

REMEMBER IRAQ'S HERITAGE
Why must we care?

Iraq, in Ancient Mesopotamia, is the cradle of civilization, the region that spawned the seminal inventions of writing, the calendar, the wheel, and even the first cities. Iraq continued to be a center of world civilization as the homeland of the Sumerians, Assyrians and Babylonians, and as the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, the first great Islamic empire.

The history of the world quite literally begins in Mesopotamia; the loss of its cultural heritage is a loss for all humanity.



"Lioness Attacking a Nubian," looted from the Iraq Museum in April, 2003. This extraordinary 8th-century BC ivory plaque with lapis, carnelian, and gold is one of only two objects of its kind known today. Collection: Iraq Museum, Baghdad (present whereabouts unknown)

The "total area looted . . . was many times greater than all the archaeological investigations ever conducted in southern Iraq and must have yielded tablets, coins, cylinder seals, statues, terracottas, bronzes and other objects in the hundreds of thousands".

*Professor Elizabeth Stone
Stony Brook University
March, 2008*

REMEMBER IRAQ'S HERITAGE
Our heritage

SAFE Global Candlelight Vigil for the Iraq Museum is organized by SAFE/Saving Antiquities for Everyone, a non-profit organization dedicated to raising public awareness about the importance of preserving cultural heritage worldwide.

Thank you for joining us in this moment of remembrance.

When you light a candle, you shed light on a problem that affects us all.



This brochure is created by SAFE in conjunction with the exhibition "Catastrophe! The Looting and Destruction of Iraq's Past" at the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute (oi.chicago.edu). The exhibit's opening date marks the fifth anniversary of the looting of the Iraq Museum.

To learn more about SAFE, and what is being accomplished through our programs and projects, visit us at **savingantiquities.org**

SAFE SAVING ANTIQUITIES FOR EVERYONE

Cover image: Students of W. D. Ford Career-Technical Center
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A tragedy in Iraq

On April 10-12, 2003, more than 15,000 artifacts from the Iraq Museum were stolen or destroyed. To date, less than half of these pieces have been recovered. Even more devastating is the continued plunder of thousands of archaeological sites in Iraq, most of which have never been excavated.

We will never know how much historical information is destroyed when looters rip apart unknown sites in the quest for artifacts such as cuneiform tablets. These written documents, preserved in clay from civilizations thousands of years ago, typically fetch US\$50.00 or less. "Only a handful of people can read them," says Elizabeth Stone, an archaeologist at Stony Brook University.

As long as security remains tenuous, Iraq's irreplaceable cultural heritage—the world's heritage—remains vulnerable to exploitation.



Photo taken shortly after the destruction at the Iraq Museum by Army Reserve Maj. Cori Wegener, U.S. Committee of the Blue Shield

REMEMBER IRAQ'S HERITAGE

A global problem

Sadly, looting and plundering continues not only in Iraq, but all around the world. Looting feeds the international black market trade in antiquities and destroys humanity's most precious non-renewable resource: the intact evidence of our undiscovered past.

Statues, tablets, or cylinder seals may be beautiful objects on their own, but are valuable for reasons far beyond their beauty. Objects uncovered in their original contexts, properly interpreted, provide insight into our ancestors' daily lives, societies, environments, and beliefs. These artifacts have the ability to enrich our understanding of ancient life. As such, antiquities comprise an essential part of our global cultural heritage.

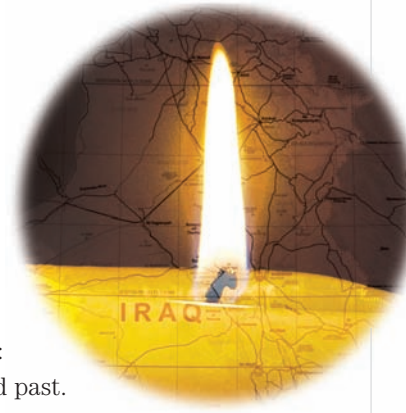
In order for artifacts to tell us about the past, archaeologists must be able to excavate and study them scientifically. Looters, in their quest for saleable objects, damage these precious sites, destroying the knowledge they contain...for profit.

Each looted artifact—whether dug up from the American Southwest, from a Mesoamerican temple site, or from a burial mound in China, Afghanistan or Mesopotamia—is like a page torn from a book.

Each missing page represents a permanent hole in our understanding of history.

"There is not an archaeological site in the world that is safe. There is not a museum in the world that is safe. This is the problem—it's not just the loss of Iraq's antiquities, but the loss of antiquities everywhere [even in the United States!]"

*Professor McGuire Gibson
University of Chicago
January, 2008*



REMEMBER IRAQ'S HERITAGE

A global solution

The problem of the illicit trade in antiquities and the need to preserve cultural heritage worldwide was addressed at the international level by the adoption of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

On a national level, countries across the globe also have laws to protect their heritage, yet the protection of cultural property is generally a low priority for law enforcement. The trade in illicit antiquities is therefore allowed to thrive in secrecy.

This global problem calls for global solutions. The stewardship of cultural heritage must be shared by all—we can't afford not to care.

First, we must raise public awareness.



Staff members of the Iraq Museum joined the SAFE Global Candlelight Vigil on April 10, 2007. Although the Iraq Museum remains closed to the public, staff members continue to work every day to restore and recover what remains.

"This can happen to any museum, anywhere, any time. We should be aware of this and protect these treasures in all our museums, so that this will never happen again!"

*Dr. Donny George
former Director of the Iraq Museum
now Visiting Professor
Stony Brook University
February, 2008*