

# The Iraqi Museum

## Preserving mankind's ancient heritage

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The undisputed fact is that Iraq is the cradle of civilization and the first inhabited land. It is also the country where writing began. And it was from Iraq that man moved out of the caves to live by the rivers. These facts come to life in the Iraq Museum in south-west Baghdad. It was once housed in one small hall in the Queshla district, on the eastern side, close by the river. But explorations by both Iraqi and foreign scientific teams increased, new treasures were found and the museum moved to its present building. ➔



The museum under occupation.

دبابة أمريكية أمام المتحف.

## The Iraqi Museum

The Iraqi Museum occupies an area of 4700 sq m. It was opened in 1963 and has been continually expanded and renovated until 1983. The expansions culminated in 28 large exhibition halls and the Iraq museum became the fifth most renowned museum in the world. The halls were divided into two floors, ground and upper levels and classified according to Iraq's main historical eras.

## Pre-history

The first hall on the upper level displays relics from early cavemen who inhabited the northern parts of Mesopotamia between 100,000 – 10,000 B.C. the time of the hunter-gatherers.

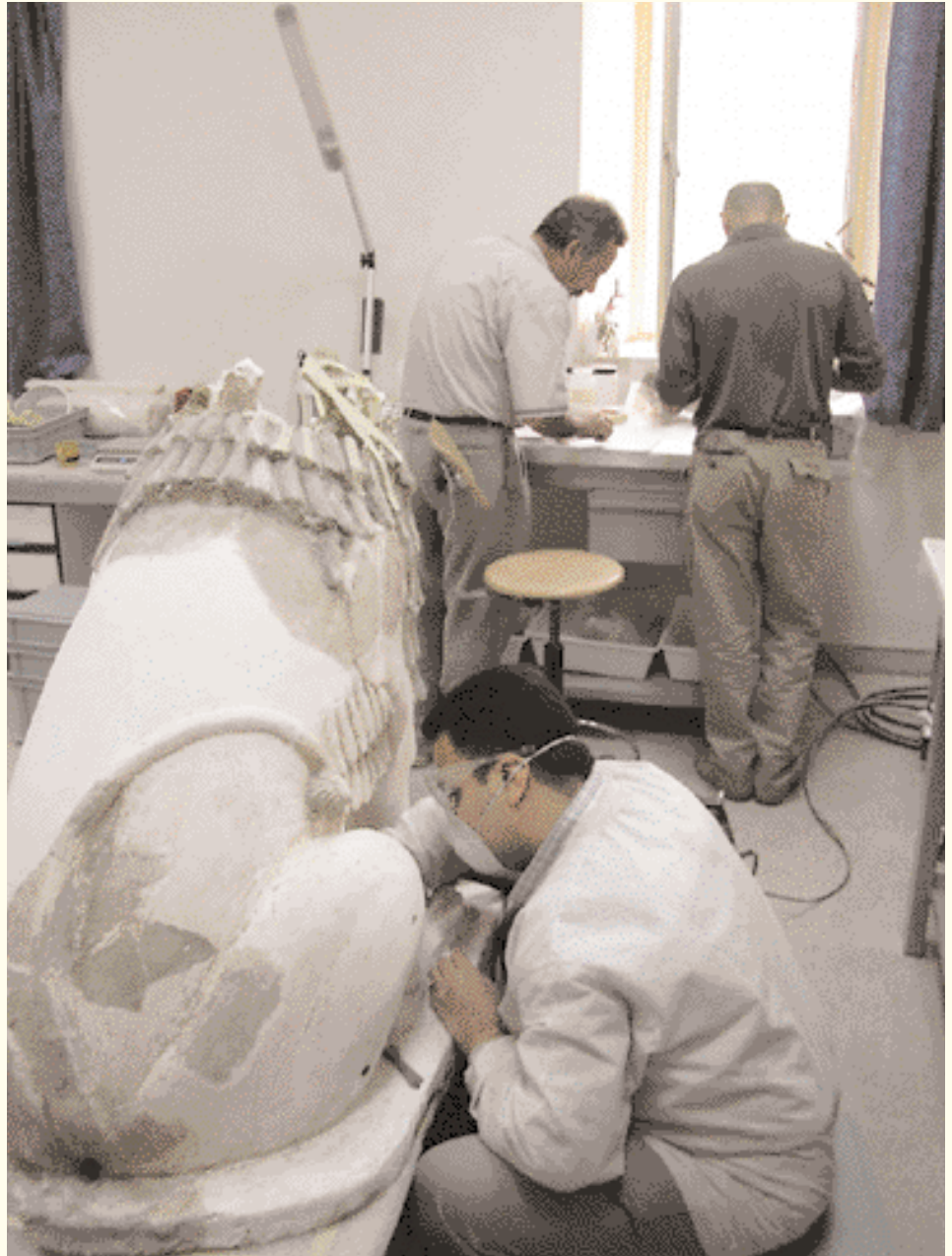
## Neanderthal man

The most interesting exhibit in this hall is the skeleton of the Neanderthal. This man is remarkably different from present man (Homo sapiens). His remains were found in the Rawanduz area, Irbil province north of Iraq by an American mission in 1951. He is distinguished by his long-shaped skull and large face. Opinions differ as to when Neanderthal man evolved into present-day man.

This hall also includes tools used by the first man made of a hard stone after being shaped into hammers and axes. Exhibits feature the development of the first man until the beginning of agriculture and the domestication of animals: black ole seeds, agricultural tools, stone pottery and other simple improvised items. Gods are depicted by small statues of naked women, some carrying children, symbolic of fertility and growth.

## The Sumerian era

The first part of this hall includes the Warka Group, recording a history of a period some 3600 B.C. and includes the first needle, as well as a face of a girl from al-Warka, known as The Warka Monaliza , and the sacrificial bowl which is about a metre long. The bowl represents the origin of life and its different aspects. The drawings start with water, then plants, followed by animals and temple priests.



The laboratory.

المختبر المركزي.

The second part of the Sumerian hall includes statues of Sumerian princes from about 2500 B. C., sacrificial tablets, a skeleton of a fighter, and a tablet showing how dairy products were made. Similar techniques are still in use today.

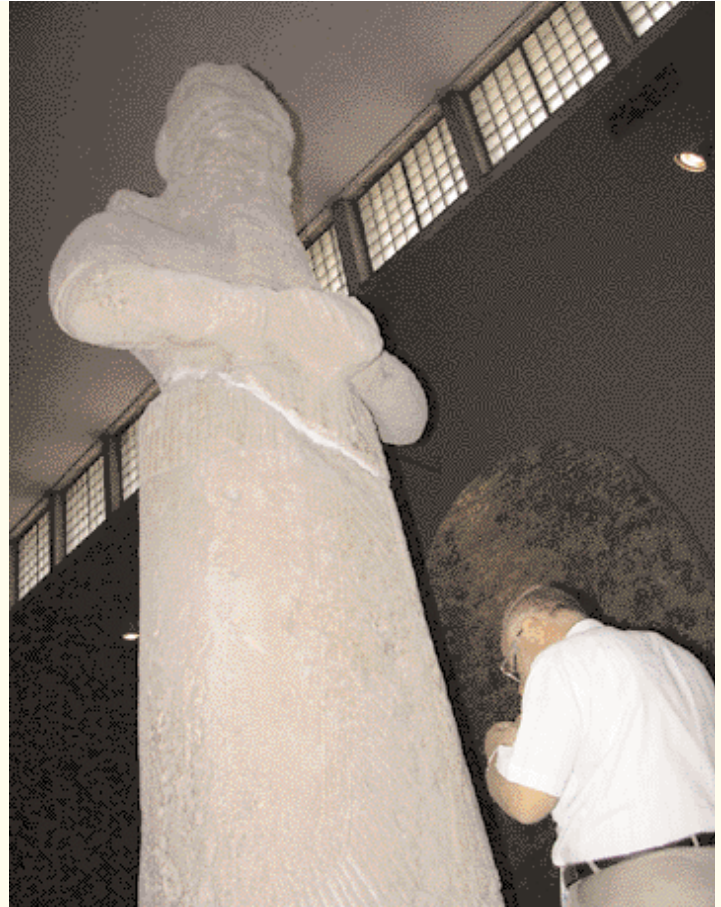
The Golden Harp which is considered to be the most important find in the royal graveyard of Ur, is in the third part of the Sumerian hall, together with other finds.

## The Akkadian era

The Akkadians were the first Sematic dynasty to have lived in Mesopotamia founded by Sarjon the Akkadian (2334-2279 B.C.) who also founded the Akkadian capital , Akkad, near Babylon. The hall contains different stone inscriptions and cylindrical seals. The most important exhibit is the bronze, 450 gram statue of Narram Sein (2254-2218 B.C.). portraying the king when he was a baby. ➔



A tablet.



Sumerian Statue.

تمثال سومري كبير.

## The Babylonian era and Hatra

One of the most important halls represents the old and new Babylon period. The Ancient Babylon hall contains some pottery in the shape of seated life-size lions, discovered in different parts of Iraq, including Babylon and the dam in Haditha district. It also includes the Needle of Dado Sham, dated 1800 B.C. and samples of bricks, stones, and foundations representing the beginning of writing, from 3000 B.C. until the Roman period.

The Hatra hall includes stone statues of princes and princesses from 200 B.C. to 200 A.C. It has been split up into two halls and most of its exhibits are now in storage.

## The Assyrian era

The exhibits here belong the period from around 2004 B.C. to the fall of Nineveh, the capital of the late Assyrian empire to the Median empire around 612 B.C. This hall includes huge winged oxen, probably the angles guarding the city, along with statues of the Gods, and the frontal piece of the throne of the King Shalmansaur the Third as well as two statues of the king himself.

The Middle Assyrian hall includes the needles of the Assyrian kings. It is dedicated to ivory statues depicting different aspects of life, and boundary stones demarcating agricultural lands.

## Other exhibits

Other interesting exhibits are found in the Currency Hall with coins from different periods including a silver collection belonging to the Umawi period, specially the time of the Caliphs Abdul-Malik Bin Marwan and Omar Bin Abdul-Aziz.

The other Islamic Hall includes front sections of houses, arches of mosques and prayer niches made of marble, doors, tombs and shrines.

## The museums treasures

One of the most important pieces that the museum should be proud of is the clay tablet that was found in Harmal hill, a suburb of Baghdad, probably dating back to the second millennium B.C. It is a mathematical clay tablet that includes three cases of geometry and algebra and deals with the similarity between triangles that have perpendicular angles, in much the same way that has been dealt with by Euclides. There is also an 11-string harp made with inlays of shells and gold. It has a head of a golden bearded calf at the front. The harp was found in Ur in the south of Iraq. It dates back to the time of Queen Shibaad, from around 2450 B.C. Another breath-taking exhibit is the stone statue of King Santaruk the first, the king of Hatra, found in Hatra, which was a commercial town south west of Mousul in the north of Iraq. The life-size statue has a picture of an eagle on his head - the sign of

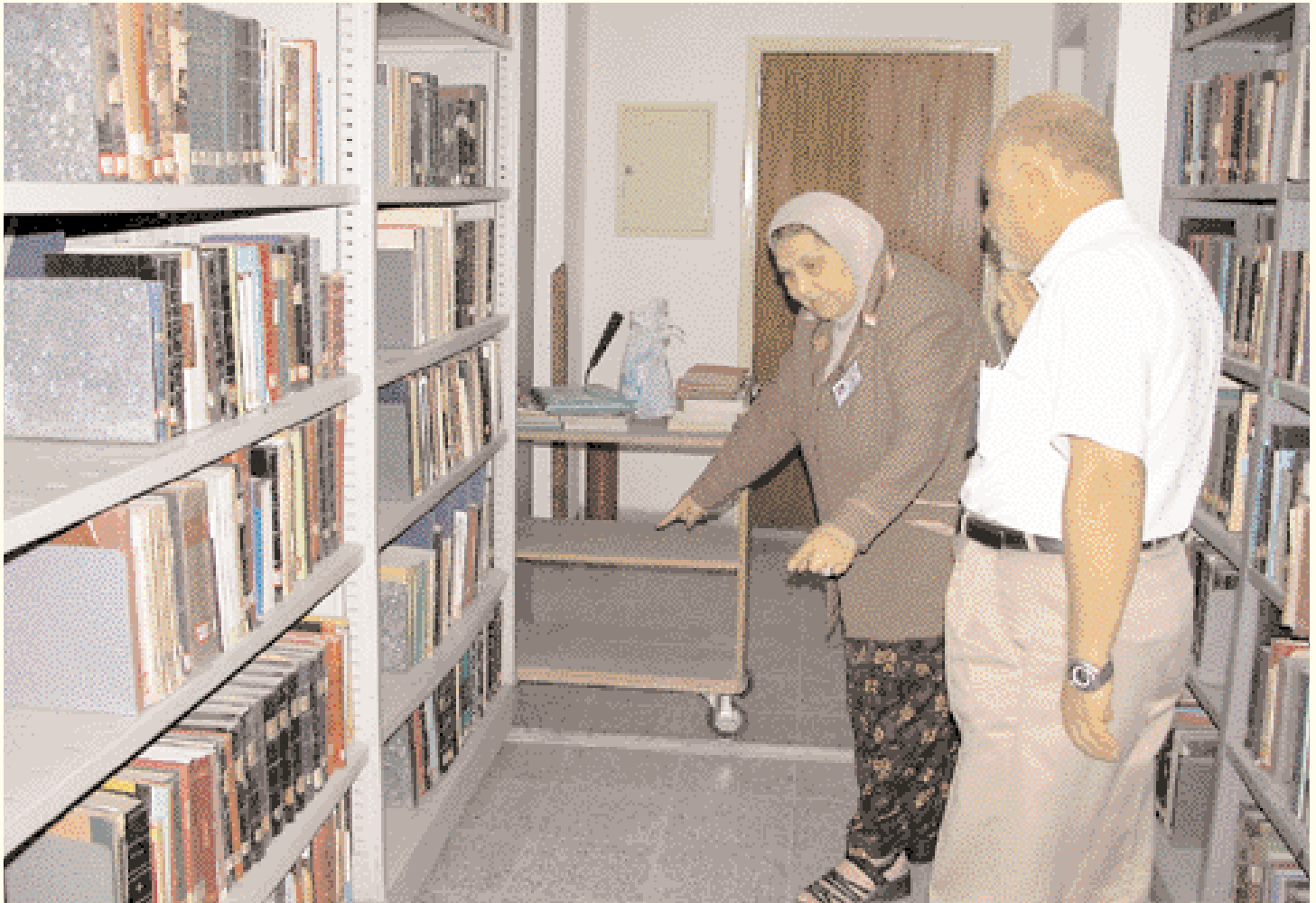
victory and glory. There is also a life-size, white marble face of a Sumerian woman considered one of the best ancient carved pieces. Today most of the prize exhibits have been locked away and not even scholars will be permitted to see them until the security situation improves.

## The Museum Library

Two other departments: the library and the central laboratory, compliment the work of the museum.

The museum library is considered one of the old libraries since it was founded in 1933 with 490 books. Today there are more than 133,000 volumes dealing with sciences, catalogues, languages and other disciplines. The library has three sections. The Arabic section which includes books written in Persian, Turkish and Sanskrit. The second section is the foreign section with English, German, Italian and Russian works. The third section is the old languages section with cuneiform books.

In storage are important manuscripts and stone prints of travel books, such as Travels to Iraq, Anatolia and Syria. The public will not have access to these books until the security situation improves considerably. Zainab Sadiq told *Islamic Tourism* that they were the only museum collections that were not looted due to the emergency measures taken by library staff. ➔



The writer listens to explanations from the librarian.

مندوب المجلة يستمع إلى شروحات من مديرة المكتبة.

The library has a large reading room, open to postgraduate students and researchers and maintains relations with foreign cultural institutions in France, Italy and the United Kingdom.

### The Central Laboratory

The function of the central laboratory is the maintenance and preservation of all archaeological finds. It consists of a maintenance department and the research unit. The first section works on preserving finds through mechanical, chemical and electronic methods. This section has been restored with the help of Italian experts. It is hoped the second section will be re-equipped by the Japanese who have promised electron microscopes, X-rays and radiation analysis equipment.

### The destruction that bedevilled the museum

The looting that devastated the museum has been extensively documented. Dr. Ahmad Kamil, the head of the cuneiform section confirmed that 38 important pieces were stolen. A third of these have now been returned. Three, out of five, stores were broken into and looted but the minor collections were saved. The golden pieces, the most prominent being the Nimrud treasures, were kept in the Central Bank of Iraq since 1991, while all 4,000 small cylindrical seals were stolen. Some have been returned.

In total 14,000 pieces were stolen and 4,000 have been returned.. The Iraqi police Interpol and UNICEF are trying to recover the remaining 10,000 looted artefacts. Interpol

distributed catalogues with information and pictures of some of the stolen pieces to countries where artefacts were likely to be sold. Some 1000 pieces were returned from the United States and a number of European countries. The locals also had a twinge of conscience and returned their country's stolen heritage. Political parties have assisted in the retrieval process and the imams of local mosques successfully called for the return of artefacts.

The Iraqi people have great confidence in international and local organisations who are seeking to restore the Iraq Museum to its former glory. Iraq's heritage is the heritage of mankind and when the museum was looted the thieves pillaged a human treasure. This crime must be solved for the sake of the Iraqi people and humanity as a whole. ■