

EDITORIAL

In view of the deteriorating security situation in Iraq it seems increasingly unlikely that the School will be able to return to work there in the foreseeable future. On the archaeological front antiquities continue to be looted and exported, and work in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad is no longer possible. After repeated threats against him and his family, Dr Donny George has had to resign as Chairman of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) and seek refuge in Damascus. Before he left, Dr George blocked all the entrances to the Museum with concrete in order to safeguard the antiquities. Under the new government the radical cleric Moktada al-Sadr now has control of four ministries, including a new Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (which replaces the Ministry of Culture), with Liwa Sumaysim, a dentist, as the new minister. The SBAH has been transferred to this ministry, and now has a new president, Dr Abbas Ali Abbas al-Hussainy, and deputy, Haider Farhan. Abdul Zahra al-Talaqani, a spokesman for the new ministry, explained that it was proposed to divide the SBAH into four administrative departments: Museums, Excavations, Manuscripts and Heritage. Archaeological posts are now being filled by conservatives and there is growing concern among scholars regarding the future of Iraq's pre-Islamic remains. The BSAI is attempting to enter into dialogue with the new administration.

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As the School no longer has premises overseas because of the situation in Iraq, the British Academy has decided to reclassify it as a Learned Society for internal Academy purposes. It is still unclear what practical effect this will have on our Academy funding.

The School's important library in Baghdad was housed in trunks in the French Embassy after the first Gulf war and has now been transferred to the British Embassy, where it is stored in locked containers in the embassy compound. We are most grateful to staff from both embassies who have made this transfer possible.

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We have recently heard the sad news of the deaths of two of the School's most valued friends. Sir Stephen Egerton, one of our Vice-Presidents, who also served on our Council and on the Development and Appeal Committees, died in September; his obituary follows this Editorial. He and his wife Caroline have been close friends of the School, both in Iraq and in London, and we extend our heartfelt sympathy to Sir Stephen's family. Nicholas Wickham-Irving died in July. He was a trustee of the Bonham Carter Charitable Trust and a generous supporter of the School. We shall miss them both.

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We continue to raise money through our Iraq Appeal and wish to thank all those who have responded so generously. As a result we have been able to invite two Iraqi colleagues to the UK this year as joint British Council/BSAI Fellows and they have worked at a number of universities and museums in a variety of fields. Alas, because of the worsening situation, we have had to delay a proposed shipment of books, collected and generously donated by members, and copies of our own publications, destined for Iraqi museums and academic institutions.

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Grants have been allocated by the BSAI as follows: to Dr Eleanor Robson for work on Old Babylonian material from Nippur housed in the University Museum in Philadelphia; to Dr Erica Hunter for a third *Christianity in Iraq* seminar; to Professor Farouk Al-Rawi and Mr Christopher Walker (project sponsor) for continuation of the Umma Project; to Dr Augusta McMahon and three team members for final analysis of samples excavated under the auspices of the BSAI at Chagar Bazar, in preparation of the final report on the excavations; to Dr Joan Oates for excavations at Tell Brak in Spring 2006 and for a final study season at Tell Brak in November–December 2006 preparatory to publication of the final report; and to Dr Georgina Herrmann for

the Nimrud Ivories Project. Reports on the Grants will be published in forthcoming BSAI Newsletters.

Previously grants were allocated for work on material prior to AD 1750, but this chronological restriction has now been removed. This will not, however, affect the scope of this journal, which will continue to accept articles ranging in date from the earliest times down to about AD 1700.

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This year has seen the publication of a facsimile reprint of David Oates' *Studies in the Ancient History of Northern Iraq*, reissued by the BSAI in David's memory and generously funded by The Charlotte Bonham Carter Charitable Trust. On 12 April there was a party at the British Academy to launch Alastair Northedge's superb *Samarra Studies I. The Historical Topography of Samarra*, the first of three volumes in the series, published by the BSAI with a generous grant from the Fondation Max van Berchem. Several of the grants listed above will result in publications: the Umma Project, Chagar Bazar, Nimrud Ivories and Tell Brak. Other publications are nearing completion.

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The BSAI has continued with its programme of outreach. Dr Erica Hunter lectured at our AGM on 15 December 2005 on "Hira as a centre of Christianity during Sassanid-Islamic periods", and in May 2006, she ran a Seminar on *Christian-Muslim dialogue in Iraq*. On 28 January 2006 a further Study Day in the BSAI series was organised by Dr Frances Reynolds at Birkbeck College in London, on *The Babylonians: Life in Ancient Southern Iraq*. It was followed, on 18 November by a Study Day on *The Assyrians: Ancient Splendour in Northern Iraq*. On 27 January 2007 there will be a Study Day at the University of Birmingham on *Writing in the Near East*, jointly organised by the BSAI and the University of Birmingham Centre for Lifelong Learning.

On 14 September Michael Wood lectured at the British Museum on "Iraq: The cradle of civilisation" in aid of the BSAI Appeal. On 26 October, also for the Appeal, John Simpson, BBC World Affairs Editor, gave a talk at the British Academy, "An ever-changing world", followed by a reception.

BSAI lectures in 2006 were given at the British Academy by Dr Dominique Collon, on 29 March, on "Survival and revival of some Mesopotamian motifs", and by Dr Irving Finkel, on 15 June (the Bonham Carter Lecture), on "Babylonian ghosts — welcome and unwelcome". The 2006 BSAI AGM will be on 14 December, when Professor Marc Van De Mieroop will lecture on "The Mesopotamians and their past".