FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 28, 2015

AAA Adds Its Voice on the Cultural Destruction in Iraq

The American Anthropological Association strongly endorses the Joint Statement on Cultural Destruction in Iraq released yesterday by the Association of Art Museum Directors, the Archaeological Institute of America, the Society for American Archaeology, the American Schools of Oriental Research, and the US Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites.

The destruction of a gate at Nineveh and other works of cultural heritage in the collection of the Mosul Museum in Iraq is indeed deplorable. We add our voice to those of our sister societies in urging “all members with appropriate expertise to provide professional support to the archaeological community to repair damaged works to the degree possible and to identify and reclaim missing objects.”

In the event that our members have information concerning the whereabouts of material stolen from the Mosul Museum’s collection, we urge them to join in alerting the appropriate international authorities.

Irreplaceable means irreplaceable. We share the widely held wish for a rapid and enduring end to armed conflict in the region. But even after a lasting resolution has been achieved, and even after schools, hospitals, homes, and roads have been rebuilt, people will still be living with the losses to cultural heritage that have already been sustained. This tangible and intangible heritage is our window into the origins of today’s lifestyles, cultures, social arrangements and social change. If damaged, the material objects of our world heritage may be repaired, albeit to a diminished state. But if destroyed, these objects are permanently lost. And if they are lost to the world, they are certainly lost to the communities whose histories and identities these materials bear witness. Their presence gives meaning to the past, as well as to the present and the future. We appeal to far-sighted people everywhere to do what is in their power to stem the threat of further such losses.

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The American Anthropological Association, dedicated to advancing human understanding and addressing the world’s most pressing problems since its founding in 1902, is the world’s largest professional anthropology organization.