

# Commemorations

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THE POLITICS OF  
NATIONAL IDENTITY

*Edited by*  
*John R. Gillis*

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*Chapter V*

THE MUSEUM AND THE POLITICS  
OF SOCIAL CONTROL IN  
MODERN IRAQ

ERIC DAVIS

WHAT IS the relationship between the museum and the state? More precisely, in what ways does the publicly sponsored museum reflect efforts by the state to expand its power in society at large? This question has only recently begun to be raised within the Western context and, to my knowledge, has not been raised at all in the Middle East. In Iraq, as in most countries, the museum is not just a neutral public space where citizens come to view painting, sculpture, or artifacts of the past. As with other aspects of Iraqi cultural life, the museum has become highly politicized. Both in their conceptual foundations and contents, the museums established by the Iraqi state during the twentieth century reflect very specific ends.

This is especially true of museums established by the Ba'athist regime under Saddam Husayn that came to power in July 1968. The state's attempt to use the museum as a symbolic tool to enhance its power and authority points to the shortcomings of the discourse of violence and coercion that has been the dominant conceptual prism through which most Third World regimes have been viewed. Even the most repressive regimes, of which the Iraqi Ba'ath is an exemplar, seek to develop ideologies that generate "self-discipline" among the populace at large. In this context, a study of the museum becomes not only an end in itself but also a corrective to social control understood only through violence and coercion.

Does this approach mean that all cultural representation in Iraqi museums can be reduced to some instrumentalist logic? Such an argument would be far too simplistic. Power, as Foucault argues, is not a static element waiting to be appropriated by a Great Leader or a ruling group. Rather power must be understood as an ever-changing set of relationships between dominator and dominated. Power becomes effective only if a social and cultural grid within which it can be exercised already exists. Thus, it does not inhere in the state but rather requires the complicity of subaltern groups.<sup>1</sup> This argumentation necessitates first and foremost a historical analysis not only of the growth of the museum as a form of social

control, but also of the social, cultural, and political environment—the "fertile soil" as it were—that has allowed it to assume this quality. Put differently, how did the museum become part of national political discourse, and how did social conditions propitious for the use of the museum to advance state power develop in Iraq?

It might be useful to begin this historical analysis by contrasting the museum in Iraq with the growth of its counterpart in the United States. The development of the museum in Iraq, as opposed to its development in the West, occurred under direct state tutelage. In the United States, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the New York Historical Society, and grander museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts were the creation of an emerging bourgeoisie rather than the state. As has been persuasively argued, the American museum, especially following the Civil War, served an important role in consolidating the status and power of many nouveau riche families. During the late nineteenth century, the museum served a nationalist function as well, as the United States began to expand into the world market and sought to assume a position equal to that of its European competitors.<sup>2</sup> In more recent times, as the works of Tompkins, Silverman, Rosler, Haacke, and Schiller indicate, the museum has increasingly assumed marketing and consumerist functions.<sup>3</sup>

The museum's development in Iraq followed a very different historical trajectory. Rather than being the creation of a powerful Iraqi bourgeoisie, the first museums were established by a relatively weak state. The first major museum to be founded by the state was the Iraqi Museum, in 1923, which contained exhibits drawn almost exclusively from Iraq's pre-Islamic and pre-Arab past. The 1930s witnessed the opening of the Museum of National Costumes and the Museum of Arab Antiquities.<sup>4</sup> During the 1930s, the state began to send Iraqi artists and archaeologists to study in Europe. As a result, archaeological excavations and restorations of antiquities increased dramatically during the 1930s. State funds were used to publish numerous directories of excavated sites.<sup>5</sup> In 1943 the Iraqi state opened the first gallery of modern art in the country.<sup>6</sup>

Although, on the face of it, none of these developments was particularly unusual, they did reflect a number of underlying social tensions and power struggles. First, the Iraqi state's renewed interest during the 1930s in the country's Mesopotamian heritage, and its history and artistic creativity more broadly defined, reflected the intensification of the nationalist struggle that emerged following Great Britain's conquest of Ottoman forces and its occupation of Iraq in 1917. The mass-based Iraqi Revolution of 1920 and the League of Nations' subsequent designation of Britain as a mandatory power in 1921 were two critical events that further agitated nationalist feelings. As in other countries under colonial domination, the increasing

polarization between nationalists and their foreign overlords served to intensify the dichotomy between self and other.

Questions were raised as to what gave a country its distinctive sense of national identity. What did Great Britain possess that was lacking in Iraq and that enabled it to assume the role of imperialist power? The sharpening of the boundaries between "we" and "they" and the spread of concern with questions of self-identity began to make explicit the political issues that had heretofore been much more implicit and diffuse in national discourse. Specifically, a large debate began to develop around the question of Iraqi heritage.<sup>7</sup> Should Iraq define itself in terms of its Arab heritage, should it look to ancient Mesopotamia or Islam, or should it forge a new identity from a populist heritage such as that proffered by the nascent Iraqi Communist party?

It is within this context that the question of the nation's antiquities became a political issue. During the early part of this century, many Iraqi nationalists were angered that foreign nationals were depleting Iraq of thousands of ancient artifacts over which the state exercised little control. Despite an Iraqi law stipulating that archaeological finds be divided in half between the state and foreign excavation teams, in reality foreigners were taking far more than half, and the most important discoveries at that. Thus, qualitatively and quantitatively, Iraq was losing much of its national heritage.

The excavation movement in Iraq, undertaken by French, British, and German scholars during the first half of the nineteenth century and joined by American scholars by the end of the century, led to numerous discoveries. Under the Ottoman Empire's antiquities law, all archaeological finds became the property of the Sublime Porte.<sup>8</sup> However, thousands of items found their way into European and later American museums as well as into the private collections of wealthy collectors of art. In addition to the loss of much of their ancient heritage, what Iraqi nationalists found particularly galling was the complete lack of interest among Western researchers in the country's "living heritage," namely, its Arab and Islamic past. It was almost as if foreigners saw the country's Arab and Muslim inhabitants as interlopers who might threaten what they considered their legitimate efforts to appropriate knowledge and representations of the "cradle of (Western) civilization." The Iraqi often felt "invisible" in the eyes of the Westerner, who, in preferring the necropolises and monuments of ancient Mesopotamia to all other aspects of the country's heritage, would just as soon have seen the land devoid of its modern inhabitants.

With the rise of nationalism during the First World War, Iraqis, as well as other Arabs, refused to remain invisible. Mass-based uprisings broke out in Egypt and Iraq in 1919 and 1920 respectively, as well as in other parts of the Arab world such as Palestine, Greater Syria, and North Africa. Follow-

ing the 1920 Revolution, British colonial officials developed a system of indirect rule in Iraq.<sup>9</sup> Under this system, a British adviser was attached to each Iraqi ministry and became the effective decision-making force, since all decisions required his or her approval.

Attached to the Ministry of Education, the Iraqi Museum came under the tutelage of Gertrude Bell, the Oriental secretary of the British high commissioner and honorary advisor to the ministry.<sup>10</sup> Efforts by Iraqi nationalists within the ministry to revise the antiquities laws Iraq inherited from the Ottomans ran up against Bell's opposition. She argued that if Iraq's laws were changed to give more favorable terms to the state the number of foreign teams coming to Iraq would sharply decline. When Sati' al-Husari, a ministry official who later became director general of antiquities, pointed out that in Crete all items discovered during excavations were given to the national museum, Bell simply replied that "Iraq is one thing and Crete is another thing altogether."<sup>11</sup> Using the argument that the Iraqi Museum concerned itself primarily with stone objects and architecture, elements associated with engineering, Bell advocated removing it from the Ministry of Education and attaching it to the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation, as had been done with its counterpart in Egypt. Since the latter ministry did not contain a large contingent of nationalists who would fight to protect the museum's interests, Bell was effectively able to remove control over the disposition of newly discovered antiquities from any Iraqi authority.<sup>12</sup>

This particular incident underlines not only the extent to which the emergence of the museum as a domain of struggle was tied to the rise of the Iraqi nationalist movement but also the need to situate the museum historically in order to understand its political and social meaning. A historical approach indicates that the state's efforts to use the museum to strengthen its power and authority did not begin with the rise to power of the current Ba'thist regime and the dramatic influx of oil wealth during the 1970s. The complex network of social, cultural, and political relationships upon which the contemporary state could build in expanding its base of power was set in place well before it came to power in 1968. How was this foundation established?

In Iraq, as in other societies, the museum is situated within a multifaceted network of oppositional relationships. In the writings of Arab nationalist, such as the *Memoirs* of Sati' al-Husari, the museum becomes a metaphor for a nation's ability to assert control over its cultural heritage. When al-Husari first entered the Iraqi Museum during the early 1920s, his shock at the lack of exhibits from Iraq's Arab or Islamic past was less a parochial reaction than a realization that this past represented a heritage to which the British accorded little or no relevance.<sup>13</sup> For Iraqi nationalists, the museum thus became a contested domain in two senses. One part of the

struggle was to force the British to accept Iraqi control over the disposition of excavated artifacts. The other entailed forcing the museum to open its purview to cultural heritages other than those of the Sumerian, Akkadian, and Assyrian civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia. What Iraqi nationalists were in effect trying to accomplish was to force Western colonialists to confront Iraq as a living and not a dead culture. Of course, it was much easier for the British state to legitimate the subjugation of another people if indeed they had no valid "living" culture.

During the 1920s, the modern Iraqi state was in its formative stages. In one of the more bizarre incidents in the annals of colonial history, the British imposed a monarchy upon Iraq that was drawn from the Hashimite family, who were the guardians of Makka (Mecca) and al-Madina, the two most holy cities in Islam. Recruiting Iraq's new monarch from the Hijaz (presently part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), as well as establishing another Hashimite dynasty in the newly created and neighboring Kingdom of Transjordan, represented an attempt to appease Arab nationalists who had risen up against Ottoman forces in the Hijaz during the First World War. These nationalists expected the British to follow through on their promise to found an independent Arab state that would include all of the Hijaz, Palestine, and the Levant following the war's end. Offering the monarchy to Faysal was also part of the British strategy to maintain a trustworthy ruler in Iraq, which was considered a vital link to India. The Balfour Declaration issued to the Zionist movement in Britain in 1917 and the secret Sykes-Picot Treaty dividing up the former Ottoman colonies between the British and the French signed the previous year indicated that the MacMahon-Husayn correspondence promising the Arabs political independence was never seriously considered by the British. After the French crushed, in 1920, the short-lived Arab republic in Syria that had been founded in 1918 and headed by Sharif Husayn's son, Prince Faysal, the British offered Faysal rule of Iraq.

The new Iraqi monarchy found itself ruling over a country where effective power was in the hands of the British, where urban nationalists resented what they considered to be an alien ruler imposed from outside, and where the refusal of tribal shaykhs in the Tigris-Euphrates Delta to cede authority to the central government in Baghdad was only encouraged by favorable tax policies enacted by the British. With few resources, either political or financial, at its disposal, it is understandable why the monarchy should have become interested in promoting Iraqi culture and heritage as one means whereby it could forge an alliance with elements of the growing nationalist movement. In Gramscian terms, the newly formed state was promoting the development of a rudimentary "historical bloc."<sup>14</sup> Since the Hashimite family could trace its lineage to the family of the Prophet Muhammad in Makka, it did possess some legitimacy among the Iraqi populace due to its links to an Arabo-Islamic heritage.<sup>15</sup>

Despite its inherently elitist and exclusionary character, there was no contradiction in the monarchy's promotion of Arabism in the form of the Museum of Arab Antiquities, opened in 1937 in a famous Baghdadi covered market, the Khan Murjan, and the Museum of National Costumes. The fact that the Hashimite family traced much of its own heritage to the beduin tradition of the Arabian Peninsula led it to promote what later came to be known as folklore or popular heritage (*al-turath al-sha'bi*). The "costumes" worn by many Iraqis, whether from the Tigris-Euphrates Delta or from the desert, were similar to the traditional or ceremonial garb of the Hashimites. With the growth of urban areas as a result of the decline of Iraqi agriculture following World War I and the migration of large numbers of peasants to major cities such as Baghdad, Basra, and Musul, a yearning for the simpler past of rural life began to be articulated in Iraqi literature and newspaper articles.<sup>16</sup> The state was thus able to conflate efforts to promote its own legitimacy with urban nationalists' concern for Iraq's Arab and Islamic past and folklore, given their desire to gain a better sense of their historical roots and rural heritage. While this pattern whereby the state sought to appropriate an oppositional space for its own ends was only crudely developed under the monarchy, it has been much more skillfully pursued by the current regime under Saddam Husayn and the Ba'ath party.

In addition to the Iraqi Museum, which was meant to preserve artifacts from Iraq's Mesopotamian past, and the Museum of Arab Antiquities and the Museum of National Costumes—which reflected a rudimentary attempt to integrate Iraq's diverse ethnolinguistic and confessional groups through representing the country's Arabo-Islamic and folkloric heritage as a unified past—the state sponsored a third type of cultural institution, intended to promote the development of Western fine arts. The Institute of Music, established in 1937, the Iraq School of Fine Arts, opened in 1939, and the state-sponsored Museum of Modern Art, established in 1943, were prominent examples of this type of cultural orientation.<sup>17</sup>

Cultural institutions intended to promote Western fine arts highlight yet another arena of struggle. In this instance, an effort was being expended to "prove" to the West that Iraqis were "civilized." Thus the Museum of Modern Art (later the Museum of Iraqi Art Pioneers), established to enshrine the realist school of Iraqi painters that developed during the 1940s, represented an attempt to erode the Orientalist perspective of Iraq as a "backward," "uncivilized," and parochial society unable to come to terms with Western artistic currents.<sup>18</sup>

Thus it is possible to speak of four types of representation in Iraqi museums that had developed prior to the 1958 revolution that overthrew the monarchy. One was concerned with Iraq's ancient Mesopotamian past, one with Iraq's Arabo-Islamic past, especially that linked to the 'Abbasid Empire, which was centered in Baghdad between A.D. 750 and 1258, another with folklore broadly defined, and one with Western artistic tradi-

tions. In arguing that the state promoted these types of representations in museums and affiliated institutions, it is important that we not treat the state as a monolith. While the monarchy supported the establishment of museums and other cultural institutions, it was within the ministries, especially in the nationalistically oriented Ministry of Education, and in the Iraqi parliament, that the impetus for their development really began. Ultimately, it was within the higher echelons of the state that decisions were finalized as to which projects would be given an official imprimatur. Political factors, I would argue, were uppermost in all these decisions. Again, the need for a historical dimension is apparent. Many of the ideas that would later become influential in the writings of the architects of current Ba' thist efforts to rewrite history and reinterpret popular culture were being formulated by lower-level officials within the Iraqi state during the prerevolutionary period. Many of these lesser bureaucrats would assume much more prominent positions in the postrevolution regimes.

The 1958 Revolution brought with it a tremendous expansion of state activity in the cultural sphere. Given the constant political turmoil that plagued Iraqi society from the end of the Second World War until 1958, under the monarchy, the state's support for archaeological research and the arts had declined as it became preoccupied with domestic security and the increasingly troubled international politics of the Middle East. One of the first tasks of the new military regime of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim was to establish a Ministry of Guidance. As outlined in *The Iraqi Revolution in Its Fourth Year*, "The Ministry of Guidance is shouldered with two main tasks, first, to orientate [*sic*] Iraqi individuals according to sound national principles, and second, to introduce the Republic of Iraq to the outside world."<sup>19</sup> The period between 1958 and the overthrow of the Qasim regime in 1963 saw the establishment of guidance centers throughout the major regions of the country, where the populace was exposed to lectures, films, publications, photography exhibits, and speeches by Qasim himself. For the first time, the state pursued a comprehensive study of folklore. Research teams were sent to the northern and southern portions of the country to document, photograph, and collect as many aspects of Iraqi folk culture as possible.<sup>20</sup> The regime stated that one of its primary objectives was to revive handicraft production and an interest in folklore.

Since many of the museums owned by the state had fallen into disrepair prior to the 1958 Revolution, one of the first activities of the Ministry of Guidance was to transfer operation of museums to its own control. The Museum of National Costumes was transferred from the Directorate of Antiquities to the ministry's Directorate of Popular Arts and Culture, as was the Museum of Modern Art, later the Museum of Iraqi Art Pioneers.<sup>21</sup> The state's active role in promoting culture, especially popular culture, was at one level a reflection of its mass base. It also reflected the presence within

the state bureaucracy of many members and sympathizers of the Iraqi Communist party (ICP). Iraqi leftists saw the 1958 Revolution as a golden opportunity to enact the type of people's democracy that the ICP had been advocating since its founding in 1934. In this sense, the museum as it developed under Qasim's republican regime reflected pressures from below in the form of the ICP and Iraq's powerful and radical trade-union movement, which was closely linked to the party.<sup>22</sup>

In its cultural orientation, the Qasim regime did not place a strong emphasis upon Arab nationalism. Its retreat from Arab nationalism was a result of several factors. First, many members of the regime, especially leftists and Communists, felt that culture should reflect the ethnolinguistic and confessional diversity of the country. Second, a competition existed between Iraq and the Arab nationalist regime in Egypt under Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir, which was striving to achieve a dominant leadership role within the Arab world. Symbols drawn from Iraq's Mesopotamian heritage were incorporated into the new flag and the emblem of the revolution. Communists and shi'is who supported the regime were especially hostile to the corporatist Arab nationalism advocated by Iraqi Nasirists and Ba' thists, since their ideologies denied the primacy of class conflict in social change and privileged sunni Islam to the detriment of shi'i Islam. In other words, many Iraqi Nasirists and Ba' thists were unwilling to accept the reality of Iraq as a class-based and multiethnic and multiconfessional society.

The period between 1958 and 1963 thus represented a critical period in the struggle over the official definition of Iraq's national identity. Would modern Iraq choose a narrow Arab Nationalist interpretation of Iraqi national character, or would it opt for a broader interpretation that would allow for expression of sociocultural difference? It also represented a struggle over whether political participation and a fairer distribution of economic wealth would be made available to a broader sector of Iraqi society. In short, would Iraq become a society in which equity and tolerance of sociocultural difference were promoted by the state?

The coup d'état of February 1963, which brought a coalition of Ba' thists and Nasirists to power, answered this question in the negative, as thousands of Communist party members, workers, and leftist intellectuals were killed or imprisoned. While there was little significant cultural development between 1963 and 1968, when the current regime under Saddam Husayn was able to come to power by capitalizing on the continuing political instability that beset the country, the post-1968 period saw a tremendous outpouring of state-sponsored cultural production. Part of this process entailed a greatly expanded political role for the museum that was intended to promote nationalist feelings among Iraqis.

At least nine new museums were founded between the 1968 coup d'état and 1977. One of these, the Museum of the Arab Ba' th Socialist Party, was

established in the residency of Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, a respected general and party member who became president in 1968 and was removed by Saddam Husayn in 1979.<sup>23</sup> The museum was designed to document the underground struggle of the Ba'ath party against the monarchy, the Qasim regime, and the rival wing of the party, which was eliminated during the July 1968 "revolution."<sup>24</sup> Arabo-Islamic and children's museums were also built, as well as numerous museums in the provinces in order to spread cultural activity outside Baghdad, which had been its main venue to date. Older museums, such as the Iraqi Museum and the Museum of National Costumes—now broadened in scope and renamed the Costume and Folklore Museum—were greatly expanded and given the responsibility of developing traveling exhibits throughout the provinces. The budget of the Directorate of Antiquities was also increased, with the expectation that the expanded number of excavations it would undertake would produce artifacts to fill the newly created museums.<sup>25</sup>

What did all this activity reflect? In the most immediate sense, the expanded cultural activity of the state was intended to bolster the legitimacy of the Bakr-Husayn regime. Despite the state's designation of the events between July 17 and 30, 1968, as a revolution, most Iraqis saw this period as only another in a long line of factional struggles. The one weapon that the new regime soon came to possess that had not been available to its predecessors was a tremendous increase in revenues due to a dramatic rise in oil prices during the early 1970s.

For the new regime, the museum was first and foremost part of a larger strategy designed to demonstrate the Ba'ath party's populist character. Despite having lost a substantial portion of its cadres in 1963, the ICP had been able to reorganize by the end of the 1960s. The fact that the party had become so powerful under the Qasim regime and that it continued to be popular among the working class and intelligentsia and among segments of the peasantry worried the regime.

One way to compete with the ICP for the loyalties of the masses was through emphasizing folklore. Not only did the regime expand the Costume and Folklore Museum, but it also established an institution known as Dar al-Turath al-Sha'bi (the House of Popular Culture) in 1972. The purpose of this latter institution was to revive the production of traditional crafts. The state argued that the revival of folklore was key to progressive national development, since one of the aims of imperialism was to sever the Iraqi populace's links to its past. As the monarchy had attempted much less effectively earlier in the century, the Ba'athist state co-opted the desire of large segments of the populace, especially the upwardly mobile middle class, to understand better their history and national heritage. This and other social strata faced rapid change that included the breakdown of the traditional extended family and the rapid expansion of urban areas, char-

acterized by an erosion of traditional values governing child-rearing practices and gender and business relations, as well as the spread of materialism and a consumerist mentality promoted by the influx of oil wealth. As a consequence many Iraqis felt more and more isolated and alienated. Increasingly these feelings were manifested in literature, films, and programs in the mass media.<sup>26</sup> The massive migration to urban areas that characterized Iraqi society between the 1930s and the 1970s provided fertile ground for the state's attempts to restructure the society's understanding of its national heritage.

The emphasis on popular culture, which was a key component in this process, became a way of ameliorating feelings of social disorientation by giving the public an ersatz version of Iraqi history and folklore. It is important to recognize that the Dar al-Turath al-Sha'bi was entrusted not only with preserving Iraq's folkloric heritage but also with reviving it. It is in this latter sphere that political ends could best be pursued, since it was here that the state maintained the best opportunities to "invent tradition."<sup>27</sup> Arguing that prior regimes collaborated with imperialism to deprive Iraqis of their heritage through neglecting their history and folklore, the official task of the House of Popular Culture and its companion institute, the Institute of Arts and Craft Industries, was to create a new generation of nationally oriented artists.<sup>28</sup> Many of the activities of the Dar al-Turath al-Sha'bi point to their underlying political ends. One example is the manufacture of traditional rugs containing the Ba'ath party emblem and slogans by students in the Section for Weaving and Handmade Rugs.<sup>29</sup> Another is the incorporation in works produced in the Section for Painting and Sketching of imagery from the Battle of Qadisiya, where, in A.D. 637, Arab forces in Iraq were able to defeat the Persian Sassanians.<sup>30</sup> Appropriated to become "Qadisiyat Saddam," or Saddam's Qadisiya, after the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran War in 1980, folkloric production centered around this historic battle was used to mobilize the populace against the Iranian enemy.<sup>31</sup> Similar examples can also be found in the production of traditional clothing and ceramics. Although at the time of this writing the Iraqi Ba'ath faces an uncertain future given continued uprisings by Kurds in the north and dissident shi'is in the south, undoubtedly the Dar al-Turath al-Sha'bi will work to develop an officially sanctioned iconography surrounding the 1991 Gulf War that supports the regime's current campaign to turn defeat into "victory."

The state's effort to penetrate "low culture" initially represented an attempt to enhance its legitimacy and outflank a possible resurgence of strength by the ICP. It was later expanded to incorporate efforts to combat a rise of radical Islam among sections of Iraq's shi'i population following the successful Islamic revolution in neighboring Iran. Given the historic economic and cultural ties between Iraqi and Iranian shi'is, the Ba'athist

regime distrusted the loyalty of the shi'a, who comprise 60 percent of the populace. The new type of museum, in the form of a combined craft center and exhibit space, was also used further to deny social difference. Folklore could become the common denominator of all Iraqis—sunni Muslims, shi'i Muslims, and Kurds alike—who shared more or less the same type of food, clothing, rituals, games, music, and family structure. In other words, as constructed by the state, folklore not only proved that Iraqis represented a unified national culture and political community but also provided a link to Iraq's Mesopotamian heritage, since many cultural patterns practiced by the ancient inhabitants of the region were said to parallel those of modern Iraqis.<sup>32</sup>

Prior to the debacle in Kuwait, the regime of Saddam Husayn had been successful in either co-opting or physically eliminating opponents during its first decade in power and, during its second decade, defeating or at least fighting to a stalemate a much larger Iranian army. The false sense of security that the regime had built up before August 1990 was reflected in the development of the museum. While the museum and visual representation in general continued to be manipulated by the state, wall posters and official photographs being two prominent examples, more recent efforts were directed at the commodification of culture. This reflected the continuing move to the right and the gradual dispensing of the radical anti-imperialist and socialist rhetoric that had characterized the early years of the Ba'hist regime. Using the argument that prices of traditional handicraft production had declined through neglect, the regime began to emphasize marketing both within Iraq and abroad the production of craft centers such as the House of Popular Culture.<sup>33</sup> During the late 1970s, a Dar al-Azya' (House of Fashion) was established to revive ancient Mesopotamian dress.<sup>34</sup> Attempts at marketing fashionable dresses that mix Western and Mesopotamian styles were also initiated.

These efforts reflected not only the greater political security that the state felt during the 1980s but also the dramatic growth of a new Iraqi bourgeoisie tied to oil wealth. Perhaps an argument could be made for a parallel between the relationship of the museum and the bourgeoisie in the United States and the museum and the bourgeoisie tied to the state in Iraq. In each case, the historical pattern indicates that, in its earlier stages, the museum was used to promote nationalism and enhance the bourgeoisie's social status. As the bourgeoisie came to feel more established both politically and culturally, the museum assumed an additional function in augmenting the bourgeoisie's financial interests. Just as artistic production has become a big business in the West, so the 1980s witnessed the beginnings of a similar process, albeit much more limited and tied primarily to "primitive" folkloric art, in Iraq.

The weakened Iraqi state that emerged from the massive defeat of its

armed forces in Kuwait can no longer afford, either in financial or human resources, to continue the intensity of its campaign to reinterpret the country's national heritage. Thus we can expect that the pace of establishing new museums will slacken. However, the ability of Saddam Husayn to exploit the Gulf Crisis should not be underestimated. "Museums" may assume more unorthodox forms, as with the so-called Victory Arch monument (*qaws al-nasr*) constructed by Saddam to celebrate and personalize his supposed vanquishing of the Iranian enemy.<sup>35</sup> Certainly the regime will continue its efforts to exploit the suffering that the populace endured during the Gulf War to direct hostility against its two main enemies, the United States and Israel. Material manifestations of that suffering will undoubtedly become the exhibits of new museums, designed to glorify the regime's "courage" in standing up to foreign aggression, especially the massive military might of the United States.

Under the Iraqi Ba'ath, the museum remains, at its most basic level, a form of social control. Whether relating to "high culture" in the form of the Iraqi Museum or the 'Abbasid Museum, or "low culture" in the form of the Costume and Folklore Museum or the House of Popular Culture, the regime has used the representation of the past to diffuse very well-defined ideological messages to the populace at large. These messages are that Iraqis are hewn from a similar cast and that any expression of cultural difference that challenges the regime's power in any way will not be tolerated. While the past is glorified, it is simultaneously denigrated. Aspects of Iraqi culture contained in museums are to be praised and perhaps even trotted out for certain rituals and national holidays. However, by being placed in the museum, they are deemed no longer appropriate for everyday life. Those who persist in adhering to culture as represented in the museum, especially elements of tribal or religious culture that can be mobilized symbolically by oppositional groups, oppose the progress of the nation toward greater technological development and modernity. They are thus enemies of the state. In this manner, traditional sectors of the shi'i, Kurdish, and even sunni communities, as well as other minorities, the left, and the poor, find themselves marginalized and outside the economic and political mainstream unless they submit to the culturally hegemonic dictates of the state.

#### NOTES

1. Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 98.
2. Karl E. Meyer, *The Art Museum: Power, Money, Ethics* (New York: William Morrow, 1979), pp. 23-25.
3. See Calvin Tompkins, *Merchants and Masterpieces: The Story of the Metro-*

politan Museum of Art (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1970); Martha Rosler, "Lookers, Buyers, Dealers and Makers: Thoughts on Audience," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. Brian Wallis (New York and Boston: New Museum of Contemporary Art and David R. Godine, 1984), pp. 311–340; Debora Silverman, *Selling Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986); Brian Wallis, ed., *Hans Haacke: Unfinished Business* (New York and Cambridge, MA: New Museum of Contemporary Art and M.I.T. Press, 1986); and Herbert I. Schiller, *Culture, Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), esp. pp. 91–98.

4. See, for example, Directorate of Antiquities, *dalil mathaf al-athar al-'arabiya* [Guide to the Museum of Arab Antiquities] (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Hukuma, 1938), esp. pp. 17–18.

5. See, for example, Directorate of Antiquities, *jisr harba* (Baghdad: Matba'at al-Hukuma, 1935).

6. Directorate General of Propaganda, *Kingdom of Iraq* (Baltimore: Lord Baltimore Press, n.d.), p. 79.

7. For elements of this debate, see Eric Davis and Nicolas Gavrielides, "Statecraft, Historical Memory and Popular Culture in Iraq and Kuwait," in *Statecraft in the Middle East: Oil, Historical Memory and Popular Culture*, ed. E. Davis and N. Gavrielides (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991), esp. pp. 123–128 and 132–140.

8. Abu al-Khaldun Sati' al-Husari, *mudhakkarati fi-l-'iraq, 1921–1941* [My Iraqi memoirs, 1921–1941] (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1967), vol. 1, 1921–1927, p. 178.

9. For an extensive discussion of British colonial policy in Iraq, see Daniel Silverfarb, *Britain's Informal Empire in the Middle East: A Case Study of Iraq, 1929–1941* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

10. On her activities in Iraq, see Sarah Graham-Brown's introduction to Bell's *The Desert and the Sown* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), pp. xi–xviii; and H.V.F. Winstone, *Gertrude Bell* (London: Quartet Books, 1980). Bell's influence on early British policy in Iraq is underlined by her unofficial title as "the uncrowned queen of Iraq" (Graham-Brown, p. xi).

11. al-Husari, *mudhakkarati: fi-l-'iraq*, vol. 1, p. 180.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 181.

13. Abu al-Khaldun Sati' al-Husari, *mudhakkarati, fi-l-'iraq, 1921–1941* [My Iraqi memoirs, 1921–1941] (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1968), vol. 2, 1927–1941, p. 409.

14. On the concept of the "historical bloc," see Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), pp. 157–158, 418.

15. This element was stressed in all official publications that described the royal family. See *Kingdom of Iraq*, pp. 3, 9.

16. See Muhsin Jassim al-Musawi, "The Sociopolitical Context of the Iraqi Short Story, 1908–1968," in Davis and Gavrielides, *Statecraft in the Middle East*, pp. 214–217.

17. *Kingdom of Iraq*, pp. 78–79. At its founding, the museum was simply referred to as a "gallery of fine art."

18. Ministry of Culture and Arts, *Culture and Arts in Iraq: Celebrating the Tenth Anniversary of the July 17–30 Revolution* (Baghdad, 1978), p. 25; 'Adil Kamil, *al-haraka al-tashkiliya al-mu'asira fi-l-'iraq: marhalat al-ruwwad* [The contemporary art movement in Iraq: The "pioneer" period] (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture and Information, Dar al-Rashid li-l-Nashr, 1980), pp. 5–18. See also Shawkat al-Rab'i, *lawhat wa afkar* [Paintings and ideas] (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, Dar al-Hurriya li-l-Tiba'a, 1976); and 'Abdallah al-Khatib, *al-funun al-tashkiliya wa-l-thawra* [The plastic arts and revolution] (Baghdad: Ministry of Information, Dar al-Hurriya li-l-Tiba'a, 1976).

19. Ministry of Guidance, High Committee for the Celebration of the July 14 Revolution, *The Iraqi Revolution in Its Fourth Year* (Baghdad: Times Press, 1962).

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 630–631.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 633.

22. The impact of the Iraqi labor movement on political and cultural representation in Iraq is discussed in my "History for the Many or History for the Few? The Historiography of the Iraqi Working Class," in *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories and Historiographies*, ed. Zachary Lockman (Albany: State University of New York Press, forthcoming).

23. For photographs of the *mathaf al-bizb* (the Party Museum), see *al-masira: lamahat mudayi'a min nidal bizb al-ba' th al-'arabi al-ishtiraki* [Images of the Struggle of the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party] (Baghdad: n.d.), pp. 86–87, 91, 92, 93–94. This volume contains parallel Arabic, English, and French texts.

24. The group of military officers and civilians that overthrew the regime of 'Abd al-Rahman 'Arif in July 1968 was in turn beset by internal struggles shortly after coming to power. Between July 17 and 30, Bakr, Husayn, and their supporters were able in two separate coups first to eliminate 'Arif and then to consolidate their control. As Hanna Batatu points out, these events essentially constituted a "palace coup" (*The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978], p. 1073). Despite the flagrant distortion of reality, the official designation of this two-week period continues to be the "Revolution of July 17–30, 1968."

25. *Culture and Arts in Iraq*, pp. 74, 91–93.

26. On this point, see al-Musawi, "The Sociopolitical Context of the Iraqi Short Story," pp. 218–225.

27. On this notion, see Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

28. *al-turath al-sha'bi* [The journal of popular heritage], *mulhaq khass 'an al-biraf wa-l-sina'at al-sha'biya fi-l-'iraq* [Special supplement on popular artisan and craft production in Iraq] (Baghdad: Dar al-Hurriya li-l-Nashr, 1984), pp. 6, 8.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

31. For the Ba'ath's efforts to stimulate anti-Iranian feeling, see my "State-Building in Iraq During the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf Crisis," in *The Internationalization of Communal Strife*, ed. Manus I. Midlarsky (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), esp. pp. 71–72.

32. See, for example, Tariq al-Nasiri, *al-riyada bada'at fi wadi al-rafidayn* [Sports in the (sic) ancient Mesopotamia] (Baghdad: Dar al-Qadisiya li-l-Tiba'a,

1983); and Subhi Anwar Rashid, *al-musīqa fi-l-'iraq al-qadim* [Music in ancient Iraq] (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture and Information, Dar al-Shu'un al-Thaqafiya al-'amma, 1988). Texts such as these resonate far more with the literate public than more didactic writings such as those by the prominent historian Anmad al-Susa, e.g., *hidarat al-'arab wa marahil tatawwuraha 'abar al-'asur* [Arab culture and the stages of its development through the ages] (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture and Information, Dar al-Hurriya li-l-Tiba'a, 1979); *hidarat wadi al-rafidayn bayn al-samiyin wa-l-sumariyin* [Mesopotamian culture between the Semites and the Sumerians] (Baghdad: Ministry of Culture and Information, Dar al-Rashid li-l-Nashr, 1980); and *tarikh hidarat wadi al-rafidayn fi daw' mashari' al-rayy al-zira'iya wa-l-muktashafat al-athariya wa-l-masadir al-tarikhiya* [The history of Mesopotamian civilization in light of agricultural irrigation projects, archaeological discoveries and historical sources] (Baghdad: Dar al-Hurriya li-l-Tiba'a, 1983), vol. 1. Susa's works attempt to demonstrate the racial ties between the ancient Sumerians and the Arabs of modern Iraq.

33. *al-turath al-sha'bi, mulhaq khass*, pp. 9–10, 12.

34. *Culture and Arts in Iraq*, pp. 162–164.

35. For a detailed analysis of the meaning of the Victory Arch for Iraqi politics and cultural development, see Samir al-Khalil, *The Monument: Art, Vulgarity and Responsibility in Iraq* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).