**Archaeology**

Good and Bad News From Iraq

Near East archaeologists are celebrating the recovery of a priceless antiquity even as the situation in Iraq remains perilous. Last week the famed Warka mask, lost during the looting of the Iraq Museum in April, was found buried deep in a field north of the capital. An investigation by Iraqi police led them to a 2-meter-deep hole in a field north of Baghdad, where they recovered the 5000-year-old marble mask.

Elizabeth Stone, an archaeologist at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, says, “The sense is that it has been bouncing around Baghdad all summer, being basically too hot to handle.” The mask, which some researchers believe represents the powerful Sumerian goddess Inanna, is one of the museum’s most valuable pieces and illustrates “the ultimate femme fatale,” Stone adds.

John Russell, an archaeologist at Boston’s Massachusetts College of Art, adds that “the Warka lady exemplifies the classical ideal in sculpture 2500 years before the Greeks thought of it.” It was made in ancient Uruk (modern-day Warka).

Russell, who excavated at Nineveh near Mosul in the 1980s, is on his way to Baghdad to serve as deputy senior adviser to the Ministry of Culture. An outspoken critic of antiquities looting, Russell strongly criticized the failure of U.S. troops to protect the museum in April. His move is welcomed by U.S. and foreign researchers, who are becoming increasingly concerned about the widespread looting and smuggling of antiquities at remote sites. The country’s dicey security and economic and political woes pose “a daunting challenge to make a difference,” Russell admits. UNESCO has withdrawn all its staff from Iraq, for example, including those handling archaeology matters.

In an incident last week that graphically illustrated the danger, Russell’s boss, Pietro Cordone, escaped serious injury after U.S. troops fired on his car when it tried to pass an American convoy. One of his aides was killed. Cordone, a senior adviser to newly named Culture Minister Mufid al-Jazaeri, has been involved in efforts to revamp the trashed Iraq Museum. He was already slated to be replaced at the end of the month by a colleague, Mario Bondioli Osio, who has served as Italy’s minister for the recovery of art and negotiated an antiquities trading agreement between the United States and Italy.

—Andrew Lawler

**India**

Science Minister Resigns, Faces Rioting Charges

NEW DELHI—India’s high-profile science minister has resigned after being accused of helping foment a deadly religious riot in 1992.

Murli Manohar Joshi submitted his resignation after an Indian court last week implicated him and other leaders of the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party in connection with the 6 December 1992 attack on the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. The Hindu party leaders acknowledge that they were present on the day Hindu mobs tore down the mosque, triggering a nationwide melee that killed about 1000 people. But they say that they did not direct or in any way influence events. On 10 October Joshi and six others will face formal charges, including rioting, spreading communal frenzy, and creating ill will, that carry lengthy prison terms and hefty fines.

Joshi called the court’s decision “unfortunate” and dismissed allegations about his role in the 1992 incident as “baseless.” But he left himself little room to maneuver after pledging one day before the court’s announcement that he would step down if the court implicated him.

The 69-year-old Joshi, a former physics professor, is the first scientist to have held the rank of cabinet minister. An acknowledged Hindu scholar and ardent supporter of the Hindu cause, he has been minister for human resource development and science since the party took office in 1998. Joshi has won steady funding increases for research and presided over the adoption of a new Indian science and technology policy (Science, 15 March 2002, p. 1993 and 10 January 2003, p. 187).

—Pallava Bagla