

AN EFFORT TO HELP PRESERVE IRAQ'S INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

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The year is 2006. You are an assistant professor of political science at the University of Baghdad. With your twenty years of experience teaching in Iraq's universities and dozens of publications in peer-reviewed journals, you are currently pursuing promotion to a full professorship. Then, just before the academic year breaks for the summer, a list containing the names of 600 Iraqi professors targeted for assassination is posted on the Internet. Your name is one of them.

When security concerns in Iraq reached unprecedented levels, such stories were not uncommon among academics, as the campaign to dismantle Iraq's intellectual heritage raged. As a result, the Institute of International Education's (IIE) Scholar Rescue Fund (SRF) program began receiving hundreds of requests for assistance from Iraqi professors and researchers describing daily threats to their lives in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, and at many major universities across the country.

Since its founding in 2002, IIE's Scholar Rescue Fund has worked to support persecuted academics around the world by awarding fellowships to scholars suffering censorship, harassment, imprisonment, and threat of

elimination — to name a few examples — in their home countries. However, as the targeting of intellectuals in Iraq rose to crisis levels, the Scholar Rescue Fund needed a new mechanism to respond quickly. The Institute therefore launched the Scholar Rescue Fund Iraq Scholar Rescue Project in 2007 with generous funding from both the private and public sectors, most notably the U.S. Department of State, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Richard Lousbery Foundation. The Scholar Rescue Fund since awarded fellowships to more than 265 Iraqi scholars, allowing them to resume their teaching and research in safety.

The Project's core work is to arrange for and fund temporary academic positions for threatened Iraqi scholars (in any discipline) at hosting institutions in secure locations, providing an academic safe-haven for the fellows to continue their scholarly work. While partnering universities, colleges, and other institutions of higher learning all over the world — including many of TAARII's institutional members — have generously opened their institutions to Scholar Rescue Fund Iraqi scholars, there has been a particular focus on engaging partners in the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region. More than sixty institutions within MENA have hosted scholars, allowing many to assume teaching and research positions close to Iraq. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has been the Project's leading host country, providing temporary sanctuary to 40% of Scholar Rescue Fund Iraq fellows (the U.S. and U.K. follow).

Scholar Rescue Fund scholars have undertaken groundbreaking research, presented at academic

conferences, filed patents, lectured to thousands of students, and published while undertaking the fellowship. These academics have also contributed to the growth of their host universities by training staff and students, and establishing new departments and research laboratories. One scholar, a specialist in electrical engineering with thirty-five years of post-doctoral research and teaching experience, fled Iraq after receiving repeated death threats and demands for money from militants. The Scholar Rescue Fund was able to arrange a visiting professor position for the scholar at a newly established college of engineering within a private university in Jordan. While there, the scholar assisted faculty members in establishing a program of study. He designed courses on electric circuits and control systems and helped to establish departmental laboratories, including identifying and ordering the necessary equipment. In a country like Jordan, which has just over thirty universities, 130 fully funded year-long placements of qualified faculty members over five years is not insignificant.

As a consequence of the departure of a sizeable portion of Iraq's professoriate due to large-scale targeting, the issue of brain drain understandably arises. Through monitoring and evaluation of program participants, we have found that Iraqi scholars have, indeed, maintained their academic connections to Iraqi students and faculty colleagues through a variety of methods during their fellowships. To enhance these connections on a broader scale, the Scholar Rescue Fund established a distance-learning component called the "Iraq Scholar Lecture Series." The program captures academic lectures by Scholar Rescue



Figure 6.1. Scholar Rescue Fund Iraq Scholar Rescue Project fellow at work in a microbiology lab at the University of Insubria, Italy. (Photo credit: IIE SRF)



Figure 6.2. Scholar Rescue Fund Iraq Scholar Rescue Project distance education lecture at al-Anbar University. (Photo credit: IIE SRF)

Fund Iraqi scholars in the diaspora for distribution and presentation — in DVD format or via live feed — at universities throughout Iraq. To date, over 150 much-needed lectures in fields as diverse as pediatrics, environmental biotechnology, and trauma psychology have been made available to faculty and students at more than twenty Iraqi public and private universities. University presidents and deans alike have remarked on the impact the program has had by exposing students to the country’s best academic minds, no matter their geographic location. Pictured in Figure 6.2 is a specialist in English literature giving a lecture on “Arabian Nights in the West” to students at the Women’s College of Education of al-Anbar University in western Iraq. Although the scholar is now based in the U.S., this classroom screening reached ninety Iraqi students and faculty colleagues.

As the Iraq Scholar Rescue Project developed, it became clear that security concerns are not the only challenge facing scholars in Iraq. The impact of the years of Sanctions that restricted access to new technologies, pedagogies, and learning tools crucial to higher education in today’s world are still acutely felt. To address these challenges, the Scholar Rescue Fund

has made a range of additional benefits available to fellowship recipients to help in their adjustment to the host country and to prepare them for their scholarly work beyond the fellowship term. Generous donors have made it possible to extend additional grants to scholars seeking professional skills training, language training, membership in academic associations, and assistance with publishing costs. Partnerships with local training programs in the scholars’ host countries have enhanced these benefits by tailoring trainings to the particular needs of Iraqi scholars.

Experience from the first years of the Project has enabled the Scholar Rescue Fund to understand the tangible needs of Iraqi scholars before, during, and after the fellowship. To help these efforts, in 2009 SRF began organizing tailored training workshops for Iraqi scholars. The first workshops took place in Amman, Jordan, where scholars coming from all over the MENA region convened. The Scholar Rescue Fund partnered with international and local institutions such as the British Council, Columbia University, TAARII, and the New York Institute of Technology-Amman to organize specialized trainings including English language instruction for academic purposes, workshops on CV writing and research proposal writing, and training on the use of technological tools to advance learning.

Members of the Royal Family in Jordan have been extremely supportive of these efforts, offering academic venues and addressing workshop participants on the importance of Iraq’s rich tradition of higher education (fig. 6.3).

In 2011, these workshops expanded into a series of training conferences held in Erbil, Iraq. Bringing together participants from Iraqi universities and higher education ministries, Scholar Rescue Fund fellowship recipients, and other international education experts, the conferences cover issues of broad interest to the higher education community. Topics range from education quality assurance and accreditation of universities to building institutional linkages to exploring modern teaching methodologies.

Holding academic events in Iraq is reflective of the changing tides of the Iraq Scholar Rescue Project since its inception. While some scholars continue to face specific threats in various areas of Iraq and seek Scholar Rescue Fund support to find safe academic environments to pursue their work, others are able to return to their country to contribute to a globally engaged higher education community. As of this writing, more than 40% of scholars completing the fellowship have returned to Iraq either to resume their previous academic positions or take up new posts.



Figure 6.3. HRH Prince Raad bin Zeid addressing Iraqi scholars at an IIE SRF workshop in Amman, Jordan. (Photo credit: IIE SRF)

With changing dynamics in the country, IIE's Scholar Rescue Fund continues to operate a multi-phase program to foster opportunities for preserving and revitalizing Iraq's higher education and scientific sectors.

About the Institute of International Education

The Institute of International Education is a world leader in the international exchange of people and ideas. An independent, not-for-profit organization founded in 1919, IIE has a network of 18 offices worldwide and over 1,000 member institutions. IIE designs and implements programs of study and

training for students, educators, young professionals and trainees from all sectors with funding from government agencies, foundations, and corporations. IIE also conducts policy research and program evaluations, and provides advising and counseling on international education and opportunities abroad. For more information, visit the website: www.iie.org.

About the Scholar Rescue Fund

In 2002, IIE launched the Scholar Rescue Fund to provide fellowships for scholars threatened in their home countries. To date, 715 major academic fellowships have been awarded to

488 scholars from 48 countries. These fellowships support temporary academic positions at safe universities and colleges anywhere in the world. Nearly 300 academic institutions in 40 countries have partnered with the Scholar Rescue Fund by providing safe-haven academic homes for the program's recipients. Scholars contribute to their host universities through teaching, research, lectures and other activities. In return, host universities provide professional guidance and financial and in-kind support. Scholars from any country may qualify. For more information, please visit the website: www.scholarrescuefund.org.

THE ARCHITECTURAL ORNAMENT OF SAMARRA REVISITED: INITIAL REMARKS AND QUESTIONS

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The architectural ornament of Samarra, a palace-city founded by the caliph al-Mu'tasim in A.D. 836, has played an important role in the historiography of Islamic art since the initial publications of the finds from the site.¹ For many art historians, the abstract styles of carving employed in the city's palaces and private houses evidenced the birth of a new set of aesthetic values that they associated with Islam's prohibition of images (fig. 7.1). Despite its canonical status, however, there are still gaps in our understanding of this material. Since art historical studies have focused largely on establishing stylistic classifications, little attention has been paid to where the fragments housed in museum collections today originally appeared in buildings. Moreover, groups of material that fell outside the stylistic parameters established in the early scholarship were ignored altogether. My dissertation seeks to shed light on the contexts in which the architectural ornament of

Samarra originally appeared and was experienced through a study of the material excavated from the city's main palace, the Dar al-Khilafa.² In its aim to incorporate archaeological and social contexts into the study of Samarra's ornament, my project contributes to a growing body of scholarship that explores the assemblage with new approaches.³

Last summer with a U.S. research fellowship from TAARII, I began my dissertation research by surveying the architectural ornament from Samarra's Dar al-Khilafa excavated by Ernst Herzfeld now housed in London and Berlin, while consulting notes on findspots and archaeological context in the Herzfeld archives housed in Washington, D.C.⁴ The

following is a brief overview of some initial observations and questions raised by this intriguing assemblage.⁵



Figure 7.1. Detail of design from a carved stucco panel excavated from Samarra's Dar al-Khilafa Palace. Berlin, Museum für Islamische Kunst, I. 3507. (Photo credit: Matt Saba)