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## **Paper in the heat of battle**

The protection of cultural heritage in times of war

<intro>

While there are many professionals who struggle on a daily basis to safeguard all that the human mind produced, there are other forces at work that threaten to damage or even destroy this heritage. One of the most destructive forces is armed conflict. Regrettably in recent years we have seen more than once the shocking consequences of armed struggle for the cultural heritage in places like Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. It is this plague of advancing globalisation that confronts many a cultural worker in his daily work.

Can anything actually be done for a culture in crisis when bullets are flying around your ears and rockets landing on the roof? Is it worth safeguarding cultural heritage whatever the cost? Certainly. Cultural heritage is indispensable in the preservation of our identity. That is why we must do everything to preserve the tangible product of the creativity of our forefathers. And yes, experience teaches us that if we respond quickly enough, there is a good chance that collections can be saved.

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The role of culture in conflict situations, and cultural heritage in particular, is grossly underestimated. We live in a world that is simultaneously becoming more integrated as a consequence of globalisation and more diversified as a consequence of regionalisation. This is why cultural pluralism has become a problem for many regions. The challenge for the politicians is to forge this diversity into an integrated whole, whereby the distinctive identity of communities coincides with the national identity: unity in diversity. Increasing cultural differences are in some regions leading to homogeneity, where one culture dominates and oppresses all others. Just think of the imposition of the Serbian culture in Kosovo, or the prohibition of any expression of Kurdish culture in Turkish Kurdistan.

### Explosive source

If cultural differences are deliberately emphasized, mobilised or manipulated, they form an explosive source of conflict. Out of fear for the loss of their identity and in order to highlight cultural differences, some go as far as to reinvent their culture. When Saddam Hussein's image was badly damaged after the defeat in the First Gulf War in 1991, he rediscovered the Babylonian culture and decreed that henceforth he was to be considered the heroic successor to Nebuchadnezzar II (see ill. 1, 2 and 3).

The majority of armed conflicts in the last 15 years have their origins in cultural or historical claims to raw materials or other sources of income, or in the right of individuals and communities to have access to knowledge and skills.<sup>1</sup>

If culture is an important factor in the flare up of a violent incident, then logically it can also play a crucial role in the solution of such a dispute.

Culture determines how conflicts are perceived and experienced. The assumed irreconcilable rift between Christianity and Islam is in fact a difference in cultures. The 'Great Divide', as this controversy is referred to, is about the recognition, representation and legitimisation of differing identities and ways of life. It goes back to a dispute that in the West as well as in many Islamic countries appears to have been overcome.<sup>2</sup> The solution lies in the re-unification of the two cultures and placing the emphasis on what they have in common, as has been done in the intercultural youth projects in post-war Croatia, which have led to excellent results.<sup>3</sup>

#### Tangible and intangible heritage

Culture is something that takes place at on a symbolic level and is therefore invisible. Cultural heritage however is extremely visible and therefore extremely concrete in its symbolism. As part of human activity, it produces the tangible expression of values, beliefs, traditions and lifestyles. Cultural heritage, the visible traces from antiquity to the recent past, creates a bond and is the foundation for a common identity. According to Margaret Bergen (editor of the World Bank's Urban Age magazine), the absence of such a link is a tragedy that robs people of both a sense of belonging and their claim to the past.<sup>4</sup> Objects in museums, archaeological discoveries, archives, libraries, monuments and landscapes all belong to the cultural legacy. But so do the associated rituals, stories and traditions. Accordingly, a distinction is also made between the tangible and intangible heritage. For the purposes of this discussion, we will restrict ourselves to the legacy from libraries and archives, in short the paper and documentary heritage.

#### Access to information

The paper memory is of far greater importance than many realize. A large part of our identity is founded on the written information that has been passed down, that which our forefathers entrusted to paper. Without 'the word' we are nothing. The 1966 film Fahrenheit 451 by François Truffaut shows what a society without the written word can lead to: a weak-willed community that is easily manipulated.

Reading liberates. Access to information is of vital importance for every society, but especially for those countries acutely divided internally. It is not for nothing that the curtailing of the freedom of newsgathering and the abolition of freedom of expression are often the first measures an authoritarian regime institutes. Literature, as a component of art, provides individuals with an alternative worldview and in so doing teaches them to better understand 'others' in their immediate surroundings.

Through free access to information in book form or as an archive item, a start can be made on reconciling group differences. This is essential for the building of a democratic society. An information freeze, as was the case in Iraq, also deeply encroaches on other areas of society. The ban on the import of books, paper and printing equipment as a result of the ten years of sanctions imposed by the United Nations, has meant that the National Library of Iraq was colloquially known as the 'book cemetery' (see ill 4 and 5). The last western books received date from 1991 and the most recent acquisitions were gifts from friends of Saddam Hussein: China, Russia, North Korea and Albania, printed in the original language and script of course.

This import ban has had a disastrous effect on education and the economy. Without up-to-date knowledge of modern processes and techniques, industry has rapidly gone into decline with all the attendant consequences. A population without access to information faces far greater problems than it can ever imagine.

### Importance of archives

Hence, the importance of archives is only recognized once they have gone up in flames. Without Municipal Registry, it is practically impossible for citizens to prove their identities and they become 'illegals' in their own country; a *sans-papier* – 'a paperless citizen' as the French put it. Should the Land Registry also disappear, it would make it extremely difficult for home owners to prove ownership of their property. In Iraq, for example, after the American invasion in 2003 subversives drove people from their homes so that they themselves could move in. The original owners could no longer prove that their homes belonged to them. And what about a government that no longer has a record on paper of how many citizens the country has, how many municipalities, where the roads are or the names of judges. Such a catastrophe is difficult to comprehend – and yet it happened.

### The fate of paper

Fortunately, many documents have survived the violence reeked by nature and the barbaric hand of man. Much has also been lost. In their book for the UNESCO 'Memory of the World' Programme entitled 'Lost memory' (1996), Hans van der Hoeven and Joan van Albada give a depressingly lengthy list of the libraries and archives destroyed in the twentieth century. With the two World Wars and countless civil conflicts in the nineties, the twentieth century has been named the most biblioclastic century ever by the authors. What is ironical is that we know the evidence has been committed to paper; paper that itself survived the struggle. This is how we know that Hulagu Khan, the grandson of Djengis Khan, captured Baghdad in 1258 and threw the contents of the rich libraries, into the waters of the Tigris, which ran black with ink. And who has not heard of the appalling loss of the Library of Alexandria – the mother of all libraries – consigned to the flames with the fall of the Roman Empire (see ill 6). Although a recent study indicates that acts of war are on the decrease,<sup>5</sup> it has also become clear that in the last 15 years it is the regional conflicts above all (no continent excepted) which have such a destructive effect on cultural heritage.

### Unprepared

Must heritage specialists accept the ruinous effects of war – the ultimate failure of the human mind – as inevitable or are there ways to preserve their paper treasures from a similar fate. Beyond their personal responsibility, it is not their task to prevent or stop wars. Admittedly, heritage institutions play an increasingly important role in the prevention of conflict situations, but they are powerless to prevent the clash of arms: politicians declare war and soldiers wage war. Nevertheless what they can do is prepare themselves should a war be unavoidable. The increasing number of natural disasters in Europe during the 1990s exposed both the vulnerability of cultural heritage and the lack of contingency measures on the part of the emergency services. Most countries were totally unprepared. The outcome is that needs assessments were carried out, manuals written and regional coordination programmes started; it seems that many countries had to learn from bitter experience.

### Hostilities

The contingency plans that were developed however mainly concentrated on the prevention of natural disasters with only scant attention being given to man-made disasters, except for burglary and theft. Just a handful of institutions in the United Kingdom and Spain allowed for terrorist attacks. The shock caused by the attack on 11 September 2001 in the United States forced many managers to adjust their plans. Remarkably, Dutch cultural institutions give almost no consideration to an attack by terrorists. If the major authorities do make preparation against attacks, they almost never allow for the outbreak of war on their own territory.

What can be established with certainty is that the preventive wars (sic) in Afghanistan and Iraq have caused enormous damage to the national heritage. Everyone has seen the shocking scenes of the plundering crowds in the National Museum and the National Library in Baghdad, and the shattered remains of the towering Buddhas in the Afghanistan province of Bamiyan (see ill 7 and 8). In a few countries where hostilities have broken out, some individual libraries and archives have taken measures to escape acts of war. Not all of the ideas appear to be practicable but we can learn from them all the same (see ill 9 and 10).

#### The flight of paper

A librarian or archivist can take action at various moments in order to spare their collections a premature end. Before violence breaks out, they can allow for the outbreak of armed encounters by giving this eventuality consideration in their contingency plans (pre-conflict). If hostilities have already begun, they can, however bad the circumstances, still take measures to protect their treasures from the direct consequences of the situation (peri-conflict). Once the hostilities are over, they should first do everything to limit the war damage and thereby prevent it from becoming worse, before the reconstruction work gets underway (post-conflict).

#### Pre-conflict situation

Naturally the nature of the material determines what an institution can realize. Old collections often contain large-format books and items produced on unusual materials. The first Chinese books consist of knotted bamboo slats that can reach a total length of 70cm (see ill 11): when rolled up they become thick bundles and for some books the reader required several bundles. For a library to move books consisting of bamboo slats would certainly be no picnic. The same applies to the scrolls that were later in fashion in the Middle and Far East (see ill 12). Remains of such works are priceless and currently aficionados encounter more rare collections in the great libraries of the world than they would ever have thought possible. Like the National Library of Egypt for example, which owns one of the oldest Koran collections of which scores of specimens measure at least one metre by one and a half metres It won't surprise anybody to hear that these manuscripts cannot be moved easily.

#### Kanjur and Tanjur

The Dalai Lama was confronted with a similar problem when he had to take flight from Tibet in 1959. How was the age-old Buddhist literature to be transported over the Himalayas? The Tibetan canon consists of the *Kanjur* made up of 100 to 108 volumes, texts considered to be the Buddha's own doctrines, and the 225-volume *Tanjur*, consisting of commentaries on the Kanjur. The bulk of the literature, which besides the canon includes countless Apocrypha, is printed on paper from texts engraved on woodblocks, the so-called block prints or block books.

Every Tibetan library carefully stores its woodcuts, sometimes 1000 years old, in order to make new prints of the texts as and when they are required. It was well nigh impossible for the Dalai Lama to take the woodblocks, with him so he decided to take just one block print from each important work. When he finally arrived in Dharamsala in India, he instructed the craftsman who had travelled with him to cut new blocks based on the paper examples (see ill 13, 14 and 15). The age-old woodblocks that were left behind in Tibet have to be written off forever. Many curators, who have themselves experienced some kind of conflict, can probably empathize with the Dalai Lama's terrible dilemma.

### Contingency plan

In order to prevent such choices, contingency plans have been developed. These plans enable administrators to make choices in advance. It appears that in practice this is the most difficult part of the whole preparation strategy: which part of the collection should be saved first or will require special measures. How do you determine the value of a book? Is the replacement value the criterion, or its popularity with readers, the unicity of the specimen, the artistic value or the cultural value?

Under the pressure of the situation bad choices are often made and books are grabbed randomly from the shelves in order to save 'as many as possible'. Once the heaviest fighting in Baghdad was over after the American invasion in April 2003 and plundering crowds took to the streets, Shiite clerics helped by local residents opened the doors of the National Library and wildly loaded their pick-up trucks with anything they could lay their hands on. The books were soon piled up against the wall of the local mosque and guard posts were set up to thwart any hotheads. It is not precisely clear what has actually been saved because a few days later the whole library went up in flames, including all the catalogues.

### Storage

The best way to safeguard a library or archive is to ensure that the collections are safely stored when fighting breaks out. This requires foresight but not everyone is blessed with this. However if thought is given to this beforehand during peacetime, securing the collection either on the premises itself or relocating it to a secure refuge outside the museum certainly ranks among the possibilities. The National Library of Iraq had taken not a single precautionary measure to protect its collection when fighting broke out in March 2003. The director of the Academy for Science and Technology in Baghdad had learned from bitter experience in the First Gulf War (1991) when he was deacon of Basra University and a plundering crowd moved through the city and looted most of the libraries on campus. However he was unable to convince the board of his Academy in 2003 to make security arrangements for the library before the coalition troops marched into Baghdad. As a precaution, he did empty his own office and stored his collection of books at home. Unfortunately the Academy's library also fell victim to hotheads and agitators in April 2003, who destroyed a quarter of the collections.

### Welded shut

The Iraq National Museum (see ill 16) on the other hand clearly had given consideration to the consequences of a war: during the 1991 riots in Basra almost half of its regional museums were looted. Three weeks before the American invasion in 2003 the lion's share of the exhibited pieces were transferred to depots in the basement areas. Metal gates in front of the doors were welded shut and raising false walls hid access to the valuable collections. This decision was reached not without some resistance from a section of the personnel who was of the opinion that by making the collections so inaccessible, they would also be beyond the reach of the fire service should fire break out. Part of the collection was secured at a location outside the museum and another small section stored in secret compartments known only by the board of directors.

Nevertheless, plunderers managed to gain access and remove approximately 15,000 of the more than 1 million art objects stored there. Over a period of time, those regretting the errors of their ways returned half while the rest has in all probability found its way onto the market in stolen artworks. The extremely important collections of manuscripts for which the museum is responsible, were transported in metal boxes to a bunker in the city and are now being guarded by American troops among others.

In 1977, when the National Library of Lebanon felt threatened by the escalating civil war it decided in consultation with Unesco, to pack up its whole collection of 300,000 books and ship them to the Unesco headquarters in Verdun in France. There the 3,200 boxes remained untouched until the Lebanese Government decided in 1997 to resurrect the National Library of which only a ruin remained.

### Three options

There are, therefore, three possibilities for moving a collection should war threaten: in-house, an external location and abroad. The last option has worked extremely well but would only be feasible for a relatively small collection; besides which it may encounter judicial problems. The timely storage of the collection at an external location is the option that most Western institutes choose.

Experience proves that in practice the storage of a book collection inside the library itself is a tricky business. Storage alone is not enough; the way in which this is realized is crucial for security in the long term. Packing manuscripts in metal containers is not a particularly good idea: as soon as there is any sign of humidity, the metal will tend to rust and the paper contents will be contaminated. Indiscriminate piling of books against the wall of a mosque can lead to serious problems of damp because of condensation. Moreover, the pressure from the weight on the lowermost books will certainly cause distortion.

Some years ago, an old bible was excavated in Armenia. The bible had been buried in the garden of a family who had taken flight from this much-tormented country; it was too heavy to take with them. This preventative action was of little avail. The owners never returned and by the time it was found the book had remained under the ground for so long that it had become fossilized. With great difficulty, restorers at the State Library in Moscow were able to make the petrified book only partially legible (see ill 17).

Therefore when drawing up plans for a forced evacuation the necessary attention should also be given to the mode of packing and storage used.

### Peri-conflict situation

What can a library or archive do once hostilities have broken out? Not infrequently, the answer will be that nothing more can be done because the fighting is too heavy or the situation on the whole is too dangerous. This is certainly the case if it is a matter of 'ethnic cleansing' that extends to cultural heritage: the malicious and intentional destruction of the cultural heritage of a particular section of the population without military necessity. This then involves a cultural war crime.

At the Nuremberg Tribunal after World War II (see ill 18), suspects were for the first time condemned as war criminals for the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage. When the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia was set up in The Hague in the Netherlands halfway through the Yugoslav Civil War (1991-1995), the international community suspected that there had not only been a gross infringement of human rights but also that cultural war crimes were involved. For that reason the tribunal was authorized the right to also prosecute these crimes.<sup>6</sup> In the meantime, several of the chief suspects have actually been indicted for these serious offences.

### Individual lives at risk

There are many stories of heroism in circulation about people who in protecting cultural heritage have put their own lives at risk. It sounds rather romantic but, as is so often the case, in reality extremely harsh. On 10 December 1993, Dr Rizo Sijaric, Director of the National Museum in Sarajevo,

set off for the headquarters of the United Nations to organize plastic sheeting for the seriously damaged museum – he never returned. The protection of items of cultural heritage during wartime can be a deadly business.

As a consequence of my activities in Baghdad<sup>7</sup>, an interviewer for the discussion forum Badzout asked me whether I would be prepared to stand before a monument with my arms wide in order to halt the enemy and in so doing save the Iraqi heritage. My answer was brief and unequivocal: I'm not tired of life and my life is more precious to me than anything else.<sup>8</sup> While the risks my Iraqi colleagues were exposed to, were far greater than mine, many of my Western colleagues were also murdered and kidnapped. Everyone is free to make their own judgement but I am of the opinion that the cultural heritage is there to serve mankind and does not take precedence over the people. This is also the basic assumption for contingency plans: save the people first and only then the collections.

Experience shows that cultural institutes are closed before or just after the outbreak of hostilities. This often means that management send staff members home out of concern for their safety. Nevertheless, some drop in each day to check their beloved place of work 'just to be sure'. It is frequently these people who intervene at the last moment to prevent matters from becoming worse. We all remember the images of the female member of staff who, screaming and shaking her fist, confronted the plunderers in the National Museum of Iraq. War damage inflicted on cultural heritage comes from all directions. Sometimes the people plunder their own history out of sheer rage, sometimes the invading forces destroy the heritage with deliberate intent or by accident and sometimes the defending party does the same but then in retaliation.

#### Surprising solutions

While the clashes in Baghdad continued, I was able to rescue an important archive from destruction. I came across the Ottoman Archives at the end of 2004 in cold store at 4°C, which everyone believed had been frozen solid. With the financial support of the local American army commander, I was able to repack and transfer the archive to a refrigerated truck, move it to the premises of the National Archive, park it under a reinforced shelter and connect it up to a generator (see ill 19 and 20).

In 1975, with the help of a few museum employees, the Director of the National Museum in Lebanon took advantage of a short ceasefire to bury the museum treasures in the museum cellars, while part of the collection was deposited in local department stores and the most valuable objects were stored in the vault of the central bank. After seventeen years of war almost all of the treasures surfaced again, intact.

Central banks appear to be a popular choice for the storage of art treasures during turbulent times (see ill 21). After the First Gulf War the Nimrud Treasure was lodged in the Central Bank of Iraq. The Nimrud Treasure had been excavated a number of years earlier in 1988 in northern Iraq and dates from 800 B.C. Together the Assyrian jewels of gold, precious stones and ivory decorative objects weighed more than 50kg. It was only in 2003, during the Second Gulf War that the treasure in the vault of the Central Bank was rediscovered. In the intervening period during the plundering most of the plumbing system had been stolen and the vault was under water. The ancient ivory objects in particular suffered considerable damage due to the effects of water. In Afghanistan, the Central Bank was also utilized a number of times by the Kabul Museum, primarily in an attempt to spread the risk of damage to the country's collections.

### Museum in exile

Others make use of connections abroad. During the Taliban Regime (1996-2001) the Kabul Museum mentioned above (see ill 22) asked the Guimet Museum in Paris to take temporary charge of a number of collection pieces. In 2000, an 'Afghan Museum in Exile' was even set up in Switzerland with the help of Unesco. This museum has been given the task of temporarily housing confiscated objects from the illicit art and antiquities until Afghanistan returns to more peaceful times.

Confiscated artworks originating from Iraq were at the request of the Iraqi's themselves, stored in the Jordanian capital Amman and are used to train aspiring Iraqi archaeologists and customs officers abroad. While the Iraqi Jewish Archive, discovered in the flooded basement of Saddam Hussein's secret police in 2003, is, with the knowledge of the Iraqi authorities, currently stored in a deepfreeze in the United States awaiting conservation.

### Iconoclasts

In the early days of the Second Gulf War, libraries and archives suffered terribly from the anger and destructiveness of the people. As if gone mad, great hordes passed through the cities and villages, destroying indiscriminately everything that reminded them of the state and unfortunately their definition of 'the state' was extremely broad.

The hysterical iconoclasts devastated libraries, town halls, archives, hospitals, party headquarters, museums, schools and anything else in their path. Everything that could be of use in any way was removed to be sold later in a local market or on a street corner somewhere. Afterwards the buildings were also often set on fire. The hatred of the oppressed knows no direction; it is by definition out of control.

It eventually emerged that 25 per cent of the contents disappeared from the National Library and as much as 60 per cent from the basements of the National Archive. Of the twenty universities not one escaped the people's rage and the destruction of the libraries varied between minor damage (Mosul) to total annihilation (Basra). Of the 16,000 schools 80 per cent were damaged, including their stocks of books. This is a complete and utter disaster for a country of which an old proverb says: Arabic books are read in Baghdad, written in Cairo and printed in Beirut.

### Black market

Meanwhile many stolen books are offered for sale on the black market. A number of the Iraqi manuscripts that had been stolen in earlier wars resurfaced in the Schøyen Collection. Mr. Martin Schøyen, a private collector from Norway, offered his 13,500 manuscripts to the Norwegian State for 110 million US Dollars.

Besides the Iraqi manuscripts, the collection also included 1,400 Buddhist documents that had been smuggled out of Afghanistan in 2000 and 2001 after the Taliban gained power. It is highly probable that they originate from a library in the caves near Bamiyan, and date back to the seventh and eighth centuries.<sup>9</sup>

It can only be hoped that the countries which have lost their art treasures in wartime, have signed up to the 1970 Unesco Convention and the 1995 Unidroit Convention. Both conventions make the trading in and import and export of stolen art objects difficult. Incidentally, if warring parties adhere to the 1954 Hague Convention, it would probably never get this far. The Convention clearly states that in the case of war, every army is duty-bound to protect cultural heritage, thus also against a plundering population.<sup>10</sup>

### Post-conflict situation

After armed conflict has ceased and a fragile peace has perhaps been negotiated, the important work of reconstruction begins. It will only now become apparent that war is not only the most deadly enemy of human beings but also the enemy of the best that humankind has created. As with every social process, war is not a static event, but has a build-up phase and a winding-down phase.

Therefore at first there will have to be extremely careful manoeuvring, certainly in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan. It has also become clear in these countries, but also in places like Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, how neglected the cultural sector was prior to the (last) outbreak of armed conflict. Ironically enough, this situation creates at the same time the chance to start afresh. In many instances this provides the opportunity to replace outdated card-cataloguing systems with digital catalogues in conjunction with bringing the library into the electronic age.

### Repairing the damage

For cultural institutes, war damage is in most cases not so different from damage caused by natural disasters: certainly where it involves secondary consequences such as flood or fire. The reconstruction of buildings and the replacement of inventories must be taken in hand without delay. This is where many mistakes are made because a sense of responsibility can quickly lead to action for its own sake, whereby precise planning schedules and the correct choice of materials are liable to be pushed aside. The reconstruction of the National Library in Baghdad at the end of 2004 took a relatively long time because according to a number of large donors, the building was past salvaging, in spite of two reports to the contrary. The reconstruction was finally undertaken using Iraqi money although the organization of the work left a lot to be desired.

### Book donations

If collections have suffered heavy losses they will have to be re-amassed. Book donations are especially popular with NGOs (non-governmental organizations), particularly those involved in development programmes. Such well-intentioned initiatives can however create problems. The greatest being that the collection of donations is not demand-driven, i.e. English soft porn ending up in a primary school in Afghanistan.

Another problem is transportation in the recipient country. In particular private donations repeatedly end up in storage sheds and hangars where they are left to become mouldy. In Marobor in Slovenia for example, 10,000 unused books lay in a storage shed while fighting was going on, and the British Council accepted a donation of 10,000kg of books from British universities in 2004, the bulk of which were shipped via Amman to Baghdad where they lie in a hangar somewhere waiting for someone to come and sort and distribute them. The Sabre Foundation is one of the few NGOs that do have a great deal of experience in the organization and distribution of book donations.<sup>11</sup>

### Cataloguing

If a catalogue has been lost then this must be compiled afresh with the help of colleagues from other institutes. For the reconstruction of bibliographies, separate projects are usually set up, as was the case in Bosnia-Herzegovina where on 25 August 1992 the National Library was completely burned to the ground. Four American research libraries are now working together in the 'Bosniaca Bibliographic Database' project to compile a catalogue of books published in Bosnia or written about Bosnia, and the 'Bosnian Manuscript Ingathering Project' has been given the task to record where copies of the most rare documents and books are located elsewhere in the world.

In Iraq, various libraries including the British Library and the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, are attempting to reconstruct the national bibliography.

### Education

Training and education are important elements in the restructuring of archive and library systems. Preservation and conservation in particular will require a lot of attention so that an immediate start can be made on the conservation of the damaged books. The offers Iraq received from abroad to help with training programmes has been overwhelming.

However what the NGOs did not take into consideration was the fact that few young Iraqis have command of a foreign language. In addition they had not allowed for the large number of young women who would have to first obtain permission from their spouses or parents before they could travel abroad to follow a training course. Certain countries were also off limits for political reasons. In spite of all this, ten aspiring conservators have followed a two-month training course in Prague, as well as other shorter courses in other countries.

### Partnership

What is noticeable in Iraq is the universal thirst for knowledge. This is therefore the time to initiate new cooperation programmes and to intensify those already established. In order to prevent the fragmentation of foreign aid, it appears that in Iraq it is best for libraries to enter into collaboration with a single sister institute. This type of partnership offers advantages to both parties. For the Iraqi partner it makes exclusive involvement with one foreign partner possible. The advantage for the foreign partner is that it can build up a sustainable relationship and see immediately how its money is being spent. Should it be necessary, plans can also be quickly adjusted.<sup>12</sup> The Austrian World University Service has even published a manual for its projects in former Yugoslavia.

### A tragic example

That reconstruction does not always turn out well is clearly demonstrated by the tragic fate of the ancient university of Leuven in Belgium. In World War I (1914-1918) the library dating back to 1438 was reduced to ashes. During the German invasion, within a few hours 300,000 books and around 1,000 valuable manuscripts went up in flames. Rebuilding commenced immediately after the war and the first stone of the restored university library was laid in 1921. As fate would have it, the library was again burned to the ground in World War II (1939-1945): this time 900,000 books were reduced to ashes. It took until 1951 before the ill-fated library partially reopened and another ten years before the book stock reached its pre-war proportions.

### Hidden agenda?

I regularly had discussions with the deputy ambassador at the American Embassy while I was in Baghdad, which invariably ended with the comment, 'Who needs culture anyway?' In times of need little attention is paid to cultural heritage, unless it reaches the newspaper headlines. Two years later, at the same embassy, the cultural department of the Iraqi Reconstruction Management Office was closed down. Very few understand that culture plays a crucial role in the Iraqi conflict – sad but nevertheless true.

It is not much better in the Netherlands. In my attempts to get the issue of the threatened Iraqi heritage onto the political agenda, I was confronted with a lack of interest and indifference from all parties – left and right. This is indicative of an outdated and conservative political system based on a materialistic philosophy of both capitalism and socialism in which culture is subordinate to the economy.

Culture does not play a significant role in development aid policy either. Feeding hungry mouths is considered far more important. Or to quote from Bertold Brecht's *Dreigroschen Oper* (Threepenny Opera) of 1928, '*Erst kommt das Fressen und dann kommt die Moral*' (Food comes first, then morality).

Likewise, we would be searching in vain to find culture mentioned in one of the eight Millennium Development Goals set out in the UN's programme for meeting the needs of the world's poorest, accepted by all members of the United Nations in September 2000 during the Millennium Top.<sup>13</sup> However the Netherlands international development organization HIVOS is one of the few to make a case for making 'culture' the ninth Millennium Development Goal.<sup>14</sup>

### Still a long way to go

It is clear that in spite of all the reports published by Unesco, we still have a long way to go before cultural heritage is given the position it deserves.<sup>15</sup> Our paper heritage is perhaps the most vulnerable of all, more vulnerable than paintings, monuments and sculpture. Yet we remain singularly dependent on this fragile material for our economic growth, for our political administration, for keeping politicians and civil servants in check, for our own self realization, for our own identity so we know where we come from and can determine where we are going to and, last but not least, for the development of our imagination so that we can be partners in the wild dreams of others – the vast domain we call literature. The defence of such values is surely the most satisfying job that a human being can do to earn their daily bread; and the destruction of these values the most depraved activity anyone can undertake. To quote Goethe (1826) '*Manches Herrliche der Welt ist in Krieg und Streit zerronnen; wer beschützt und erhält, hat das schönste Los gewonnen*' (Much glory in the world fades away in war and conflict; those who protect and preserve have won the most beautiful of prizes).

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<notes>

- 1 See Serageldim, 1998; Pérez de Cuéllar, 1998; Arizpe, 2000.
- 2 See Fukuyama, 1992; Huntington, 1993.
- 3 See *Kontakt der Kontinenten* under 'Projects in Central and Eastern Europe', [http://www.kdk-nl.org/actueel/nieuw\\_at.html](http://www.kdk-nl.org/actueel/nieuw_at.html) [accessed 12-12-2005].
- 4 M. Burden, 'Editor's note', in 'Cultural heritage, an urban age special issue', September 1998 (p.4).
- 5 See report Human Security Centre, 2005.
- 6 See Maass, 1999.
- 7 From July 2004 until March 2005, I was detached to Iraq by the Netherlands Armed Forces and stationed in the American Embassy as senior adviser for culture and liaison officer to the Iraqi Ministry of Culture. For more information see the published speech on Iraqi War & Archaeology website: <http://iwa.univie.ac.at/teijgeler.html> [accessed 31-12-2005]
- 8 The monthly discussion forum for arts and politics presented by *Badzout Café* in Amsterdam, 5 November 2005. Also see [http://www.badzout.nl/artikel\\_irak.shtml](http://www.badzout.nl/artikel_irak.shtml) [accessed 31-12-2005]
- 9 For more information see <http://folk.uio.no/atleom/manuscripts.htm> [accessed 3-1-2006]
- 10 For the complete text of the Unesco Convention see [http://portal.UNESCO.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=13039&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.UNESCO.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13039&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)  
For the complete text of the Unidroit Convention see <http://www.unidroit.org/english/conventions/1995culturalproperty/1995culturalproperty-e.htm> [accessed 15-12-2005].  
For the complete text of the Hague Convention see [http://portal.UNESCO.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=8450&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.UNESCO.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=8450&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)  
[All sites in this note accessed 15-12-2005]
- 11 For more information see <http://www.sabre.org/>
- 12 For example see museum project of International Partnerships Among Museums (IPAM) of the American Association of Museums, <http://www.aam-us.org/iraq/index.cfm> [accessed 4-1-2006]
- 13 For more information about the UN Millennium Development Goals see: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> [accessed 5-1-2006]
- 14 See <http://www.krachtvancultuur.nl/uk/current/2005/june/hivos.html> [accessed 5-1-2006]
- 15 For example see Arizpe, 2000, Pérez de Cuéllar, 1998; Unesco.

<about the author>

René Teijgeler (1950) began his study of sociology in 1970. Over a period of time he developed a taste for books and after several years in the antiquarian business, he followed a course in bookbinding. Two years later, he was teaching and giving bookbinding lessons at the Amsterdam School of Printing. He then turned to restoration and studied in Amsterdam to become a restorer.

His next employer, the National Library of the Netherlands in The Hague, gave him the opportunity to study non-Western manuscripts. At the request of the curator, after a year-long investigation for the University of Leiden, he organized an exhibition on the precursors of paper in Indonesia. In order to give his studies more substance, he obtained a degree (with honours) in anthropology in 1996 after two years of study. Since then Teijgeler has produced many research papers, including the history of paper and book production in Indonesia, India, Thailand, the Philippines, China and Mexico, and has supervised many paper projects for Fair Trade Assistance. He has contributed to the Holland Biennial for a number of years and is an active member of the Association of International Paper Historians.

Currently, he advises on projects concerned with cultural heritage issues in the Netherlands and abroad. His specialism lies in the tropics and the disasters that cultural institutes there have to contend with. Recently, he experienced at first hand the consequences of armed conflict for cultural heritage when he worked as adviser to the Iraqi Minister of Culture and the ambassador and his deputy and their staff at the American Embassy in Baghdad for seven months. He now has more than 25 publications to his name.

<captions>

1.  
An original brick from the Ishtar Gate of Babylon built by King Nebuchadnezzar II.
2.  
A recent brick from the Ishtar Gate of Babylon reconstructed by Saddam Hussein.
3.  
Saddam Hussein, represented as Nebuchadnezzar II, leads the way into battle.
4.  
The National Library of Iraq after bombardement and plundering.
5.  
Books rescued from the plundered National Library of Iraq.
6.  
Artist's impression of the ancient Library of Alexandria by O. von Corven.
7.  
The Buddha of Bamiyan before being demolished by the Taliban.
8.  
The site of the Buddha of Bamiyan after demolition.

9.  
German troops in Afghanistan.
10.  
American troops in Iraq.
11.  
Chinese books made of bamboo slats.
12.  
The storage of scrolls depicted in a Roman frieze.
13.  
Tibetan temple in Dharamsala (India).
14.  
Tibetan monk with wood block.
15.  
The woodblocks can be used to print books and prayer flags.
16.  
The Iraq National Museum in Baghdad.
17.  
Old bible from Armenia, dated 1435, found in eastern Turkey.
18.  
Part of the Altar of Gent 'dispatched' by the Nazis in the Second World War
- 19 & 20.  
Refrigeration truck next to the National Library of Iraq.
21.  
In times of war the vault of the central bank such as the one in Iraq, is often a popular location for the safe-keeping of archives and other valuables.
22.  
The National Museum in Kabul, Afghanistan.