

Il Novissimo Ramusio

39



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Saving the World Heritage Site of Hatra

First aid interventions after DAESH occupation

Catalogue of the exhibition
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ISMEO

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I am very pleased to introduce this volume, catalogue of the exhibition “Saving the World Heritage Site of Hatra - First aid interventions after DAESH occupation”, that was opened at our embassy on 10th November 2022. It has celebrated the restoration project carried out from 2020 at the site of Hatra by ISMEO – The International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies in collaboration with the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), the Universities of Padua and Siena, and the foundation ALIPH – International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas whose economic support has been making it possible.

On behalf of the Republic of Iraq I would like to thank all these institutions involved in a so relevant project, that has been giving new life to one of the more important Iraqi archaeological sites after the destructions operated by DAESH. I hope the full re-opening of the site to the public may be realized soon: it would symbol the real rebirth of the city and represent the main success of the project.

I knew the work of the Iraqi-Italian team, and I welcomed with pride the proposal to host this exhibition, that was also the last occasion for the dissemination of the activities; they were already well known thanks to web and international press, and to a successful inauguration ceremony in Hatra in last February. The exhibition has comprised about fifty photos, that can be seen also in this catalogue, in addition to brief videos, that show different fieldwork phases, and didactic panels on the site and the restoration work. In its complex, this material has appeared able to give an exhaustive image of the mission: 3d reconstructions and drone photos show a suggestive view of the landscape, and archaeologists are portrayed while restoring structures and vandalised sculptures, in meetings, lessons and breaks.

A recurrent and very remarkable aspect is the collaboration between Iraqi and Italian people. This project is in fact only one of the several chapters of the Iraq-Italy cooperation in archaeological field, that is a fundamental and historical part of bilateral relations, dating back to the 1930s. About twenty Italian missions, some of which lead by ISMEO itself, currently work in Iraq, actively collaborating with the local colleagues in a context of mutual enrichment. At the same time I cannot forget the ALIPH’s contribution, active with several projects in my country.

I would like to conclude this brief foreword with a dutiful thanks to the members of the Mission—Massimo Vidale, Stefano Campana, Stefania Berlioz, Adib Fateh Ali, Rowaed Muwafaq Mohammed Mohammed and their collaborators—for their constant engagement in safeguarding and valorizing the Iraqi heritage, in the hope that this project is only the first step towards a new era for Hatra and for the Mesopotamian civilization, that is a heritage of civilization, archaeology and history for the whole world.

H.E. Saywan Barzani
AMBASSADOR OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRAQ IN ROME

The Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), that I have the honour to lead, manages the National Heritage Sites and National Museums of Iraq. Since its foundation in 1924, SBAH has encouraged the cooperation with public and private institutions in the task of safeguard and valorize the Iraqi cultural heritage. In 2020 we therefore welcomed the cooperation with ISMEO and ALIPH in a new restoration project of the glorious archaeological area of Hatra in Nineveh Governorate. ISMEO, currently active in other field missions in Sulaymaniyah area, is well-known in Iraq, whereas the collaboration with ALIPH is now a consolidated reality for several projects throughout the country.

Hatra, founded in the 2nd or 3rd century BCE, gave the name to a kingdom that grew during the following centuries, and since the 2nd century CE became an important buffer state in a strategic location between the Parthian, Roman, and later, Sasanian Empires. The first modern interest for the site dates back to 1904 on the part of a German mission led by Walter Andrae while working at Assur; in the following century several international missions visited the site, including an Italian team led by prof. Roberta Venco Ricciardi before the current project. Hatra was the first Iraqi site to be inserted in the UNESCO World Heritage List, in 1985. I am pleased to remember that Iraq was among the first countries to ratify the World Heritage Convention in early 1974.

Since its beginning the project “First Aid Interventions to the World Heritage Site of Hatra after Daesh Occupation” appeared to satisfy the main needs of Hatra, with special reference to the definition of emergency and conservation plans, an accurate cleaning after the DAESH destructions, and the restoration of buildings in danger of collapse, in order to guarantee a quick safe re-opening to the public. Moreover, the building of well-equipped offices and security houses has been being an important support for a correct site management.

The successful inauguration of the project, that took place on February 2022, showed the great interest of the population for Hatra, with our great satisfaction. I am sure that the importance of this site, and our efforts to assure its rebirth and conservation, will be greatly appreciated also by Italian people thanks to the exhibition in the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq in Rome, and to this catalogue.

This project will be followed by further interventions towards a complete re-arrangement of the archaeological area of Hatra, that will soon host new flows of internal and international tourism, as its splendour deserves. Ensuring the safety of the site aims in a brief time to remove Hatra from the list of world heritage in danger, where it is since 2015 following the DAESH occupation, in response to international demands. I would like to thank ISMEO, ALIPH, UNESCO and all Iraqi and Italian experts for collaborating with us towards this very important objective.

Laith M. Hussein
HEAD OF STATE BOARD OF ANTIQUITIES AND HERITAGE

The intervention in Hatra, led by ISMEO – The International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies in close collaboration with the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH), exemplifies the founding spirit and mission of the International alliance for the protection of heritage in conflict areas (ALIPH): to implement concrete heritage protection projects on the ground.

Initially supported with an emergency grant from ALIPH, the ISMEO-SBAH team reached Hatra in early 2019, carrying out the first on site assessment and rescue mission since it was liberated from Daesh occupation in April 2017. In few weeks, the team conducted extensive assessment of the damage inflicted by Daesh between 2015 and 2017, widely broadcasted on the internet. In this first mission the ISMEO-SBAH team secured fragments of the most valuable and damaged sculptures.

Ever since, ISMEO and SBAH have been working tirelessly, with extended support from ALIPH, and in coordination with UNESCO, towards the full rehabilitation of this unique site, to remove it from the list of World Heritage in Danger. In two years, the team has achieved results beyond expectations, by recovering, restoring, and relocating dozens of sculptures as well as widely publishing and broadcasting the outcomes of their work, summarized in this catalogue.

In addition to conservation and restoration activities, the team has created safe conditions to access and work in this remote area, not just for heritage professionals but also for security forces and trainees. Facilities at the site now allow for analysis, training, restoration, storage, and surveillance tasks. Beyond its heritage and scientific value, the reopening of Hatra to the public in 2022 brings hope after the war by returning this outstanding site to the people of Iraq and to the world.

ALIPH is proud to support the preservation of the diverse culture and memory of Iraq not just at Hatra, but also elsewhere in the country through its over 30 projects including the rehabilitation of the Mosul Museum, the restoration of the Arch of Ctesiphon, the rehabilitation of the Yazidi Mam Rasha shrine, and the preservation of Iraq's rare manuscripts, to cite but a few.

The achievements in Hatra and across Iraq reinforce ALIPH's belief that the preservation of cultural diversity, merging local and international capacities, can contribute to building peace amongst peoples impacted by war.

Andrea L. Balbo
SENIOR PROJECT MANAGER, ALIPH

The restoration project at Hatra subject of this exhibition started in February 2020 under the aegis of ISMEO thanks to the availability of the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) and to generous funds granted by the Foundation ALIPH – International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas. An important scientific contribution came from the universities of Padua and Siena, whose experts have flanked the ISMEO restorers in the recourse to new technologies and specialist studies.

Since the first proposals advanced by prof. Vidale in 2019, ISMEO has strongly believed in this project, that is perfectly coherent with our mission, particularly in consideration of the importance of Hatra, that is hard to underestimate in the frame of Iraqi and world archaeology. In this sense, we are glad to continue the work of important teams who already worked at the site, among which particularly successful was the mission directed by prof. Roberta Venco Ricciardi. We currently support over thirty archaeological missions in Asia, Africa and East Europe, that carry out excavation, restoration and musealization projects with the priority aims of the safeguarding and valorization of the ancient cultural heritage.

The successful work carried out at Hatra is an emblematic example of this mission. It has been in fact permitting a gradual securing and re-opening of the site to the Iraqi public—under the SBAH authority—after the destructions operated by DAESH from 2015, in the hope that Hatra will be soon removed from the UNESCO list of the sites in danger. The efforts and success of the mentioned Iraqi-Italian team are witnessed in this catalogue and in the related exhibition taking place in November 2022 in the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq in Rome, that I would like to thank for the great availability and collaboration in every phase of the Project.

The about fifty photos, exhibited in the Embassy seat and reproduced in the volume, show the different phases of a multidisciplinary archaeological work, and in their complex represent a sort of compendium of an exemplary field project: the display of structures, photo surveys, cleaning, restoring, lessons and break moments, in addition to areal and photogrammetric views, yield the image of a well-organized work that has always been inspired by the meeting between people of different formation and nationality who have collaborated in a context of mutual agreement and enrichment. My thanks go to the members of the team—I can mention Massimo Vidale, Stefano Campana, Stefania Berlioz, Adib Fateh Ali, Rowaed Muwafaq Mohammed Mohammed and their colleagues—for their strong commitment.

This exhibition closed the first phase of the project at Hatra, but I believe work needs to be continued. I am sure of the support of SBAH and ALIPH, whose role in Iraq has been being fundamental in protecting one of the major archaeological heritages in the world.

Adriano V. Rossi
PRESIDENT OF ISMEO

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