



**Orientation**

INTERDISZIPLINÄRER STUDENTISCHER VEREIN FÜR ORIENTALISCHE STUDIEN

## **BURNT BOOKS AND WRECKED LIBRARIES**

### ***The Situation of Patrimonial and Academic Libraries in Post-War Iraq***

**A meeting/discussion (in English) with Mrs. Juwan Mahmud Hiyas,  
Director of the Iraqi Scientific Academy's Library in Baghdad**

#### **Cultural Damage in Post-War-Iraq**

Iraq, April 2003: At the time where the American troops were completing their victory and taking position as occupying forces all over the country, the collapse of Iraqi state structures which followed the defeat of Saddam Hussein's regime gave way to some spectacular plundering in every major city of Iraq. American troops seem to have been extremely slow to put a check to it. Cultural, scientific and academic institutions paid an especially heavy toll, irreparable damages occurred: Museums devastated, libraries burnt to the ground, and university campuses pillaged to a degree that even electrical switches in the walls were removed. Not only the very soul of Iraq has been severely damaged, many chances to retrieve it on the long term have vanished. This threatens the very fundamentals of the idea we form of civilisation, thus undermining the last remnants of the war's semblance of legitimacy. The tragic current situation in which the Iraqi libraries and academic institutions are left after 25 years of war, 12 years of international sanctions, and the cataclysm of April 2003, has so far been almost totally ignored.

#### **Personal Insight and Experience – Mrs. Juwan Mahmud Hiyas**

The Iraqi Scientific Academy's library and the whole Academy compound were badly damaged in the lootings of April 2003. Mrs. Juwan Mahmud Hiyas has been the powerless witness of some of these actions of vandalism. Since then, she and her colleagues have been trying to rebuild what has remained of the library. Together with other Iraqi librarians she has been working in order to gather data about the general situation of the libraries in Baghdad, and thus has been involved in some international actions which aim at providing support to the Iraqi librarians. In May 2004, she was invited along with one of her colleagues to join the Middle-East Librarians Committee (MELCOM) annual meeting in Munich. She is now again on tour in Europe at the invitation of the Goethe Institute and the French Ministry of Culture. Aside from the situation of Iraqi libraries the discussion will also deal with Mrs. Hiyas' own experience as a young Iraqi middle-class woman, a Kurd from Halabcha born and educated in Baghdad, married to an Arab man, and mother of several children, a woman who bears two cultural identities without any trace of duality or inner conflict: A perfect illustration of what could, at best, be "the Iraqi synthesis", which is now so much under challenge.

**SAMSTAG, 28. MAI 2005, 11 UHR,**

**ORIENTALISCHES SEMINAR**

*Regina-Pacis Weg 7, rechter Flügel des Uni-Hauptgebäudes am Rhein (Ägyptisches Museum)*