq's first parliament and in 1980 a research institute; the Abbasid Palace in Baghdad, built as a school in 1230; Al-Qushla in Baghdad erected along the Tigris in 1852 and used as government departments and as the first site of the National Museum; the Al-Mustansiriyya School in Baghdad site of one of the most famous Islamic universities constructed in A.D. 1234.

Major concerns

- Because of absence of preventive maintenance and poor curative maintenance, many historical structures are decaying.
- A number of religious monuments are made to undergo major vulgar state-sponsored renovations or expansions to turn them into showcases of the previous regime's support for Islam.
- Lack of suitably qualified technicians who can carry our restoration and preservation tasks.

Needs and priorities

- Train local staff in building preservation and restoration techniques.

- Carry out conservation work on the Qushal complex along the Tigris at the northern end of the old town. This complex consists of 9 buildings. New, preferably cultural uses should be found for the conserved buildings. This will not only provide much needed space for offices and other cultural functions, but will also anchor this part of the capital, which has fallen into disuse.
- Carry out a conservation study of the town of Erbil. This is one of the world's oldest towns that has been in uninterrupted occupation,

Institutional strengthening and capacity building

Major concerns

2.33 The 2003 conflict saw the Ministry of Culture building completely destroyed as well as other Government offices such as the Department of Antiquities plundered and premises damaged. Losses included fixtures, equipment and materials, communication, etc. The situation of other cultural institutions is mentioned above. The number of personnel on the payroll of the Ministry of Culture before the fall of the regime was 7461, of which 1600 guards at sites. These last number needs to be urgently increased due to the looting occurring at major archaeological sites. The total number would be probably presently decreased due to de-Baathification of government officials. To reorganize such large number of personnel, review their tasks and rationalize them will take some time but it is an indispensable exercise together with the provision of training and ad hoc capacity building.

Needs and priorities

- Upgrading and reorganization of national cultural heritage institutions.
- Formulation of *ad hoc* training courses targeting local personnel, decisions makers and local authorities, in particular: sites' management, presentation and conservation; conservation principles and techniques; objects' conservation, collections' management, cataloguing, etc; promotion and awareness of cultural heritage; management of information and communication for conservators.

3. EXPENDITURE AND BUDGET ESTIMATES (2003-2007)

Estimated budget from the Iraqi Ministry of Culture

3.1 The table shows estimated budget figures for the years 2004-2007 from the Ministry of Culture needed to improve the cultural heritage institution, sites, etc.. in the country. The budget figures (in Millions USD) for the years 2003 and 2004 have been approved by the CPA.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Gross expenditure	19.3	149.1	224	298	360
Recurrent expenditure	0.9	29	44	58	70
Capital expenditure	18.4	120.1	180	240	290
Archaeological sites	12	33.6	50.4	67.2	81.2
Museums	-	50.4	75.6	100.8	121.8
Libraries	3.3	20	30	40.08	48.5
Institutes	0.8	3.7	5.58	7.44	9
Historic buildings	2.3	12.4	18.42	24.48	29.5
CPA total annual budget allocations	19.3	9.2	9.2	21	21
Unmet needs	0.00	139.9	214.8	277	339

UNESCO estimated budget

3.2 This is the estimated budget of activities to be carried out which are not in the agenda of the present authority in place. (*already under implementation)

	2003*	2004	2005
Archaeological sites			
Restoration		0.5	0.5
Security	0.2	0.3	0.3
Documentation		0.5	0.4
Training		0.2	0.2
Total	0.2	1.5	1.4
Museums			
Restoration	1,4	0.5	0.4
Restoration collections		0.4	0.2
Inventories	0.2	0.3	0.3
Training		0.3	0.3
Total	1.6	1.5	1.2
Libraries			
Restoration		0.4	0.5
Restoration collections	0.	0.4	0.5
Inventories		0.3	0.3
Training		0.2	0.2
Total	0	1.3	1.5
Cultural Institutes			
Restoration	0.2	0.6	0.6
Training		0.2	0.2
Total	0.2	0.8	0.8
Historic buildings			
Restoration	0.6	1.3	0.8
Documentation		0.2	0.2
Training		0.2	0.2
Total	0.6	1.7	1.2
Institutional strengthening	0	0.5	0.5
GRAND TOTAL	2.6	7.3	6.6