

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT AND URGENT REQUEST FOR HELP

British School of Archaeology in Iraq (BSAI) funding cut by the British Academy under its new Learned Societies Programme (LSP)

The BSAI is under severe threat from a recently announced British Academy funding decision. The BSAI was notified in November 2006 that its 2007-08 grant will be £30,000, with a similar allocation likely in 2008-09. These funds are to ensure that existing BSAI research work is brought to completion and publication, and to assist with a 'professional winding-up' of other activities. Thereafter funding from the British Academy for the BSAI will cease. Our grant-in aid from the British Academy for 2006-07 is currently £60,000.

The BSAI Council, BSAI members, and colleagues world-wide are deeply shocked by this decision to cut off future funding. Council has registered this view with the President of the Academy. The reasons given by the Academy for this decision under the LSP are as follows "... when set against the Academy's aims for the programme and the other applications under consideration, your application was predominantly narrower in geographical and disciplinary reach and contained fewer innovative research themes, and puts BSAI increasingly outwith the Academy's strategic funding objectives for institutes and societies.'

The BSAI Council is continuing to review its strategy in order to preserve the BSAI's future at this critically sensitive time in world affairs. It is of vital importance to ensure its future viability to continue to assist in the salvation of the heritage of Iraq and to foster high quality research and scholarship on Iraq and neighbouring countries. The School's academic coverage includes archaeology, history, anthropology, geography, ancient and modern languages, and other related domains, in all periods from prehistory to the present. We believe it is of vital importance to foster these fields in UK academia and to continue to develop ties in the academic world internationally. The BSAI journal *IRAQ* is unique in its field and valued by academics world-wide and plays an important part in our remit.

We feel the BSAI's strengths are well worth supporting by the Academy and the government at large and that this decision is not only highly damaging to an internationally regarded learned society but also to the larger issue of the UK's relationship with Iraq and the government's desire to assist in capacity building in Iraq:

- BSAI is currently one of a very limited number of bodies in the UK assisting in the re-building of the heritage sector in Iraq.
- BSAI has established and maintained excellent relations with colleagues in the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage of Iraq.
- BSAI has played an important role in alerting government and the wider public to the threat to the unique heritage of Iraq.
- A BSAI Appeal has raised more than £100,000 to bring younger Iraqi archaeologists, linguists, and other professionals to the UK for 2 or 3 month attachments to upgrade their qualifications and improve their English (four to date since 2004).
- BSAI's research and fieldwork over its 75 year history have been vital to the investigation of the cultural history of ancient Mesopotamia and its journal *IRAQ* plays a unique role in international academia.
- BSAI has a major outreach programme providing lectures and day schools to the UK public and universities to promote active interest in Iraq and its heritage.

We urge our academic colleagues, friends, members, and supporters to write to Baroness Onora O'Neill, President of the British Academy (10 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AH) and their local MPs (if in the UK), to register their grave disappointment at this decision. We seek to continue our long-standing support from the Academy. Future funding is necessary to ensure that the BSAI is able to continue its important work in assisting our Iraqi colleagues in rebuilding their heritage and in promoting Mesopotamian studies and the study of Iraq and its region within the UK. It would be tragic for the UK to lose the ties to Iraq that have been forged over decades. In summary, the UK will lose a unique asset and many valuable ties with Iraq and the world-wide academic community in these fields will be broken if the Academy's decision is implemented. Our Iraqi friends and colleagues, and the whole international scholarly community, will find it difficult to comprehend how the UK government could allow such a thing to happen at this sensitive time.

Please help ensure that we do not lose this valuable UK resource in our long-standing relationship with Iraq.

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<http://www.britac.ac.uk/institutes/iraq/>

Registered Charity No. 219948

December 2006