ASSESSMENT OF DAMAGE TO LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES IN IRAQ

1. Update based on:
   - Verbal report by Dr Donny George, Director of Research, Iraqi Museum, to the meeting convened by the British Museum and UNESCO 29th April 2003 to discuss International Support for Iraq’s Museums
   - Written report by Edouard Méténier, a French researcher who spent 6 months working in Iraqi libraries, mostly in Baghdad from November 2002 until early April (Aperçu sur l’état des bibliothèques et dépôts d’archives irakiens au terme de la guerre d’avril 2003)
   - Information posted on various web-groups (H-ISLAM, H-LEVANT, etc.)
   - Best source of information on Iraq’s manuscript libraries - their collections and the bibliography of those collections - is G. Roper ed. World survey of Islamic manuscripts Vol. 2 (London, 1993).

2. Libraries in Baghdad:
   - Library of the Iraqi Museum: one of the finest collections on history and archaeology of the Middle East – most evacuated before the war started – completely protected
   - Islamic Manuscripts Collection of the Iraqi Museum: about 4,000 volumes - likewise evacuated before the war to a bunker away from the main museum building – all safe (i.e. not transferred to the Saddam Manuscripts House in 1988 as reported in Roper's Survey)
   - National Library of Iraq: about 500K printed books and serials (including 5K rare books) – looted and burnt (suffered from its location opposite the Iraqi Defence Ministry building) - but some holdings at least (e.g. early newspapers) reported to have been evacuated beforehand and to be safe
   - National Archives of Iraq (which shared the same building as the National Library): containing documents from the Ottoman period onwards - size of contents unknown (no published catalogue traced) – likewise looted and burnt, but again some material at least (e.g. Ottoman cadastral registers) reported to have been evacuated beforehand and to be safe
   - Al-Awqaf Library (Ministry of Religious Affairs): situated very close to the National Library - over 5,000 Islamic manuscripts (Arabic, Persian, etc.) – likewise looted and burnt
   - Saddam Manuscripts House: about 38,000 volumes – evacuated before the war – contents safe – plus the records of a further 50,000 manuscripts in other collections throughout Iraq
   - Central Library of the University of Baghdad (on 2 sites): about 600K printed books, serials, maps, etc. - both sites burnt
   - Al-Mustansiriya University Library: about 200K printed books and serials, etc. - nothing known
   - Qadiriya Library: over 1,500 manuscripts – apparently undamaged
   - Educational Documentation Library: about 40K printed books and serials - nothing known
   - Scientific Documentation Centre Library: no information
   - Library of the Iraqi Academy of Sciences: nothing known – Arabic and Western-language printed books and serials - most of its 800 Islamic manuscript apparently transferred to the Saddam Manuscripts House
   - Library of Bayt al-Hikma: centre for research in the social sciences, law, economics and strategic studies very active in the 1980s – situated in the same area as the National Library – believed to be completely destroyed

Roper also lists 7 other manuscript libraries in Baghdad about which no information available.

3. Libraries outside Baghdad: Very little information yet available: a real urgency for this to be collected on the ground. NB It may yet well turn out to be that –as in Baghdad – the staff of libraries in other cities took precautions before the war and evacuated part or all of their collections:

Mosul
   - Central Library of the University of Mosul: about 900K printed books, serials, etc. – looted and burnt
• **Library of the Mosul Museum:** since the Museum was bombed and looted, its library presumably also damaged

• **Other libraries in Mosul:** 3 libraries containing 6,500 Islamic manuscripts, most important of which the Al-Awqaf Library with 5,700 manuscripts – nothing known

**Basra**

• **Central Library of the University of Basra:** containing 1,400 manuscripts, 200K printed books, serials, etc. -nothing yet known

• **Library of the Centre for Arab Gulf Studies:** nothing known

• **Archives of the Court of Justice:** contain the Ottoman period documents on the Basra region - nothing known

• **Other libraries in Basra:** only one other small manuscripts collection (Abassi Library – 600 volumes): nothing known

**Other Cities**

• **Libraries in Karbala and Najaf** (the two towns holy to the Shias) – 3 collections in each - containing together over 12,000 manuscripts – probably did not suffer damage during the recent war – but they are believed to have been heavily pillaged, if not totally destroyed, during the 1991 suppression of the Shia revolt against Saddam Hussain

• **Libraries in Sulaymania:** 2 collections containing 4,400 (of which 3,700 in the Al-Awqaf Library) – nothing known.

4. **General conclusion re: libraries and archives in Iraq:**

• **The overall picture is still far from clear** - particularly for libraries and archives outside Baghdad, but there are encouraging reports that many institutions took steps to evacuate at least parts of their collection to safer storage elsewhere

• **Most serious 'irreplaceable' loss = National Archives** - probably some documents from the Ottoman period will be duplicated in archives in Turkey - some documents from the British period will also be found in BL (India Office Records) - but by no means all

• **Equally serious = national library + university libraries** - the two largest of the four principal university libraries have apparently been destroyed (universities of Baghdad and Mosul) - in the worst case scenario, 2 million printed books and serials out of a total combined stock of 2.5 million could have been destroyed - despite some material now known to have been evacuated, the extent of the loss may still be very considerable, representing a devastating blow to teaching and research

• **Islamic manuscripts collections** - only one important collection destroyed (5,000 volumes in the Al-Awqaf Library in Baghdad). This part of Iraq’s unique cultural heritage - of world importance - appears to have emerged remarkably unscathed.

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