

“UK sends antiquities experts to Iraq,”

BBC News, April 15, 2003.

Britain is dispatching a group of experts to Iraq to help in the restoration and recovery of looted antiquities. There has been outrage after coalition troops failed to prevent looters burning priceless libraries and ransacking museums.

Among the works now missing or destroyed are some of the first examples of written words and number systems from the dawn of civilisation. The British Museum - which has the greatest Mesopotamian collection outside Iraq - said the destruction and theft was a “catastrophe” for the country’s cultural heritage. Archaeology experts from the museum will join their embattled counterparts in Iraq in their effort to repair some of the damage.

Dr Lamia Gailani, who was an archaeologist at the Baghdad museum for 10 years, told BBC Radio 4’s Front Row, that there were two responsibilities that now needed to be undertaken. “The first thing is the conservation and the repairing because quite a lot of the material appears to have been smashed not stolen, so we need to repair them all,” she said. “Before that, is how to secure the museum again because now it is open, so really you need to get these two things done at the beginning.”

“An account of the looting,” by Martin Bailey, *The Art Newspaper*, April 17, 2003.

Museum guard, Abdulk Rahman, tried to stop the first pillagers breaking through security gates at the rear of the compound, but he was forced to give up. Once inside, guards and curators were powerless to resist. A few hours later, US troops answered a desperate call from a curator, Raid Abdul Ridha Mohammed. Tanks were brought to the entrance, which dispersed the looters, but the Americans stayed for only half an hour. Immediately after their departure, the looters returned. The main ransacking seems to have occurred the next day, when hundreds of looters quickly gained access to the 28 public galleries.

“The looting of the Iraq Museum - What objects are on this database?”

The Art Newspaper, April 17, 2003.

The Art Newspaper has put illustrations of artwork lost in Iraq’s National Museum online. The drawings come from the museum’s catalog. “We should stress that at this stage there is no detailed information on what objects have been looted, what have been damaged, and what are safe. Nevertheless, the images in the Treasures of the Iraq Museum represent many of the most important objects from the collection, which numbers some 170,000 pieces.”

“Iraq museum looting overstated?”

Wall Street Journal, April 17, 2003.

Was the extent of the looting of the National Museum in Baghdad overstated? “Thanks to Iraqi preparations before the war, it seems the worst has been avoided.” Donny George, the director-general of restoration at the Iraqi Antiquities Department, Wednesday said his staff had preserved the museum’s most important treasures, including the kings’ graves of Ur and the Assyrian bulls.

These objects were hidden in vaults that haven’t been violated by looters. Most of the things were removed. “We knew a war was coming, so it was our duty to protect everything. We thought there would be some sort of bombing at the museum. We never thought it could be looted.”

“Expert thieves took artifacts UNESCO Says,” by Robert J. McCartney, *Washington Post Foreign Service*, April 18, 2003.

Well-organized professional thieves stole most of the priceless artifacts looted from Baghdad’s National Museum of Antiquities last week, and they may have had inside help from low-level museum employees, the head of UNESCO said today.

Museum officials in Baghdad told UNESCO that one group of thieves had keys to an underground vault where the most valuable artifacts were stored. The thefts were probably the work of international gangs who hired Iraqis for the job, and who have been active in recent years doing illegal excavations at Iraqi archaeological digs, according to archaeological experts working with UNESCO. Some of the stolen artifacts are so well known that no collector would

dare let it be known that he or she had them. Looting and thefts also caused extensive losses at three other cultural sites in Baghdad, according to UNESCO. Arabic manuscripts, mostly from 900-1200, were stolen or burned at the Saddam Center for Manuscripts. Archives of the Awkaf religious center, with documents about the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian religions, were burned. Twentieth-century paintings at the Museum of Fine Arts were burned. A museum in Mosul also was looted, but the losses were not as great as in Baghdad.

UNESCO is worried that cultural sites continue to lack adequate protection. “We are still not sure that the institutions . . . have been made safe,” said Mounir Bouchenaki, assistant director general for culture. The organization will ask the United States to authorize creation of a special Iraqi heritage police force. Interpol has been told to look out for stolen Iraqi artifacts, and initial lists of missing items have been sent to checkpoints on Iraq’s border.

There is not yet any active investigation of the thefts because of restrictions on entering Iraq. UNESCO has established a Special Fund for the Iraqi Cultural Heritage to help pay for the emergency measures.

“US experts resign over Iraq looting,”

BBC News, April 18, 2003.

Three White House cultural advisers have resigned in protest at the failure of US forces to prevent the looting of Iraq’s national museum - home to artifacts dating back 10,000 years. Priceless statues, manuscripts, and other treasures were taken away in a wave of lawlessness following the collapse of the government of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad last week.

“It didn’t have to happen,” Martin Sullivan - who chaired the President’s Advisory Committee on Cultural Property for eight years - told Reuters news agency. “In a pre-emptive war that’s the kind of thing you should have planned for,” he said.

In his letter of resignation, Mr. Sullivan called the looting a “tragedy” and said many other Americans shared his feelings. His disquiet was echoed by Richard S. Lanier and Gary Vikan of the 11-member committee composed of experts and professionals from the art world.

“He may be a tyrant, but he loves his art,” by Sarah Milroy, *Toronto Globe and Mail*, April 19, 2003.

When Saddam Hussein went to ground, he forgot to take his collection of fantasy-themed paintings. The cache probably won't make its way to the Louvre, but they say a lot about the man.

In light of the atrocities committed against the Iraqi people and other unfortunates over the past 30 years, it is undoubtedly beside the point to criticize Saddam Hussein for his aesthetics. Still, one of the more tantalizing discoveries of the last few days has been the revelation of the dictator's taste in art.

Among the more lurid treasures to heave into view are the fantasy paintings of American (oh irony of ironies!) painter Rowena Morrill, a native of the town of Cossackie, in upstate New York. No one knows how the painter's works ended up in the possession of Saddam.

The 58-year-old sci-fi painter moonlights as an illustrator, and her paintings often serve as cover art for trash fiction. In one piece, a bare-breasted beauty looks on — helplessly, of course — as a heroic, sword-wielding Fabio-clone wrestles with a giant serpent.

But before we get too snarky, how's the art looking at our own presidential palaces? Well, on a quality level, you'd have to call it a draw. Bush's favourite is a picture called *Rio Grande*, a 1954 canvas by Texan cowboy artist Tom Lea that is on loan to the Oval Office from the El Paso Museum of Art.

Where Rowena is all orgiastic gushing and diaphanous harem pants pulled taught over hard-boiled buttocks, the President's taste runs to the suspiciously sterile. In fact, the Lea classic depicts a desolate desert landscape peopled only by one giant cactus (that thrusting shape again!), all crusted over with spines.

“Looted Iraqi antiquities seized,” *The Age (AP) (Melbourne)*, April 22 2003.

Art collectors and dealers say they are already getting queries about artifacts looted from Iraq's museums, and the FBI said today at least one suspected piece had been seized at an American airport. Thousands of items, some dating back many thousands of years, were taken when US forces overthrew Saddam Hussein's regime.

The FBI has begun working with US and international law enforcement agencies, as well as art collectors, auctioneers, and experts, to try to recover them. Lynne Chaffinch, manager of the FBI Art Theft Program, told reporters that she expected the thieves would attempt to sell most of the stolen pieces in wealthy countries such as the United States, Britain, Germany, Japan, France, and Switzerland.

People in the United States already buy about 60 per cent of the world's art, both legal and illegal.

The FBI will soon send a team of agents, probably along with Chaffinch, to Baghdad to collect information that will be posted for police on the FBI's National Stolen Art File, which along with private and international databases list descriptions of some 100,000 pieces of stolen art.

Interpol plans a conference May 5-6 in Lyons, France, to organise and coordinate international efforts to both recover the stolen pieces and arrest the perpetrators. Some Interpol investigators are already in Kuwait, awaiting US military permission to travel to Baghdad.

“Historic buildings are sitting targets for thieves who plunder the past,” by Nicholas Pyke and Robin Stummer, *The Guardian*, March 1, 2003.

There is a fierce lion's head on the cover of Simon Jenkins' popular guide to England's Thousand Best Churches. Dating from the 12th century, it is well worth seeing. Sadly this is now impossible without a copy of the book: the original has been stolen, victim of a plague of architectural thefts sweeping the country.

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) warns that churches and historic houses have never been at so much risk as crooks target decorative fixtures and fittings to feed the home renovation boom. Such thefts have reached “epidemic” proportions, according to the society, Britain's oldest heritage conservation group.

Last year there were 3,600 thefts from churches alone, with statues, fonts, and even whole altars vanishing. National Churchwatch, the insurance-backed security adviser, says thieves appear to be using reputable church guides as crime manuals.

Architectural looting is scarcely new. It is 70 years since William Randolph Hearst outraged public opinion by destroying the medieval Bradenstoke Priory, in Wiltshire. The newspaper magnate, the model for Orson Welles's Citizen Kane, used the doors, windows, and even the bricks to “restore” his various properties, including a castle in Wales.

“Ancient villa rescued from Vesuvius' mud,” by Rossella Lorenzi, *Discovery News*, March 3, 2003.

The fabled Villa of the Papyri, Herculaneum's most famous building, opened its doors on Saturday for the first time since it was buried in Mount Vesuvius's lava and mud 2,000 years ago.

The largest Roman villa ever found, it was the magnificent seafront retreat for Lucius Calpurnius Piso, Julius Caesar's father-in-law. Piso, a literate man who patronized poets and philosophers, built there one of the finest libraries of its time. A century after Piso's death, in 79 A.D, the villa was entombed under 100 feet of volcanic mud by the eruption of Vesuvius.

Accidentally discovered in 1738 by tunnelers exploring a well shaft, the villa revealed 1,800 rolls of papyrus, reduced to lumps of coal by the 750-degree Fahrenheit cloud that wrapped the city during the eruption.

Paradoxically preserved forever, the scrolls make this the only intact library known to have survived in the ancient world.

But while Pompeii was relatively easy to excavate as it was buried under layers of ash, the Villa of the Papyri lies under solidified mud. The conservation of the western part of the villa has been made possible only because of water-scooping machines.

The digging produced promising findings: the 30,000-square-foot villa wasn't built only on one level, but stretched down toward the sea on four terraces. Many believe that the mud filled lower terraces could hide the fabled second library, which probably contains lost plays by Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus, lost dialogues of Aristotle, and Livy's *History of Rome*, of which more than 100 of the original 142 books are missing.

“Mindless acts...” by Jim Gilchrist, *The Scotsman*, April 21, 2003.

Controversial artists Jake and Dinos Chapman have sparked an outcry with their defacement of a set of £25,000 prints of *The Disasters of War* by Francisco Goya, published in 1863 and portraying the atrocities of the Peninsular Wars. The Chapmans have re-christened their customised Goyas *Insult to Injury*. And well they might.

What particularly rankles with the brothers' critics is that not only have they defaced “original” prints, bought for £25,000, but that they have now cheerfully sold the modified set for six times that amount.

Goya gets the Chapman treatment as part of their provocatively titled show, *The Rape of Creativity*. There is nothing new in one artist making free with another's work - Salvador Dali, in fact, had his way with some of the *Disasters of War* images, though using reproductions, rather than genuine prints.

Professor Duncan Macmillan, *The Scotsman's* art critic and curator of the Talbot Rice Gallery in Edinburgh, is scathing: “There's no reason why they should work on the real thing apart from vanity on their part. I find it objectionable that they should, as they have consistently done, compare themselves to Goya, because he was a deeply serious artist and *The Disasters of War* is one of the most powerful commentaries on war ever created.”

In the Chapmans' case, reaction so far has been mixed, says Andrew Nairne, director of Modern Art Oxford, where the brothers have just sold the prints they modified for £150,000.

“Modern science ruins prehistoric art,” by Paul Webster, *The Observer*, April 13, 2003.

Science is now failing where the caveman's instinct triumphed. After surviving undisturbed for 20,000 years, the prehistoric wall paintings at Lascaux in central France are threatened with irreparable damage by modern man's attempts to save them.

When the caves were discovered in 1940 by four children falling into a hidden entrance, the paintings were perfectly preserved. Now scientists admit 150 frescoes of prehistoric beasts and

hunting scenes, as well as hundreds of etchings and sketches, have developed mold - some of it due to the use of modern products intended to kill fungi.

Isabelle Pallot-Frossard, director of a Paris laboratory, says the use of powerful chemicals to stop the paintings from being covered with mold has seriously unbalanced the ecosystem. “All except the most robust forms of fungi were killed off during treatment,” she said. “These have dominated the weaker species and thrived.”

The threat to Lascaux has led to criticism of France's historic monuments commission. The scientific magazine *Recherche* blamed a bureaucratic muddle for failure to protect the drawings, responsibility being shared by four different officials as well as two rival scientific bodies.

Current Science, March 1, 2002.

The Impressionist artist Claude Monet (1840-1926) is probably most famous for a series of large paintings of water lilies he created at his home in Giverny, France. Smoke damaged one of those paintings in a fire at New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1958. The damage couldn't be fixed then, but now a new technology used by the US space program holds promise that the lilies can be restored to their original beauty.

Chemists Bruce Banks and Sharon Miller, of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Glenn Research Center, developed the technology. Banks and Miller have been devising materials that can withstand the corrosive effects of atomic oxygen in the upper atmosphere.

Atomic oxygen occurs when radiation from the sun splits oxygen molecules. Atomic oxygen damages the surfaces of spacecraft. To learn how to make materials that can resist atomic oxygen's effects, the chemists first had to learn how to make atomic oxygen in the laboratory. Once that was accomplished, the chemists hit on the idea of putting the destructive powers of atomic oxygen to a good use, such as to blast away the corrosion on aging artworks.

Banks and Miller developed a small gun that shoots a beam of atomic oxygen and tested it on a few paint chips

taken from a corner of the damaged Monet. The test worked. The atomic beam vaporized the soot and charred particles and exposed the chips' original colors.

In a full-scale rescue operation, Banks and Miller also zapped lipstick smears that a vandal had left on an Andy Warhol painting. The Center for Conservation at New York University, which now owns the soot-covered Monet, would not say whether it would be restored.

“Civic and mural virtues,” by Eric Slater, *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 2003.

Hundreds of WPA artworks have been uncovered and restored during a 10-year long effort to revitalize public art in Chicago's schools. Among the most important are a 54-foot long fresco *Outstanding American Women* painted by Edward Millman in 1940.

The mural had been painted over only a year after completion as it was considered “subversive” and “misery-laden” by the then all male school board. Conservation was completed in 1997, and the mural's powerful impact induced city and school officials to fund the conservation of every remaining mural in every school.

In total, 436 murals in public schools from the early 20th century were restored, including the city's only known Modernist mural, Rudolph Weisenborn's *Contemporary Chicago*, 1936.

The preservation program was backed by the Board of Education, however, the conservators who restored the works of art dropped their fees considerably to make the project possible.

“The agony and ecstasy of serving a Michelangelo,” by Hilary Clarke, *The Guardian*, April 21, 2003.

The woman hired to clean Michelangelo's statue of David has walked out of arguably the best job in art restoration - after a row with her boss over the best way to clean the marble hunk ready for his 500th birthday party next year.

Art restorer Agnese Parronchi, 46, who had been spending 16 hours a day with the statue, is refusing to resume work because she objects to the modern techniques chosen by her supervisor, the director of the Accademia gallery where

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the 4.8m-tall (16ft) David is housed.

Franca Falletti, the gallery director who led an 11-year health check of the statue before it was decided to go ahead with the restoration, wants it to be cleaned using a modern “wet” technique involving small amounts of water.

Ms. Parronchi believes that any method other than careful dry brushing to remove the engrained dirt could further erode the protective coating. “Statues aren’t like people, too much water can damage them,” she said.

David suffered during his last clean, late in the 19th century, because of the acid used in the cleaning solution. Ms Parronchi says using water would dissolve any of the remaining protective patina given it by Michelangelo. The row between the two women has also highlighted the cut-throat, female-dominated art-restoration industry in Florence. Although few make it to the top, it is a career increasingly popular with upper middle-class women.
