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Your Ref  
Our Ref 03/03406  
21 July 2003



Dear Mr Woods

Thank you for your letter of 16 April to the Prime Minister about Iraq's cultural heritage. This was transferred to this Department as we have been taking the lead in the UK Government's response to these issues and crossed with the Secretary of State's response to your letter of 16 April. I must apologise for the considerable delay in responding to your letter.

You comment on vanishing heritage of post war Iraq. There was a great deal of conflicting information immediately after the arrival of coalition troops in Baghdad and it is now clear that many of the most important items in the museum's collection had been removed for safekeeping before the start of the conflict. The original scale of losses at the Museum was thought to be as high as around 170,000 items, but this has now been re-estimated at around 13,000 items. The US forces conducted an amnesty which had some positive results with several key pieces, including the Warka Vase, returned to the Iraq Museum.

We have also received your offer of help / support via Dr Eleanor Robson. As I am sure you will be aware, the situation in Iraq remains very volatile and it is quite hard to predict what it will be possible to achieve in the short to medium term. A small number of UK secondees have been working within the Office of the Coalition Provisional Authority ( OCPA) for the last couple of months but it is not yet clear whether this arrangement will be continuing beyond the next month or so. If there is a possibility that someone with your skills and background could play a part, we will certainly keep you in mind. In the somewhat longer term, depending on how the security situation improves and how the Iraqis themselves wish to take forward the restoration of cultural heritage, there may also be opportunities for organisations or individuals to get engaged with aspects of the work. We are maintaining a database recording all the offers of help and interest we have received and we will add your name to that list.



In the meantime, I enclose the most recent statement by DCMS on safeguarding Iraq's culture heritage, which I hope provides you with the latest position.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Wakelin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nigel Wakelin  
Iraq Project Team