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**Catastrophe:**

***The Looting and Destruction of Iraq's Past***

Target audience: General public, high school  
educators and their students,  
and scholars here and abroad

Label type: Concept

**Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago**

Chicago, Illinois



## Praise from the Jurors

This label is long, but it tells a good story that works with visuals and pulls me along. Good use of quotes: they tell part of the story and create a tension that propels further reading. Subheads also propel the storytelling, the before and after. The subheads facilitate my looking at the objects (accompanying photos) which in turn could provoke me to read the longer text.

— **Barbara Becker**

### Label copy

## THE MUSEUM

In April 2003, the world was shocked by the looting of the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad. The looting triggered an outpouring of anger and concern for the safety of the museum, which houses the world's largest and most complete collection of ancient Mesopotamian artifacts, as well as documentation for all past archaeological excavations in Iraq.

### The Iraq National Museum Prepares for Invasion

Prior to the 2003 Iraq war, various scholars and organizations warned of the potential damage to Iraq's cultural heritage. The Iraq National Museum staff took steps to safeguard the collection. Manuscripts and archives were placed in an underground bunker while other valuable artifacts were sealed in the vaults of the Central Bank in Baghdad. Museum staff removed smaller artifacts from the public galleries to a secure secret location. Unfortunately, objects too heavy or difficult to remove remained in the galleries.

### The Iraq National Museum in April 2003

Despite the staff's efforts, the Iraq National Museum suffered significant looting. On April 10, 2003, just two days after U.S. troops entered the city, looters broke into the unprotected museum. Some of the looters were professional thieves who stole specific artifacts from the storerooms. A second group of looters stole artifacts from the galleries and storerooms. They also ransacked the museum's archives, offices, and laboratories. On April 12, museum staff drove the looters out and four days later, U.S. forces secured the building. Starting April 22, Col. Matthew Bogdanos led the U.S. investigation of the looting at the museum while museum staff began the enormous tasks of assessing the damage, recovering and restoring objects.

***"I have warned you because I am sure that if anything happens, then the museum will be targeted."***

Donny George  
Former Director  
Iraq National Museum  
February 2003

***"... it's the same picture of some person walking out of some building with a vase, and you see it twenty times, and you think, 'My goodness, were there that many vases?' (Laughter) Is it possible that there were that many vases in the whole country?"***

Donald Rumsfeld  
Former Secretary of Defense  
April 2003