

**Invasion, Devastation and Controversy:
The Case of Iraqi Libraries and Archives since 2003**

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A reading of history clearly suggests the role that libraries have played as a barometer for the status of civilization. It reveals that a flourishing and developing society has always been one that privileged libraries and archives. Perhaps because of their importance, these critical cultural institutions have been especially vulnerable when power has been exercised arbitrarily, or when those seeking it have resorted to violent means to achieve their ends, or when the normal controls imposed by authority have been overthrown. It is axiomatic that control over knowledge potentially enables control over a whole people, yet, carefully stewarded, knowledge becomes an indispensable guide to the world, so that the destruction of the repositories of knowledge is equivalent to the destruction of memory, of identity, and of the possibilities for informed action.

That Iraq's principal libraries and archives are in such a desperate state is a critical symptom of the profound crisis facing this nation and its people. Their devastation and halting recovery, and the wounds to such allied cultural spaces as al-Mutanabi Street, Baghdad's booksellers' market, reflect the wounds to Iraq's civil fabric.

The wave of looting unleashed as a direct consequence of the liminal state created by the failure of invading forces to take elementary steps to impose a new authority after toppling a totalitarian regime in April 2003, unleashed all sorts of destructive impulses, and provided an opportunity for every type of opportunist to grab objects of value of every sort, heedless of the consequences to the commonweal. Much of the world still scarcely grasps that the Iraq Museum was not the sole victim of that looting. What happened in Iraq was simply a catastrophe of incalculable

proportions, yet it is seldom if ever remarked upon in weighing the consequences of this war, whether by US politicians or mainstream commentators. A complete inventory of the losses to libraries and archives would be long indeed. A couple of examples will have to suffice—most notably the Iraq National Library and Archive (henceforth INLA). After that discussion, I will briefly address the sorry state of efforts to rehabilitate libraries and archives before addressing current controversies concerning the status of Iraqi archival documents, including the most prominent actors, the INLA and the Iraq Memory Foundation (henceforth IMF), and the question, more marginal but still telling, of the so-called Iraqi Jewish Archive.

IMAGES, LEFT 1a: Basrah 1: Exterior of burnt University bldg.
RIGHT 1b: Basrah 2: Interior of the University’s Central Library

The testimony of the Iraqi expatriate academic, Hamid K. Ahmed, who revisited the University of Basrah after the invasion provides a clear account of the aftermath of looting: “I found out that the school was in desperate need of everything. The whole internal system of operation - electricity, water, communication, air conditioning, etc. - was gone. Equipment and furniture had been looted. People had set fire to most of the buildings including the libraries in different colleges and departments of the school. The remaining books, journals and research materials were decades out of date.” The University’s Central Library lost 70% of its holdings to the torch. Note a burnt-out University building at Left, and an interior view of the University’s Central Library at Right, its contents incinerated. Virtually all other Iraqi university libraries were comprehensively looted, some of them also set on fire.

IMAGES, LEFT 2a: Central al-Awqaf Library, general interior view
RIGHT 2b: Central al-Awqaf Library, detail of burnt mss.

The Maktabat al-Awqaf, or Central al-Awqaf Library in Baghdad was the principal repository for waqfiyyas (traditional endowment documents), and contained 6,500

manuscripts in all fields of knowledge. The library also had a collection of 45,000 printed books, of which 6,000 were books in Ottoman Turkish. 5,000 of the manuscripts, including an important collection of Korans, were saved by the staff; otherwise, everything else including all of the institution's furnishings were either systematically looted or burnt, as the general and detail views here at left and right reveal.

The best news was that the collections of the Dar Al-Makhtutat Al-'Iraqiyya, or Iraqi House of Manuscripts, whose holdings comprised as many as 50,000 manuscripts collected from all over Iraq at Saddam's orders, were spared destruction or looting. For the longest time they remained hidden away. Since they had been under the aegis of the State Board of Antiquities, it came as no surprise but a great relief when they were recently transferred to one of the Iraq Museum's storerooms. Although the collection is intact, many of the manuscripts reportedly suffered by being crammed in metal boxes for several years, and housed in less than ideal conditions.

IMAGES, LEFT, 3a: INLA, after burning, w/ deposed statue of Saddam in front

 RIGHT, 3b: INLA, after burning, burnt materials in situ

The looting and burning of the INLA provides the premier instance of the devastation to Iraqi libraries and archives, and its story exemplifies the afflictions incurred by Iraqi institutions at the time of the invasion and since. Its story further reveals the extent to which subsequent expectations of assistance from the US have largely been disappointed, and the challenges faced and price paid under dire circumstances to sustain an effective operation. Nevertheless, it also demonstrates what may be accomplished by a determined and visionary person, namely Dr. Saad Eskander, its Director General, even under awful conditions. I have told this story *in extenso* in my July 2007 Report, and much of it is familiar from his famous *Diary*, so I will abbreviate it here.

Dr. Eskander, Director General since his appointment in November 2003, has said of his institution before the invasion: “In Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, the National Library and Archive...was an abandoned cemetery, void of progressive culture and critical thinking.” The deplorable level of functioning within the institution under the Saddam regime had several causes, not the least of which was the progressive diminishment of its budget over the previous 20 years, the absence of initiative characteristic of life under dictatorship, the miserable salaries of its meager staff, which led to a situation where no book or document could be seen without a bribe, and the deprofessionalization of the staff during two decades of isolation and neglect. Furthermore, as Dr. Eskander has described it, the National Archive, per se, was seen by the government as an entity that only served narrow State purposes, rather than National ones. Individuals were not encouraged to exploit its resources.

Looting began on April 10th, and two arson events occurred on the 11th and 13th. Dr. Eskander subsequently learned that Saddam had ordered the burning of archival materials, one motivation in the case of the National Archive being that it held all records of judicial proceedings against the Baath regime’s perceived opponents. The image at Left shows the INLA’s exterior after the fire, with soot marks above the windows, and the deposed and decapitated statue of Saddam in the foreground. That at Right reveals burnt materials in situ.

**IMAGES, LEFT, 4a: Archives, after the arson
 RIGHT, 4b: Archives, after the arson, detail**

In all, approximately 60% of the archival materials, including all Republican era, and nearly all Royal Hashemite and Mandatory period documents were destroyed, along with some from the Ottoman period, most of which had been transferred to the basement of the Board of Tourism building along with other old and rare materials. Most of the microfilms and all of the microfilm equipment were either burned or looted. These images clearly reflect the devastation incurred by the

Archives. The only good news was that large numbers of documents dating up to 1978 had been transferred from the Interior Ministry to the Archives a mere two weeks before the fall of Baghdad, and were still sitting uninspected in their boxes in the basement unbeknownst to the arsonists. As of the end of 2007, 40% of them had been microfilmed.

IMAGES, LEFT, 5a: INLA—Uncatalogued materials found in a pile after the looting
RIGHT, 5b: INLA—soaked archival materials after freezing

Approximately 25% of the book collections were looted or burned, although nearly 100 percent of the map and photograph collections were also consumed. However, they were already in a sorry state of management, and lacking in any recent publications from abroad. The institutional inertia before the invasion is reflected in the great pile of uncatalogued materials in the Library that were photographed in May 2003, seen here at Left.

A paper could easily be devoted to the complicated story of the fate of materials removed from the INLA. The most critical were the rare books, manuscripts, and archival materials transferred before the invasion to apparent safety in the basement of the Board of Tourism. Although the story has oft been mangled, it appears that knowledgeable malefactors stole an uncertain number of items, and then broke the water pipes, flooding the remainder to cover their tracks, immeasurably compounding their evil deed. These materials were eventually removed from this dreadful soup; however, only after much delay were the waterlogged, moldy, and decaying materials refrigerated, then frozen, and they are now slowly being conserved at the INLA. Some of those materials may be seen at Right.

IMAGES, LEFT, 6a: INLA, Exterior after restoration
RIGHT, 6b: INLA, Interior activity

Initially, the devastated INLA was declared fit only for the wrecking ball, and the Army Officers Club was assigned as a substitute site. Dr. Eskander thus spent several months renovating it to perform its new functions, only to have it arrogated by the Dept. of Justice, an all too characteristic example of intra-governmental turf wars. He then resolved to restore the original building, in which effort he and his colleagues have worked something of a miracle. At left you see the exterior after restoration, at right, staff activity.

IMAGES, LEFT, 7a: Stairs directly after the fire

RIGHT, 7b: Stairs after restoration

These images reflect the extraordinary contrast between the state of the building after the arson, and after restoration. However, the image on the right signifies more: Dr. Eskander refused to hang any photographs of political or sectarian figures past or present, preferring images with which any Iraqi could identify. This formed part of his campaign to make the INLA a truly national institution. He not only found the best available furnishings and equipment for his staff, he also resolved to foster in every way a non-sectarian, non-ethnic atmosphere of tolerance and cooperation. Furthermore, he inculcated democratic values by asking each department to elect representatives to participate in the Council of Managers, and encouraged an active women's group, which has taken such initiatives as establishing child care and a food service. As Dr. Eskander himself has written, "I removed all corrupt and lazy elements from positions of responsibility, while promoting a number of qualified young female staff to higher positions. I also focused my attention on lifting the morale of male and female staff alike. The culture of taking orders was dominant. Staff members were unable to and sometimes afraid of taking initiative. I have encouraged them to be proactive and creative. The new culture has begun gradually but steadily to take root in the internal life of the INLA." By these and other means, he also developed an ethic of institutional transparency, and has provided a model for how any institution might be managed in an enlightened manner. Dr. Eskander has also succeeded in

increasing the number of his staff from the 95 time-servers whom he inherited to 425, excluding 39 guards. However, he has had to commit as much as 40% of his budget to transporting that staff to and from work, the only way in which this arrangement would be viable given the extreme dangers facing anyone traveling through Baghdad in recent years.

Dr. Eskander has been forced to undertake rear-guard actions at times against meddling from his own ministry. It is a lamentable fact concerning the current fractured and retarded state of Iraqi politics that ministries are characteristically seen as sites of patronage while providing opportunities for the often sorry display of ideology and venality. Also, rebuilding such a large and complex institution requires funding and sources of aid. Here, the INLA exemplifies the appalling lack of commitment by the US government to compensate Iraq for the devastation of its institutions by rehabilitating them. Nothing of the sort has occurred.

Instructive in this regard is the experience of Dr. John Agresto, who, as the first Senior Advisor for Higher Education under the CPA, submitted a budget for 1.2 billion US dollars to restore Iraqi universities to functioning. He was awarded 9 million dollars, less than one percent of what he asked for. In light of the overwhelming needs, and the wanton squandering and theft of funds elsewhere, such meagre budget allocations have made the achievement of reasonable and necessary targets impossible.

Dr. Eskander has had to seek support where it was available. Equipment, critical materials, training, especially in conservation, and staff support have come from the provincial government of Lombardy (capital Milan), the Italian NGO, Un ponte per, the municipality of Florence, the Czech government, and the Ohio Genealogical Society. OCLC (the Online Computer Library Center), and the Simmons-Harvard-UCLA initiative (the latter with NEH—National Endowment for the Humanities—funding) have undertaken training in various aspects of librarianship for several dozen Iraqi librarians and archivists in Amman and the Gulf during the last three

years, including some from the INLA. What these facts reveal is that relatively modest governmental and private entities can have a positive impact, and make a mockery of the failure of larger ones to accomplish anything on a scale commensurate with their capacities—and obligations. After rocky beginnings, the Library of Congress has committed to provide the INLA with a state of the art scanner. Otherwise, except for a couple recent, modest book donations, and the one NEH grant, US governmental assistance is nowhere to be seen.

During Dr. Eskander's visit to the US and Canada last November, he and I created the first draft of a comprehensive needs assessment for installations, equipment, furniture, materials, collections, and further staff training to make the INLA a truly fully functioning institution. 36 classes of needs were identified, ranging from items as basic as 600 linear meters of stacks, and metal storage cabinets for the Archives, to a new automated cataloguing system for the library, with everything from 35 Dell computers and Japanese paper to massive collections development for the Library in between. An attempt to arrive at costs to satisfy these needs is presently underway. Regarding collection development (hampered by such bald facts as the INLA's \$7,000 book budget for the year 2006), a sophisticated book assistance project involving donations from American scholarly presses and focused on the INLA and three universities in Baghdad is underway, with the Sabre Foundation of Cambridge, on whose board I sit, involved. Modest amounts of funding for the first of these new Sabre shipments has been made be available by the US Embassy in Baghdad. Sabre's resources and logistical know-how have already been critical—in coordination with the Iraqi expat Dr. Ekhlass Jarjees, Manager of the Hawaii-Iraq Education Partnership—in realizing a series of shipments to universities in Kurdistan and the University of Mosul paid for with Iraqi funds, with more in view.

Another sign of American perfidy was the sad case of USAID-Head grants, established on a three-year renewable basis in June 2004, and involving five consortia of various mainly American universities, each focusing on specific topics, such as agriculture, law and Assyriology. The total expenditure was to be a measly

\$25,000,000, yet some officer in the State Department axed all of the projects after one year, leaving those involved, Americans and Iraqis alike, high and dry, their efforts incomplete or thwarted. The lack of general support for universities has meant that renovations, such as those at the University of Baghdad, have relied upon Iraqi governmental disbursements.

It remains abundantly clear that the needs of the INLA—and other Iraqi institutions—are great, and it is painful to behold the lack of care and effectiveness on the part of international actors such as IFLA (the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions), and UNESCO, and, more importantly, US governmental entities in publicizing needs, coordination of efforts, providing funding, and delivering goods and services in support of the rehabilitation. Despite the many recommendations, it is worth noting that UNESCO’s International Coordination Committee has, in fact, promised very little, and its intention to promote training for librarians has been accomplished by others. In this regard, it is symptomatic that the links on UNESCO’S Crisis in Iraq webpage for ‘Projects Awaiting Financial Support’, ‘Ongoing Projects’, and ‘Projects Completed’ have revealed only for the first time this year items in the first category seeking assistance to libraries or archives, despite the recommendations of the 2003 UNESCO-commissioned report by Jean-Marie Arnoult.

Commitment to achieving the redevelopment of all Iraqi libraries and related institutions—and higher education generally—should have been a primary feature of the CPA’s brief in Iraq, a vital factor in creating an educated, developed, and thriving Iraq, but has manifestly not been an American priority then or since. One might also ask why support from major European and Arab actors has been similarly minimal. It is also worth noting that none of the great private foundations with a strong interest in education (e.g., Carnegie, Ford, Gates, MacArthur, and Soros), have made any commitments to Iraqi universities or libraries.

The single best initiative undertaken with the financial support of the US government has been the Iraqi Virtual Science Library (IVSL). Its own prospectus states that the IVSL, “launched on May 3, 2006, is a digital portal that provides Iraqi universities and research institutes with access to an outstanding collection of millions of full text articles from over 17,000 premier scientific and engineering journals and their archives, in addition to technical content and educational resources. Its goal is to help rebuild the educational and scientific infrastructure in Iraq.” This remarkable offering relied upon the vendors providing discounts commencing at 87% to 100%, and averaging 98% to provide access for seven of the most prominent Iraqi universities, containing about 80 percent of Iraq’s tertiary students, although the program was recently extended to all Iraqi public institutions of higher education, totalling 35.

Advanced training in IVSL use in August 2007 resulted in an increase in the number of users by 200 per month to 3,771 registered users as of June 30th, about one third from the University of Baghdad, and another third from the University of Mosul. Despite marked declines in the number of students and faculty actually in attendance at Iraqi universities due to mass flight, there were 78,953 article downloads in the first three months of 2008. Augmented funding has been sought for a sister site envisioned for this year, the “Iraq Research and Education Portal”, to be established under the direction of Dr. Bahaa Kazem of the University of Baghdad, the Iraqi point-man for the IVSL, to provide e-learning tools, publishing tools, and for placing Iraqi research journals and PhD theses online. All of these facilities presuppose adequate internet access for users at all of these institutions.

The IVSL’s initial funding was predicted to cover two years of access. In December 2007, it received \$1.2 million in further funding from the State Department’s Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund to continue the program through the end of 2009 to permit a transition to Iraqi management and funding. The prospect of Iraqi takeover presents two principal problems: (1) the contracts with the sundry

resource providers presuppose a 2-5% incremental rise in the annual fees, eventually to reach real-world levels; and (2) Dr. Kazem has informed me that he was having a hard time convincing the Minister of Higher Education that the need for this program was critical and worth the eventual cost. I believe that the US government should continue partial subvention as the annual costs rise and that Iraqi support should gradually increase over time. It should come as no surprise that Iraqi principals in this project have received death threats for their participation, and half live in their offices.

Finally, recent events and articles in the US press have brought the situation concerning Iraqi archival documents to the fore. Effective control over its own archival documents is a hallmark of a well-ordered government, and definitional of sovereignty. The chaos following the invasion created the conditions for a free-for-all regarding the possession of Iraqi governmental and Baath Party documents held in numerous locations. Principal among the parties involved was the US military, which gained control of as many as 100 million pages of documents, most of which are reportedly stored in Qatar, although I have it on good authority that substantial numbers are stored in Baghdad still. Other actors included nascent Iraqi political parties interested in the leverage provided by possession of such materials, and opportunists interested in blackmail, or fees for access to be paid by family members seeking news of missing loved ones. The other principal agent was the Iraq Memory Foundation (IMF), founded by Kanan Makiya as a private, if well-connected, NGO, which removed the documents discovered in the Baath Party Headquarters in Baghdad, among others. This organization acted at a time when the INLA was a burnt and devastated wreck, its moribund staff incapable of action.

After Dr. Eskander's efforts resulted in a revived and viable INLA, he attempted to communicate with the IMF, only to be rebuffed. The situation was profoundly altered when the IMF persuaded the US military to surreptitiously fly the documents in their possession out of Baghdad's Green Zone to an army facility in West Virginia in February 2005, where they were scanned over the course of the

next year, events of which I became aware in September of that year but considered too combustible to publicize pending the possibility that the documents might be returned to Iraq. I finally apprised Dr. Eskander of their presence here only in November 2007. Meanwhile, Dr. Eskander had become ever more vocal in declaring the right and responsibility of his institution to be the proper repository of Iraqi documents of national import. In so doing, he has articulated the basic notion that such documents are commonly and rightly regarded as an integral part of any nation's cultural heritage, and that, collectively, they are the embodiment of a people's historical memory. For these reasons, the principle of safeguarding national documentary and cultural property has been enshrined in international law, notably the Geneva and Hague Conventions. Those conventions also declare it the duty of occupying powers to protect cultural heritage of an occupied country, in this instance Iraq, including the records of the Iraqi state.

On the 21st of January, the announcement came that the IMF had arranged for the original Iraqi state documents under its control to be deposited at the Hoover Institution, the well-known conservative think tank associated with Stanford University. That such an institution in far-off California should consider itself the proper site for these documents as opposed to the National Archive of Iraq is the height of arrogance. It is all the more untenable given that the IMF has control over the scanned copies—leaving aside the validity of that possession for now—and no longer desires ownership of the originals, but yet begrudges then to the INLA using repeated claims concerning their security if returned to Baghdad, which are both self-serving and defamatory of an institution that has demonstrated its viability in the worst of circumstances and committed itself to responsible stewardship.

Dr. Eskander has made clear his commitment to secure, preserve, and make available the cultural/archival heritage of all citizens of Iraq, to establish the definitive account of the dark legacy of the Saddam Hussein regime and its immediate predecessors, and to make this information available in a controlled and responsible manner so that it is used to benefit all rather than for invidious or

destructive ends. That it should be Kanan Makiya who stands in his way in achieving these goals is particularly ironic given that, in speech and deed, Dr. Eskander and the INLA exemplify the very standards and principles Makiya himself claims to espouse. One can only wonder how the INLA and the Iraqi government are to pursue Iraq's legal right to the millions of documents seized by the US Army in 2003, if such behavior on the part of private entities is countenanced in 2008.

Recent events have increased scrutiny of this question. Two highly problematic articles by John Gravois were published in the *Chronicle for Higher Education* on 23 January, and 4 February 2008 resulted in attention from a wider audience. The former, more slanted one, provoked a sharp response from me to the Iraq Crisis listserv, which, I trust, brought the question before the most interested community. On 22 April, the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and the Association of Canadian Archivists (ACA) released a joint statement affirming, among other things, the rights of the INLA to control over Iraqi archival documents. The IMF acted quickly (27 April), evidently providing a text for Mr. Jaber al-Jaberi of the Ministry of Culture to sign, asserting its rights and depreciating those of the INLA. This was then followed by a letter of 6 June from the Hoover Institution to the SAA by which both of these missives became public justifying its actions by virtue of the assertions by Mr. al-Jaberi. These in turn resulted in an open letter to the Hoover Institution by Dr. Saad Eskander of 20 June countering the arguments in both previous letters at length, and one dated 23 June from Acting Minister of Culture, Akram M. Hadi, addressed to Mark Greene, President of the SAA, which stated, in part, "We would like to affirm that the letter written by the senior deputy of the Ministry of Culture Mr. Jabber Al-Jabiry neither reflect[s] the Iraqi government policies nor express[es] opinions of our ministry, and it reflects his personal views only. Our policy remain[s] very firm to work on regaining those records as they are part of [the] national heritage of Iraq. Also, we emphasis[e] that the National Library and Archives is the official department of our Ministry who deals with preserving all Iraqi records and other related matters."

The Iraqi government being as fractionated as it is (the opposite of George Bush's "unitary" ideal—which makes him more like Saddam), agents of the IMF have been busily lobbying their friends in government in order to overturn the position of the Ministry of Culture, so the issue of this controversy remains in doubt. However, the willingness of Iraqis in positions of authority to abdicate their own sovereignty, and play handmaiden to neo-imperialists is not a pretty prospect. I will leave the last word to Dr. Eskander, from his open letter: "The Ba'ath documents are the property of the Iraqis and the institutions that represent them, and so it is arrogant and unethical for one person (an émigré) to decide the destiny of millions of sensitive official documents that have had and will continue to have considerable impact on the private lives of millions of Iraqi citizens. ... The Iraqis are well aware that any national reconciliation project cannot be successfully implemented without making the seized documents available for both scholars and the public mediated by a responsible agency representative of them."

IMAGES 9, Left and Right: Removal from Basement

A related matter of some legal and ethical complexity is posed by the situation of the so-called Iraqi Jewish Archive. I must limn the situation only briefly here. This collection comprises stray but meaningful textual vestiges of the once thriving Jewish community of Iraq, which are now constituted as a collection numbering approximately 3,000 items or sets of items, however adventitiously it came into being. This heterogeneous amalgamation includes rare books, correspondence and document files, pamphlets, modern books, audio tapes, and parchment scrolls. Languages represented include Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic, Arabic and English. The Hebraica include holiday and daily prayer books, Bibles and commentaries, sections from a damaged Torah scroll, books on Jewish law, as well as children's Hebrew language and Bible primers.

These materials were found lying in three feet of water in the flooded basement of the Baghdad central office of the Mukhabarat , or Secret Police. I have recently been informed that they largely came from the Jewish community of Basrah, one of the last Jewish communities in Iraq to be liquidated in a grim process extending over four decades during which nationalist and anti-Zionist impulses in the Iraqi government led to the cruel dispossession and expulsion of the ancient Iraqi Jewish population. In a seat-of-the-pants operation directly in the aftermath of the invasion, a curious set of actors, including representatives of the American military and State Department, Ahmed Chalabi, the prominent émigré political operative, a wealthy Jewish New Yorker, representatives of NARA (the US National Archives and Records Administration), and the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, the only Iraqi institution functioning at that time, cooperated in the removal of these materials from their place of discovery (seen in these two images) and their ultimate transfer to a NARA facility in the US, where freeze-drying was undertaken.

Suffice it to say that the original, two-year, formal agreement was followed by an informal understanding that postponed return of the materials to Iraq, as had been promised; other terms of the original agreement have not been met as well. As of January 2008, the Iraqis have appointed a high-ranking delegation, including Dr. Eskander of the INLA, who will visit Washington at some as yet undesignated point to investigate the situation directly, with the intention of resolving any continuing issues regarding the status of what is now called the Iraqi Jewish Archive.

(Parenthetically, I would recommend that such a delegation address issues of archival documents more broadly). By statute, NARA, while still in physical control of the Archive, cannot undertake further conservation. Contacts between NARA and the Center for Jewish History, based in New York, eventuated in the latter receiving a grant for \$94,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), to undertake systematic conservation assessment under NARA supervision. This was to be followed by cataloguing of these materials by the Center, still in the planning stage as of this April.

It is a regrettable fact that the millions of dollars necessary to achieve comprehensive conservation and complete digital capture of all texts have yet to be secured. The original contract with the Iraqis had called for microfilming; however, the Center for Jewish History concluded that comprehensive scanning would be more efficient and promising given the condition of the materials. Unfortunately, questions concerning the status of the archive have made fund-raising difficult. Those sources that the Center for Jewish History could most readily tap would like to see the collection come to New York or Israel, and are not likely to be keen on providing the funds were the originals to be returned to Baghdad. There has been talk of an exhibit, which could be a single site or traveling show, but that itself will demand further funding and negotiation even if there is some possibility that it would make the return of the materials easier for funders to accept. That leaves the most expensive part, the full conservation, to be accounted for. The Center remains in a Catch-22 situation. So do days, months, and years pass by.

There are those who find it difficult to accept that these Jewish materials, interred for decades by a feared and loathed secret police, and representing the legacy of a community destroyed by hatred born of an essentializing ideology, should return whence they came, all the more so perhaps since, rather than being replete with objects of monetary value, they represent a remarkable range of textual materials with which the whole life of a people may be viewed. However, they remain part of the Iraqi patrimony as well. As has been most clearly enunciated by Dr. Eskander, it is exceptionally important that these signs of the complete cultural heritage of the land of the two rivers remain as a testament to the richness of its past, for the Iraqi people as a whole and their culture have been victims of the grim political process that not only singled out the Jewish community for particular attention, but made it a state project to obscure the realities of the near and further past in the service of ideological ends.

Trudy Huskamp Peterson, the noted authority on archives, has recently weighed in on the question of the status of Iraqi archives generally. She makes it clear that “the principle of inalienability” requires that any documents reasonably considered governmental, including Ba’ath Party records, must be returned to Iraq’s National Archive. This should apply equally to that vast array of documents seized by the US Army and other American operatives in their vain search for weapons of mass destruction, the Saddam government’s putative links with al-Qaeda, and actionable evidence concerning persons once in power, all now reportedly scanned. On the other hand, she states that, in principle, “Any materials obtained from non-government bodies and private persons should be deposited where the creating entity or its legitimate successor decides.” This is easier to uphold when such persons and entities remain in situ, and have not been swept aside by historical events, but it does add weight to the rights and concerns of the diasporic Jewish community. Nevertheless, formal commitments have been made to the Iraqis, and their expectations have been dashed too often for those commitments not to be honored.

Complete digital documentation of the Iraqi Jewish Archive would create a permanent record that will know no boundaries, and can stay in the US, or be sent to Israel, or placed on the internet—not to mention shared with the INLA—when the original materials have been returned.

It remains important to acknowledge in making these decisions that the original objects have a compelling facticity and materiality about them. They were owned, and sometimes treasured by people who lived in a particular place at a particular time; they are links to a life imbued with centuries of development in that place—Iraq—and recall their owners in a way that no surrogate of them ever will. Thus it is improper not to recognize the powerful symbolic character of the original objects, the tug on memory that they exert, and we should not pretend that digital images—even if entirely adequate for the purposes of scholarship, and important for widely transmitting knowledge of this collection—are the same thing. It is precisely these

memorial facts that make both counter claims compelling. This is also why more obviously governmental documents—whether held by the US Army or the IMF—must be returned to Baghdad.

To add to these vexed questions are the recent media reports about a Torah scroll smuggled out of Iraq, and ultimately sold to a synagogue in Maryland, and 300 hundred important early Jewish documents and texts smuggled to Israel, journalistic reports about which seem to have been hopelessly—perhaps deliberately—conflated with the story of the Iraqi Jewish Archive. Patty Gerstenblith has cited and discussed UN Resolution 1483 and the US Emergency Protection for Iraqi Cultural Antiquities Act of 2004 regarding the prohibition against removing Iraqi cultural material. Here, it must be said that the end does not justify the means. The appalling haemorrhaging of Iraqi patrimony, dealt with extensively elsewhere, cannot be tolerated in any of its parts. An honest means should be found to reunite some of the Jewish documents found in Iraq with some of the large expatriate communities in Israel and North America. I have received information that the Mukhabarat made it a practice to sell important and valuable cultural artefacts to the Iraq Museum that came into its hands. This probably accounts for many of the hundreds of Torah scrolls there. A conversation might be in order concerning their status. Much remains to be resolved—and much remains to be done to assist Iraqi libraries and archives in achieving a level of functioning that will help provide Iraq with a promising future.

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Abstract

The unplanned for consequences of the 2003 Invasion of Iraq had devastating effects on cultural and educational institutions throughout the country. This was particularly clear in the case of universities and their libraries, and other important libraries and archives, most notably the Iraq National Library and Archive (INLA). This paper will briefly describe these circumstances and effects, with an emphasis on the exemplary and exceptional case of the INLA. It will particularly address the failure to provide adequate funding on the part of critical actors for institutional rehabilitation, and the ongoing controversies concerning Iraqi documents seized by various parties soon after the invasion, and efforts to see that they are repatriated to Iraq. These include the millions of documents appropriated by the invading forces, particularly American, those taken by the Iraq Memory Foundation (now in the US), and the complicated case of the so-called Iraqi Jewish Archive.