EDITORIAL

"I enter the church choked with the cares of the world. The glorious colours attract my sight like a flowering meadow, and the glory of God steals imperceptibly into my soul"
St John of Damascus; 8th century A.D.

☙ Washington Cathedral, DC, otherwise the *National Shrine*, is a magnificent building 517 feet long, constructed (by private subscriptions) between 1907 and 1990, and dedicated to SS Peter and Paul. It is thoroughly medieval as well as thoroughly modern – a true celebration of past and present. It has black and white marble floors, lofty columns, stained glass windows and bright blue, red and gold mosaics on the walls; it also features a Space Window containing a piece of rock from the moon, and an effigy of Darth Vader on the north-west tower (children being among its designers). Walking into this cathedral has no ersatz feel – it is more like paying a visit to the springtime of Christianity, entering a brand new *duomo* in 6th century Rome, Ravenna or Constantinople, and – at 7 am on a Sunday morning – full of incense and chant and more worshippers than tourists.

Washington Cathedral. Ph Martin Carver.

Surrounding the cathedral is the campus of the Catholic University where another great celebration of past and present – and future – the Fifth World Archaeology Congress was held in June 2003. Attended by 1300 participants from 75 countries, the conference featured 560 papers given in 20 parallel sessions (- sometimes too many to attract a quorum). Most speakers concerned themselves with solving the puzzles of the past, but many pitched at the problems of defining and understanding "heritage" – the appreciation and use of the material past today. Some even looked to the future: the possibility of archaeological surveys on Mars – (something that has always appealed to me, I confess, since reading C S Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet*).

Like UNESCO, WAC has a reputation for favouring the disadvantaged and dispossessed which can make reactionaries nervous. Old codgers leafing through the voluminous programme could be heard muttering "yes, yes, very worthy, but is it archaeology?" The prospect afforded by the titles of some talks might well allow codgerly feelings to rise to the surface, but they are often disarmed in delivery, even in that most academically vulnerable of topics, cultural resource management. Take Johannes Franz's interpretation and presentation of a pre-Columbian cemetery at Malacatoya in Nicaragua. Building a museum there to house

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artefacts and stimulate tourism had brought little sustenance to the very poor (who had lived by looting the cemetery), and prompted Franz to observe that "in Third World countries, the very appreciation of the old itself is another product, imported *by* cultivated strangers *for* cultivated strangers". In a new venture of some ingenuity, enormous replicas of the objects found in the graves were erected in a sculpture park next to the museum and local children subsequently took possession of their own inheritance by climbing on the sculptures – and at the same time provided a guarantee of protection better than any police. In another example Tom King showed how assessing the value of cultural resources in native American territories now includes intangibles like the purity of water or the protection of certain vistas. Isn't this really about planning? – of course; but it is also shows how a landscape is valued by people, in prehistory, as now. Native American George Horse Capture explained how such values are to be incorporated into the Smithsonian's National Museum for the American Indian, and other native American, African American and native Australian speakers showed how rich an archaeology is made from taking interpretation beyond analogy into personal experience. Politics may surface from time to time (as also in British archaeology), but can be firmly harnessed to the objective of understanding better what things might mean. This broader archaeology can be said to open one's eyes to a deeper past through a deeper reading of the present.

This conference put paid, finally one hopes, to the old-fashioned notion that Heritage is not real archaeology, but some sort of fringe activity for people not clever enough to do Science or Classics. On a good day, heritage studies can claim to be the core subject of archaeological theory, not just because it is where past meets present, but because it is where all interpretations of the past ultimately meet and are tested; the place where the future of the subject is negotiated. Most of the papers I heard were not only "real archaeology", they showed with unusual clarity that archaeology is about real life. It would be hard to envisage a more exhilarating or colourful conference than WAC5. The predominant atmosphere was akin to joy, a gathering in which people found each other more fascinating than threatening. Conferences are meant to change the way we think, and this one did. But don't take my word for it: in this quarter's "Project Gallery" we offer a variety of views from a broad spectrum of participants about what the event meant to them.

☙ It was startling to hear Margaret Beckett the British Minister of Rural Affairs announce on 29 June that the looting of the Iraqi Museum was now considered to be "a pack of lies: things thought to be stolen were there all the time or had been taken away by the people who were in charge of them before the war began" *(BBC Radio 4 The World this Weekend*). Since the anxious days of April (*Antiquity* 77, 221-225) a British television programme compered by Dan Cruikshank had attempted to persuade us that the looting had been greatly exaggerated. If lies do hunt in packs, it may be that here we are nevertheless smelling the wrong rat. Certainly WAC audiences were given plenty of reasons for thinking that there was still cause for concern and much to try and put right. On 22 June, Selma al Radi, Research Fellow at New York University Institute of Fine Arts, gave a blow by blow account of the events from 8 April when Museum staff left the building until 16 April when it came under the protection of coalition forces. Although the audit still continues, at this point 6-10 000 objects were thought to be missing with many more damaged. The US commander in charge, Colonel Bogdanos, had astutely declared an amnesty on the return of objects and 2300 had

found their way back to the museum by the end of June, including 207 brought back in a single box. Reporting to the Assyriology Meeting at the British Museum on 5 July, Colonel Bogdanos updated to the tally to 2935 objects returned, 1344 through the local amnesty and 1591 through raids and seizures in Iraq and internationally. But some 10 500 objects were still missing. Forty of the museum's most famous artefacts had been taken, of which ten (including the Uruk (*Warka*) vase) had been returned. It is odd that so many commentators were enraged by this improved turn of events, which would seem to be only typical of a gradual clearing of the confusion of war. Thirty objects would still be considered rather a lot if they had been lifted from the Sutton Hoo gallery in the British Museum.

Palace walls dismantled at Umma. Photograph Joanne Farchakh.

With archaeologists entering Iraq in the aftermath of the war, the spotlight was also falling on the fate of its famous sites and monuments, for example at Umma, Larsa, Umm al Aqarib and Adab where large scale damage and looting had been extensive. At Umma (which extends to 7 sq km) pits had been dug at intervals as far as the eye could see; the upstanding walls of palaces had been dismantled and decorated plaques removed. In June, Joanne Farchakh, Lebanese journalist and archaeologist (also speaking at WAC) had interviewed looters camped on site at Umm al Aqarib. They said that before the war they had been employed at the same site for the Iraq state archaeology service; now they were to be paid for their findings and traders had encouraged them to dig vigorously while the war lasted. Farchakh was in no doubt that this kind of looting was being caused directly by the fact that there is a market for the objects.

Site of Umma. Photograph Joanne Farchakh.

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There was looting, there was damage, and apportioning or avoiding blame is probably less important than this reality. Perhaps, as politicians say, we should now move on. Iraq's material past is a large part of the world's historical assets; it is time for the world to chip in to help save them, conserve them, evaluate them, enhance them and use them in the task of renewing their homeland. Peter Stone, Director of the Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies at Newcastle, who was co-opted by the Ministry of Defence before the war, said that mistakes were admitted and there was now a real desire to see how cultural heritage can be better served "in any future conflict"; an encouraging, if sobering thought.

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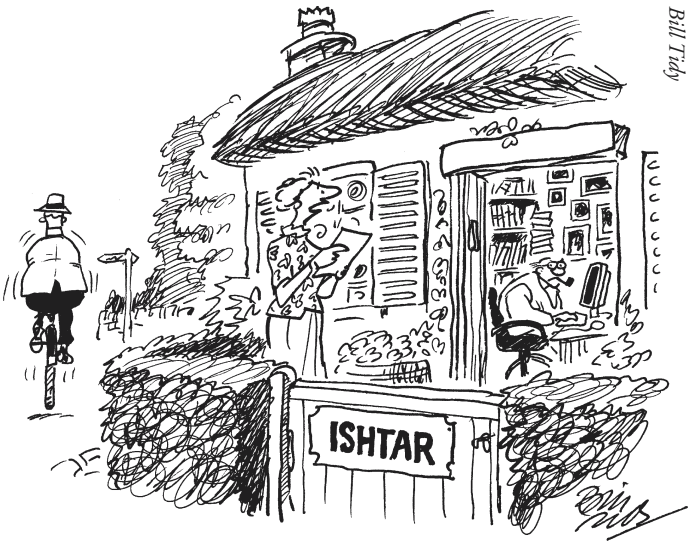

Bill Tidy

"We really should go. It's 'nerd' Sunday."

Martin Carver
York, 1 September 2003