

## **For an ethical practice in our disciplines:**

### **History, philology, archaeology and art history of the Ancient Near East**

The board of the *International Association for Assyriology* (IAA) is asked routinely to weigh in on questions related to professional behaviour because our research fields are located in countries which generate various challenges. The aim of this guide is to provide answers to these colleagues, whether they are IAA members or not, and to help students when faced with ethical dilemmas. Of course, each individual is free to adhere or not to the content of this text.

As scholars, we conduct research to contribute to the development of knowledge and for scientific advances. Our work relies, as in every scientific field, on integrity, honesty, probity, impartiality and responsibility in collaborative and collective work.

As philologists, historians, archaeologists and art historians, our ethical behaviour, from the construction of our project to its publication, must be applied to the objects of our study, addressed to our colleagues and to the different actors with whom we are to interact within the society. Our work is based on previous studies and outcomes which should be explicitly mentioned in our scientific productions, lectures and publications. We must ensure the reliability and objectivity of our research work on which the society bases its confidence.

As researchers specializing on the ancient Near East we are confronted with a variety of difficult situations in our daily practice: we work in countries in a state of war or countries which do not subscribe to the Declaration of Human Rights, we are faced with poverty, difficult economic situations, political pressure, looting and illegal trade in antiquities, etc. All these situations require analysis and ethical reflection.

#### **Scientific Cooperation**

Scientific cooperation with colleagues from local institutions is strongly recommended. We should enable and actively support their scientific mobility in other countries, such as Europe and the Americas, especially in cases in which their ability to carry out their work has been restricted. Cooperation should include data exchange on an equal level. Educational and scientific joint research programs are recommended.

#### **Fieldwork in Wartorn Countries or Disputed Zones**

Fieldwork should be conducted in safe working conditions, following international standards and respecting local habits and practices.

Each member of a scientific community is requested to conduct his/her research in respect of human rights and following international standards of ethics, including not only the safeguarding of cultural heritage, but also respect for human rights.

The scientific community should condemn any violation of professional ethics and abuse of human rights conducted by the governmental authorities of host countries.

## **Scholars and Non-Governmental Organizations**

Scientific research should be conducted according to international standards and the UNESCO rules and regulations on cultural heritage, considering that UNESCO is allowed to cooperate only with UN recognized governments.

However, all scholars are free and should be encouraged to cooperate with any other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) pursuing the aim to protect, preserve and reconstruct cultural heritage.

Scientific support for scholars at each level of their career, working for the preservation and the reconstruction of the cultural heritage, even for those forced to conduct their research outside their own country, is strongly recommended.

## **Working with unprovenanced material from the Near East**

Studying and publishing unprovenanced material are matters that have divided the scholarly community of Near Eastern Studies. Archaeologists and historians have often adopted different approaches to this material, and especially with regard to the publication of texts. On the one hand the information lost when such material is looted or improperly excavated is incalculable, and the perils faced by cultural heritage on the modern antiquities market are very real. On the other hand, the knowledge lost when such objects remain in the dark is also substantial. Finding best practices in this area requires scholars to balance their ethical responsibilities, and this is a decision that must be left to individuals.

Scholars must be aware of, and respectful of, the laws regarding cultural heritage in the countries in which they work. Scholars who discover that the material on which they are working was illegally acquired have an obligation to work towards the safe preservation and repatriation of that material to its country of origin. Scholars have a unique responsibility to educate the general public, and dealers in cultural heritage, about the dangers of trafficking in unprovenanced material. Scholars who authenticate a dealer's inventory may be supporting the market for illegal antiquities.

Scholars also have an obligation to be respectful towards their own community. The questions of how best to act with regard to unprovenanced material, how to preserve it and the sites from which it comes, and how to preserve and share the knowledge they contain, are very difficult and contentious ones. It is appropriate and necessary that these be discussed. These difficulties are heightened when material from the same site reached a modern collection at different times and in different regulatory environments. The consequences of the decisions we make may be very significant, so feelings will inevitably run high. Yet all scholars should recognize that colleagues who hold conflicting opinions do so having considered the many arguments put forward, and having come to an honest decision as to the best course of action to take. Respectful debate is essential if we are to reach a consensus. Failure to maintain this standard can impact negatively not just on this debate, but also more widely on our field – which faces many other challenges besides – and on individual colleagues, especially early career scholars.

Scholarly engagement with cultural material must always be both lawful and ethical. Scholars face added challenges when there are differences between international law and UNESCO regulations on one side, and national laws and local customs on the other side. In such cases, colleagues must strive to balance their responsibility to both past and present. This requires us to acknowledge both our responsibilities to protect cultural heritage, and our mandate as scholars to preserve knowledge and make it available for study.