

Italian Archaeological Expedition to Mesopotamia (1930)

In the spring of 1930, Giuseppe Furlani, Doro Levi, and Fausto Franco led the first Italian archaeological survey in Iraq with the aim of identifying future excavation sites. Three years later, the choice fell on Qasr Shamamok, where investigations brought to light a rich necropolis dating to the Assyrian period (13th–7th centuries BC) and the Parthian period (2nd–3rd centuries AD). For decades, the only record of this mission was a report sent by Levi to H.E. Raffaele Guariglia and preserved in the archives of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, as the results were never formally published. Recently, however, Levi's personal photographic album, containing images from the survey, was rediscovered. The album, which had been damaged during the Florence flood of 1966, was preserved at the National Archaeological Museum of Florence. A painstaking conservation treatment carried out at the National Central Library of Florence restored the legibility of a large portion of the photographs, recovering a valuable heritage that documents the beginnings of Italian archaeology in Mesopotamia.

The album, consisting of contact prints on Agfa Lupex and Kodak Velox photographic paper, had suffered extensive damage both to the photographic emulsions and to the album's structure. Immersion in water, mud, and contaminants caused some photographs to detach from the pages, while others remained attached to their supports and became stuck together emulsion-to-emulsion. Although many images were irreparably damaged, annotations found on the album pages and on the reverse sides of detached prints revealed the album's significant documentary value, making it essential to recover the information hidden on the backs of the photographs that were still adhered together.

The conservation treatment included the controlled detachment of the prints, cleaning and selective washing of the album pages, separation of adhered photographs, consolidation of the photographic emulsions, and flattening of all supports. A new mounting solution using polyester supports, always positioned in close proximity to the original pages, preserved the album's original arrangement while allowing access to both the front and reverse sides of the photographs. In addition, a custom-made housing was created, including a self-supporting display stand designed to facilitate the album's presentation and enhancement.

Each record is accompanied by two or three images: two showing the front and reverse sides of each photograph and, when available, an image taken before conservation treatment.

The term "Inventory" in the records refers to the inventory of the photographs on the recto pages of the album after conservation, from which the individual photographs were extracted.

The digitization of the album was carried out by the photographers of the National Archaeological Museum of Florence, Fernando Guerrini (before restoration) and Alessandro Pareti (after restoration).

S.A., B.C.

Fonti:

Relazione della I campagna (primavera 1930). Da Doro Levi A. S.E. Raffaele Guariglia, 16 Aprile 1931. Posizione: Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale, Archivio storico diplomatico, Serie Affari politici 1931-1945. Italia, b. 5 (1931), fascicolo 13.

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