

## Press Release

Geneva, Rome, 27 February 2020

### **Shamash - the Sun – rises on the ruins of Hatra: Art from ancient city of Hatra (Iraq), vandalized by ISIS, now secured following an Italian-Iraqi mission with the support of ALIPH**

The former caravan city of Hatra (northern Iraq, 100 km south of Mosul), a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was reached for the first time since its liberation from ISIS in April 2017 by an Italian-Iraqi scientific team, thanks to the support of the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH).

Hatra reached its pinnacle between the 2nd and 3rd century CE, as a religious centre for the cult of Shamash, the God of the Sun. For centuries it was the focus of bitter conflicts between Rome, the declining empire of the Parthians, and the rising Sasanid empire.

At the beginning of 2015, the archaeological area came under ISIS occupation when it was used for military training and its artifacts were targeted by jihadist militants. The most irreplaceable and unique Hatrene art was vandalized and severely damaged, and its destruction broadcast around the world by ISIS: acts declared a “war crime” by UNESCO. The site was added to the World Heritage in Danger list on 1 July 2015.

The Italian and Iraqi team has now thoroughly documented and mapped the site – over 700 hectares – using drone imagery. In addition, fragments of the vandalized sculptures have been recovered and secured. The most spectacular discovery was fragments from large sculpted heads that had decorated the facade of the sanctuary dedicated to the God of the Sun. Their brutal destruction was widely disseminated on social media by ISIS. The larger fragments of the sculptures fit perfectly, making it possible to restore and relocate them back to their original position.

"This is a moment of great emotion," stated Valéry Freland, Executive Director of ALIPH. "This is the first step towards the rebirth of Hatra, an ancient city that symbolizes the depth and diversity of Iraqi culture. ALIPH was founded in the wake of these forms of cultural devastation, with the mission to help restore hope in places devastated by war and terrorism".

The mission, composed of archaeologists and architects (S. Berlioz, A. Fateh Ali, G. Fontana Antonelli, M. Sordini), led by Prof. M. Vidale (University of Padua) and Prof. S. Campana (University of Siena), working under the aegis of ISMEO (International Association for Mediterranean and Eastern Studies - Rome), in partnership with the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage of Iraq, the University of Padua and the University of Siena. The project was funded by ALIPH (International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas - Geneva).



*See photographs below*

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The Italian-Iraqi team at Hatra (February 2020) © ISMEO



Temple of Maran, Hatra, Iraq (February 2020) © ISMEO