

EDITORIAL

Each and every one supplicates during the pilgrimage every year: "O' Allah. O' Allah, here we are. There is no God but one." This is the response of the Faithful to the Call of Prophet Abraham (Peace Be Upon Him) when He was ordered to initiate Hajj:

[And proclaim the pilgrimage among them: they will come to Thee on foot (and mounted) On every kind of camel, Lean on account of journeys, Through and distant, Mountain highways]. (Hajj, 27)

The hearts of all Muslims all over the world yearn yearly towards the sacred House of Allah, the very House the foundations of which were laid down by our prophet Abraham and His son Ishmael. As the Quran records it,

[The first House (of worship), Appointed for men, Was that at Bakka: Full of blessing, And of Guidance, For all kinds of beings]. (Al Imran, 96)

That was the pristine worship that Almighty Allah has ordained for the Faithful; Allah wanted this faith to start in Makkah in a barren "Valley without cultivation." Such a divine choice is perhaps a completion of the ordinance of Allah that the Faithful should rid themselves of all worldly temptations, including farm and animal wealth. Makkah receives everything from the outside: the faithfuls arrive in it from all distant regions; sustenance reaches its inhabitants by the ordinance of Allah. This reality is evidence enough that Providence has been caring for this totally infertile spot. It has remained (and will always remain) the center of attention for whoever believes in Allah, Islam, Prophet Muhammad, and the Holy Quran.

Prophet Abraham (Peace Be Upon Him) has been the symbol of the unity of the region. From the south of Iraq He migrated to the north of Syria; from Harran He descended to Jerusalem and Egypt; and from the latter he went to the land that Allah has chosen; i.e., Makkah. Thus, the "crescent of Faith in the One" is brought to completion. The two ends of this crescent extend from *Ur* to *Makkah*. And like all Calls to Faith of prophets coming after Him, Abraham's own Call was met with resistance and denials.

However, the divine teachings of Abraham did leave their marks on the laws and legislation that were recorded by the Mesopotamian civilization, especially those known as the Codex of Hammoura-bi. Their similarities to divine laws and teachings of Holy Books, especially the Ten Commandments handed down to Moses (Peace Be Upon Him), have lead historians to the belief that Hammourabi might have been one of the prophets who were not named in the divine books such as the Quran in particular.

The Holy Quran, nevertheless, has not neglected the spiritual illumination Prophet Abraham spread wherever He went; for that was the bedrock of the civilizations of Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine, and the Nile Valley. If those civilizations did not follow the Monotheism as a way of life, the spiritual teachings of Abraham informed, nonetheless, the material civilization of the entire Orient. As the cradle of civilizations (spiritual and material, focus of flaming conflict between Monotheism and Paganism), this very Orient did open the horizons of knowledge for the world, from Iran in the East to the British Islands in West.

Centuries succeeded centuries before the dawn of Islam which united for long centuries the torch of material civilization with the torch of Monotheism. In the course of swarming conflicts between Right and Wrong, the torch of material civilization made its passage into Europe, and the Islamic region re-

mained ensconced. Europe and America went on developing themselves; the world transformed itself to a different world; we woke up to the clatter of Western fleets seeking to colonize our land, politically, economically and culturally. If political colonization has disappeared for about three decades, its two other faces (economic and cultural) went on living in our land. Has one forgotten that actual political occupation is still burdening our shoulders and spirits; and where? in one of the most sacred Muslim sanctuaries, in Palestine, the first Qibla (prayer direction) of all Muslims! Indeed it has finally arrived to suffocate Arabs and Muslims, and to deny them their power, dignity, and wealth.

The West was infuriated over the destruction of the two Buddha Statues in Afghanistan; yet the West itself is now heedlessly and shamefully destroying the civilization of Mesopotamia. Some American scholars at the University of Chicago have drawn the attention to the importance of this international civilization heritage; the UNESCO has provided maps for the historical and cultural sites. Nevertheless, how could a conqueror and colonizer pay attention to the heritage of the past while he is intoxicated by technological advances, space supremacy, and satellite industries with which he has engulfed the planet! Having placed his trust in technological superiority, he now thinks he is making and rewriting history. The West has yet to decipher the fate of tyrants throughout history.

If we entrust the fate of killers to Almighty Allah, it still pains us to see them efface a civilization that has survived some six thousand years, testifying to the greatness of those who built and erected and to the inferiority of unworthy invaders who now seek to shamelessly ravage the very civilization from which they had nursed and earned the strength.

In Amman, I happened to meet with my colleague Mr. Nasser bin Hassan al-Aboudi, the archaeological expert in the Ministry of Information and Culture in the United Arab Emirates. We exchanged casual views on the concerns and problems of Archaeology in the World in general, and in the Arab world in particular.

Having talked about many topics, we finally stopped at the issue of trafficking in archaeological materials, its legitimacy, and the necessity of its cessation. Two days later, Mr. al-Aboudi handed me volume 6 of the scholarly periodical *Dirasat (Studies)*, a publication of the Association of Writers in the UAE covering the fields of sociology and the humanities.

While flipping through its pages, I chanced to find a dossier of some sixty pages on the proceedings of the UNESCO's "Regional Workshop on Illegal Trafficking in Cultural Properties of the Arab World," held in Beirut, Feb. 11-14, 2000. This dossier was put together by none other than my distinguished colleague, Mr. al-Aboudi.

The dossier reflects the actual problem from which the Arab World does

extremely suffer. Little wonder, therefore, representatives of fifteen Arab countries took part in the workshop; those include: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and Palestine. Other international centers and organizations also participated, the Interpol, the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and the International Institute for Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT). The meeting advanced 16 recommendations, five of which are:

1- Since the Arab Countries have not yet signed the UNIDROIT Agreement, we call upon the UNESCO and UNIDROIT to present and explain to the Arab Countries the 1995 "UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects." This can be done through forums or workshops in which participants from the Arab world will include Law representatives, officials in

archaeological departments, archaeologists, police, and customs personnel.

2- Enforcement of national legislations and related legal penalties to assert the importance of each country's ownership of its archaeological materials and cultural heritage, with the aim of enforcing all national legislations in foreign courts against traffickers, be they individuals or organizations, who trade in cultural property illegally exported from its original home.

3- The importance of speeding up and enhancing the process of recording and documenting all cultural properties, be those privately owned, standing landmarks of historical locations, in museums, in storage, or at archaeological sites.

4- Exerting efforts at the national level to promote awareness of illegal trafficking in cultural property; this can be achieved through educational programs in schools and public awareness campaigns in which media, national UNESCO committees, and cultural associations take active parts.

5- Specialists, decision-makers, and public must be alerted to the dangers besieging submarine heritage and the high likelihood of being plundered and excavated illegally by treasure hunters.

These five recommendations I have singled out embody the core of the problem for the guardians and protectors of heritage. What does it mean that the participants advance such recommendations on topics that are nothing more than basic for Arab work, if these countries are keen on maintaining their very identity, character, and cultural and civilization entity. The recommendations spell bitter facts: that legislations relating to traffickers have not been enforced; that penalties have not been primed; that the cultural materials have not been inventoried; that laws pertaining to cultural ownership among Arab countries have not been unified; and that people have not been made aware of the importance of their civilization and culture. The predicament is indeed scandalous.

Despite the high concern exhibited regionally and internationally by these interested in archaeology and heritage, still among us live those ill-spirited, gluttonous, and traitorous individuals who for a trivial sum of money would ignominiously betray our culture and heritage. The Arabic Issue 42446 of Al-Ahram newspaper, Saturday 22 February, 2003, surprised us on page 24, "Events and Issues," with the following headlines: "326 smuggled archaeological pieces reopen the file once more: Why give 'Kitt' the key to archaeological ruins?!"; "The Director of and an Inspector in the Acquisition Authority are in the habit of passing archaeological materials outside the borders"; "Our Archaeological materials inside Vegetable and Fruit Packages and in Khan al-Khalily, the code word is 'Village Goods.'"

This is an out of proportion tragedy I could have never imagined. It is brought about by individuals to the custody of whom we entrusted our heritage, history, and source of our pride: Pharaoh and Muslim relics. What deterring punishment those will receive, the law will decide.

However, the looting of civilization is in no way, in scope and devastation, less a crime than the looting of private property; do we then sentence those in the same way we sentence a looter? They ought to receive a harsher sentence because they export the wealth and treasures of the nation! This problem is not the first nor will it be the last; it is a common phenomenon in most Arab countries. We thus lose our heritage while others benefit from it. One cannot help but lament how much funds, litigation, and time we have to go through to recover it!

Editor-in-Chief