

Culture Without Context



The Newsletter of the Near Eastern Project of the Illicit Antiquities Research Centre

Contents:

Illicit Antiquities Research Centre	2
Editorial	3
In the News	5

Iraq Since the Gulf War

The loss of archaeological context and the illegal trade in Mesopotamian antiquities

McGUIRE GIBSON 6

The modern sack of Nineveh and Nimrud

JOHN MALCOLM RUSSELL 8

Returned antiquities: a case for changing legislation

ERICA C.D. HUNTER 21

Short notes 22

IARC Policy Statement 24

Staff:

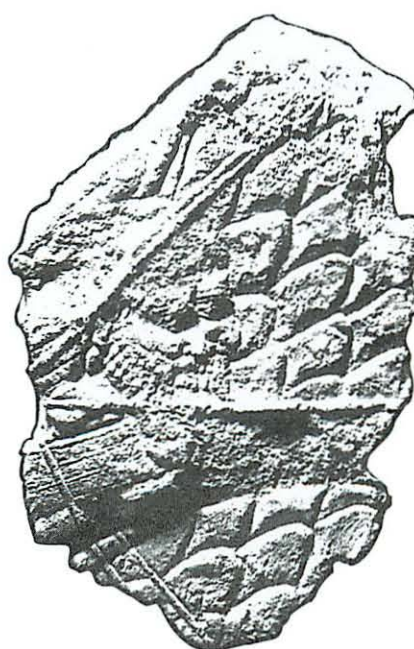
IARC Director: Colin Renfrew
IARC Co-ordinator: Neil Brodie
CWOC Editor: Augusta McMahon
CWOC Typesetter: Dora Kemp

Address for correspondence:

CWOC Editor, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Downing St, Cambridge, England, CB2 3ER

Correspondence relating to all aspects of the legal and illegal trade in antiquities is welcome; we will make an effort to print reasonable, non-libellous letters. No unsigned letters will be printed, but names will be withheld upon request.

Printed by BluePrint, Severn Place, East Road, Cambridge CB1 1HY. Tel: +44 (0)1223 314315



The Illicit Antiquities Research Centre is a project of the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research

Illicit Antiquities Research Centre

The Illicit Antiquities Research Centre (IARC) was established in May 1996, and commenced operations in October 1997 under the auspices of the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research in Cambridge, England. Its purpose is to monitor and report upon the detrimental effects of the international trade in illicit antiquities (i.e. antiquities which have been stolen or clandestinely excavated and illegally exported). The volume of this trade has increased enormously over the past twenty years and the associated demand is thought to have caused the large-scale plundering of archaeological sites and museums around the world.

The IARC will bring to the attention of the general public the scale and nature of this destruction (see Statement of Intent on back cover). It will also endeavour to create a climate of opinion which will discourage the collection of illicit antiquities by emphasizing that the true scholarly value of an artefact is irreparably damaged by the loss of cultural information which is caused by its unrecorded divorce from context. Thus the primary concern of the IARC will be to reduce the loss of knowledge caused by the chronic despoliation of sites and museums. Issues of object ownership are of secondary interest but are nevertheless frequently an inseparable part of the problem.



Editorial

The Near Eastern Project, under the umbrella of IARC, will concentrate on acquiring and disseminating information on the illicitly excavated and/or stolen antiquities of the Middle East. The international trade in these items has increased over the last few decades owing to an increased appreciation for Near Eastern antiquities and owing to the disruption caused by various civil and international conflicts; and it was therefore thought appropriate for IARC to begin its program by concentrating on this area. This newsletter will devote each issue to a single country of the Middle East, highlighting the particular difficulties facing that country with regard to the problem of illicit antiquities. In addition, the newsletter will be reporting on wider legal issues involved in antiquities trade, governmental responses, and important illicit objects from other countries, as the need and opportunity arises.

Given that the recovery rate for stolen and illegally exported, yet eminently recognizable, 'fine art' works is only in the range of 5–10 per cent worldwide, one might legitimately ask why we are expending energy in this direction on behalf of antiquities. Rates of recovery for stolen items increase in proportion to the value of the object and its recognizability — these making it more likely on the one hand that their resale will be noticed and on the other hand that prior ownership can be proven immediately. It is paradoxically regrettable that prices for Near Eastern antiquities are relatively low, and their degree of recognizability is also frequently low. This lack of recognizability is to some extent inherent in the objects themselves; it is compounded by the lack of resources in many Middle Eastern museums for the intensive documentation of objects necessary for their easy identification, and for the dissemination of this information should the items be stolen. Thus it may seem that compilation of a register of stolen and illegally exported Near Eastern antiquities and the attempted recognition and recovery of such artefacts could be considered time and energy thrown away. Any registry of stolen antiquities compiled by IARC may overlap with the efforts of other groups (Art Loss Register, International Association of Dealers in

Ancient Art, Scotland Yard Art and Antiques Department, etc.), but what IARC aims to provide is a linkage among those groups, national Antiquities Departments, the academic community, art insurers, and legitimate collectors and sellers of ancient art. We also plan to go beyond the recognition and recovery aspect and to hold up the trade in ancient art for scrutiny, hoping to provide innovative solutions to its inherent problems.

It would be impossible and unfair to call for a complete halt to all trade in antiquities, given that many transactions in this area involve objects that were legitimately removed from their country of origin prior to the 1970 UNESCO Convention. But how to eradicate the damaging trade in illicitly excavated or illegally exported antiquities, without harming the market? The arguments of those who would justify the sale of illegally exported artefacts are ready to hand — primarily that one should not blame the art market and those operating within it for the trade, but the countries of origin themselves, which do not care to or cannot control access to their own cultural property. Our response to this is to recount the constraints on the antiquities departments in most source countries; they often simply do not have the money or staff to properly police sites nor to adequately record the contents of their museums. Laws against illegal excavation and exportation exist in every country of the Middle East, but regrettably, although the will exists it is too often under-supported.

Another prevailing attitude is that purchase of stolen artefacts allows them to be conserved, appreciated, and saved from destruction or oblivion — this is a trickier problem. Our answer stresses that the objects lose value drastically when their context is not known — without the association of a site, a date, an original owner or creator, the significance of the object is greatly reduced.

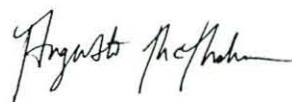
We must respond to the idea that active promotion of legal trade in antiquities will eradicate the demand for illegally excavated and exported objects. In theory, source countries could sell off 'surplus' or duplicate items, supplying the international demand for antiquities while, again theoretically, reducing the likelihood of illegal excavations and exports. The International Cultural

Property Society, through its publication, the *International Journal of Cultural Property*, has often promoted this avenue and has some quite persuasive arguments for it. On the altruistic side, there is the fact that expanded legalized trade would serve as a form of cultural exchange, introducing ancient objects to a wider range of people and creating a greater sense of appreciation for ancient art. While the degree of success this aspect would have may be debatable, on a practical level, it is certainly true that most museums in the Middle East are full of well-excavated and already well-recorded objects which the museums have no space to exhibit, and which many museums and collectors in other countries would be happy to own, have the space to exhibit and, most importantly, have the money to pay for. One can logically argue further in this vein that sale of duplicates would provide the antiquities departments of source countries with the resources necessary to record adequately the objects in their collections which are to be retained, against possible loss. And with the opening up of the market, the incentive for trade in illegally acquired objects could potentially be reduced.

But clearly there would need to be extraordinarily tight controls on this legal trade, including extensive documentation and standardized non-duplicatable export licences. And with increasing numbers of objects on the move, it is possibly more likely than ever that illegally acquired ones could be hidden among them. The illicit market will only collapse if the licit

market can defeat it, not merely compete with it. A host of problems connected with this legal trade can be envisaged: how would the source countries select the pieces they would offer for sale? Would the objects selected as expendable actually be saleable, and would the entire project produce enough revenue to make it worthwhile? A concerted international effort would have to be made to get such a program of sale up and running — and who would fund and organize such a venture?

And what about the role of the original excavators in this legal trade (in the frequent case that the excavators are from a different country than the artefacts)? Whenever this avenue of expansion for the licit trade has been discussed and encouraged, there has been little to no mention of the possible reaction of the excavators themselves. It is often in the excavators' and other scholars' interests to keep as many of the objects from one site or region together, to facilitate post-excavation study; and these interests should not be ignored. Even if removal of an object from a museum store in the source country to an exhibit space in another country means that many more individuals will see it, might the restricted access to the object by scholars and inhabitants of the home country be potentially viewed as more valuable?



A. McMahon
Editor

Culture Without Context will be published twice yearly. The next issue will appear in April 1998. Subscription details are available from:

Dr Neil Brodie
IARC
McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research
Downing Street
Cambridge CB2 3ER
UK

In the News

In recent months the news has been dominated by the reactions to allegations made by Peter Watson in his book *Sotheby's: the Inside Story*, subsequently televised as part of the C4 Dispatches series. It was revealed that senior members of Sotheby's staff had been aware of smuggled antiquities from Italy and India being offered for sale in London.

In response to a question tabled in the House of Lords the Government re-affirmed its view that the art market should regulate itself and in February Sotheby's named four non-executive directors who were appointed to conduct an internal review of the auction house's working practices.

The need for effective self-regulation was also stressed by Joanna van der Lande, the newly elected chairman of the Antiquities Dealers Association and head of Bonhams antiquities department. In June she reaffirmed the need for responsible sections of the trade to isolate themselves from those who transgress the ADA code of practice and also called for better relations between dealers, museums and academics.

Sotheby's announced in July that they were to end regular antiquities sales in London in order to concentrate their activities in New York. As a result of this decision Oliver Forge, head of antiquities, and Brendan Lynch, head of the Islamic and Indian department, chose to leave the company.

Dubious dealings were also highlighted during the trial of Jonathan Tokeley-Parry, a dealer who first appeared in court in January to deny three counts of handling stolen antiquities. The trial continued sporadically through the first half of the year until June when Tokeley-Parry was found guilty on two counts of handling artefacts looted from Saqqara, including pieces of a false door from the tomb of Hetepka and a bronze figure of the falcon god Horus, but was cleared on a third charge of handling pieces of a false door from the complex of King Pepi. He had previously been sentenced in his absence to 15 years hard labour by an Egyptian court.

Tokeley-Parry had shown a courier how to coat objects in plastic which could then be painted over to disguise them as tourist trinkets, allowing

them to pass through Egyptian customs undetected. The plastic and paint were removed with acetone once the smuggled artefacts were in England. The jury was shown photographs of a damaged head of Amenhotep III, 'restored' by Tokeley-Parry who had arranged to sell it for £850,000 to New York dealer Fred Schulz. In his defence Tokeley-Parry claimed to have bought the objects in Switzerland and Germany, emphasizing again the central role that these countries play in the illicit trade.

This role is set to diminish, however, as the Swiss government is in the process of ratifying both the UNESCO and Unidroit conventions. In protest Ruedi Staechelin has withdrawn his family's collection of modern art from museums in Basel and Geneva and loaned it instead for three years to the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth.

Some of the looted Nineveh reliefs reported in this issue have surfaced in Britain. Dr Prudence Harper of the Metropolitan Museum was sent a photograph of a piece from the palace of Tiglath-Pileser III by the London dealer Mr Robin Symes.

The situation in Afghanistan is a continuing cause for concern. The colossal figure of Buddha in Afghanistan's Bamiyan Valley was threatened by the Taliban commander Abdul Wahid who said that his troops would destroy it if they broke into the area. The Taliban government denied this threat but the present position is unclear. On a more positive note the Society for the Preservation of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage (SPACH) has recently recovered a number of antiquities which had been looted from Kabul Museum. They include six plaster medallions from the Begram Treasure and two stone seals of Bronze Age date from Shortugai.

Italian police have recently charged Franco Zanetti with selling stolen antiquities from an internet site. Zanetti was offering artefacts from sites in Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq and Lebanon as well as from sites in Italy.

Finally there is the strange report of a bag packed with Egyptian antiquities found at the Unclaimed Baggage Center of Scottsboro, Alabama. The Center deals in baggage which remains unclaimed at airports throughout the United States.

Iraq Since the Gulf War

The loss of archaeological context and the illegal trade in Mesopotamian antiquities

McGUIRE GIBSON

The Gulf War of 1991 has had a devastating impact on the archaeology of Iraq. This statement is true although destruction of sites during the war was relatively slight, as far as can be gauged. Bombs dropped into the ziggurat enclosure area at Ur created large craters, about ten metres in diameter and four metres deep, and one strafing run by a plane resulted in four hundred holes in one side of the ziggurat. Use of Tell al-Lahm, to the southeast of Ur, as a position for U.S. troops was accompanied by machine-excavation of several large holes. Probably other tells suffered similar damage, but lacking a systematic study of the war's effect on antiquities, as requested by UNESCO but denied by the UN Security Council, we cannot say for certain. Some standing buildings in Baghdad, Basra, and elsewhere were damaged by shrapnel, and many buildings received structural damage as the result of the continued shaking of the ground during the period of bombing.

The aftermath of the war witnessed the looting and sometimes the burning of nine regional museums and the loss of more than three thousand artefacts, only a few of which have been recovered. The loss of the objects, although grave, was not as destructive as the change that the attacks on the museums will have on the future relationship of museums to the people of Iraq. It is unlikely that there will ever again be an effort at public education about archaeology on the scale that was represented by those regional museums.

The main devastation to archaeology, however, was not the loss of the objects and the damage to the museums, but was, rather, the

halting of almost all archaeological research in the country, along with the gradual loss of control over the sites, and the revival of the illegal antiquities trade. Iraq, in the past five years, has joined the ranks of countries that are routinely robbed of their antiquities.

Since its birth as a nation in 1923, Iraq has had a Department of Antiquities with a model antiquities law and a National Museum. In order to build the museum's collections quickly, foreign expeditions were induced to work in the country for a share in the excavated objects. The choice of which half of the duplicate objects would remain in Iraq was left to the Director of Antiquities, with all unique items going to the Museum. The long-term excavations at Kish and Ur set the pattern and showed how effective the policy was in forming a collection of Mesopotamian artefacts that is second to none.

From its inception, Iraqis were included in the administration and staffing of the Antiquities Department and the Museum, but the sending out of Iraqi students for graduate training in Europe and the U.S. in the 1930s marked the beginning of real control by Iraqis themselves. The excavations at Tell Hassuna and Tell Uqair, carried out during World War II by Taha Baqir, Fuad Safar and others who had returned from abroad, were the beginning of a record of investigation and restoration that has placed Iraq in the forefront of responsible excavation, analysis, and curation of antiquities in the Near East. The continued welcome that was afforded to foreign expeditions and the joint Iraqi/foreign operations (most notably the Hamrin, Haditha, and Eski Mosul Salvage projects) have been examples for other nations to emulate.

During the 1920s there was some legal dealing in antiquities in Baghdad, but by the 1930s the trade was being reduced systematically. Edgar J. Banks, probably the leading American dealer in Mesopotamian antiquities at that time, would routinely mention in letters to clients the increased difficulty in obtaining objects from Iraq due to the strictness of the antiquities law. After

the revolution of 1958, the antiquities trade in Iraq was stopped entirely. Occasionally, through the next two decades, would one hear a rumor of cuneiform tablets, cylinder seals, or other objects on the market in Europe. Clearly, some illegal trade was still going on because there was a continuing dribble of important artefacts finding their way to display cases in major museums. When these museums accepted the UNESCO protocol on cultural property, by which they agreed not to accept artefacts that had left their countries of origin after 1970, such objects would be displayed with a label proclaiming that they were on loan from a named collector.

But the trade in illegal antiquities from Iraq remained a minor one even during the 1980s, when great numbers of objects from Iran, Afghanistan, and other countries were fueling the markets in Europe, America, and elsewhere. Because it had title to all antiquities sites in Iraq, and it had not just guards at major sites but also regional inspectors in all areas, the Iraqi Department of Antiquities was in an enviable situation when compared to its counterparts in neighbouring countries.

With the economic embargo that is still in place, however, the situation in Iraq has changed drastically. The economic hardship that has forced Iraqi individuals to sell off their personal property and then resort to begging or to theft has also forced institutions to make hard choices. The Department of Antiquities has been forced to pare its central staff and that of the National Museum to a skeleton crew, to lay off site guards, and to cut back on automobiles that regional inspectors need to make their rounds and to investigate reported violations of sites. Now, the Department of Antiquities receives reports of dozens of people digging illegally on well-known sites such as Umma and Ur, and of continuing looting of many other sites, especially those in desert areas. Even sites that are major tourist attractions in and near population centres and which are still manned by guards are not safe. Within the past two years, the Department of Antiquities has reported the theft of a slab of sculpture from the palace of Assurnasirpal at Nimrud (ancient Calah), the loss of sculptured items from Hatra, and most recently the removal of a number of relief fragments from the throne room of Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh.

Despite the fact that desert patrols have intercepted small trucks filled with antiquities, and the customs inspectors at the Iraqi–Jordanian border have confiscated enough antiquities to make possible an exhibition in the National Museum, many more objects are being smuggled out successfully.

During the past five years, the number of Iraqi artefacts in the European and American antiquities market has increased dramatically. On a visit to Portobello Road two years ago, I saw Mesopotamian tablets and cylinder seals in several shops. Having been a visitor to Portobello for many years, I can testify that I had never before been aware of Mesopotamian objects there. I found even more and better quality items in the up-scale antiques markets near Bond Street. In one Bond Street shop, I was shown a bag of more than a hundred cylinder seals and received an apology because these were the poorer quality ones; I was told that the best items had been sold to Japanese and Taiwanese collectors a day or two before. Regrettably, in several of the shops I visited, some items (and most usually cuneiform tablets) were accompanied by written authentications, including dating and translation or at least indications of content, signed by well-known British colleagues.

Publicity of the loss of Iraqi antiquities, appearing in *Archaeology* magazine, *The New York Times*, and *International Fine Art Reports*, as well as in the fascicles of *Lost Heritage*, has had some effect on the illegal antiquities market, if only in making some buyers a little more cautious. A large stone statue fragment, with a very important inscription related to a revolt against the Old Babylonian king Samsuiluna, was being offered two years ago by an unnamed dealer in London. Several colleagues who attended an American Oriental Society meeting at that time were shown photographs of the object, and one of these persons discussed the importance of the inscription with me. The object was said to have a provenance that would place it in Switzerland thirty or more years ago, thereby avoiding the difficulties presented by the UNESCO resolutions on cultural property. The dealer was unable to sell the artefact at that time, and now it is being offered again. This time, I am told, the price is greatly reduced and the provenance has been changed; now it is said to have a certificate of export from the Jordanian government. Since the

Jordanian Department of Antiquities has had as strict a rule against the trade in antiquities as Iraq, the certificate is of dubious value.

The brisk trade in smuggled Iraqi antiquities, regardless of the route, has had a very bad effect on the archaeology of neighbouring countries. We hear reports of looted sites in Syria and Jordan. In the past two years, souvenir dealers and rug merchants in Amman, Damascus, and Aleppo offered me a few, poor quality or fake Iraqi antiquities, but they had many more Jordanian and Syrian items. Despite a well-publicized raid on one shop, after a complaint was lodged in an Amman newspaper, the Jordanian Depart-

ment of Antiquities and its counterpart in Syria clearly are beginning to lose the fight against antiquities smuggling. But as long as the smuggling is encouraged and abetted by our professional colleagues, major museums, and those museums' donors who are major collectors, the market will continue and the destruction of archaeological sites will increase.

McGuire Gibson
The Oriental Institute
University of Chicago
1155 East 58th Street
Chicago, IL 60637
USA

The modern sack of Nineveh and Nimrud

JOHN MALCOLM RUSSELL

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;

(Byron, *The Destruction of Sennacherib*, 1815)

So wrote Byron of the siege of Jerusalem, undertaken by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 BC from Nineveh, capital of the greatest empire the world had ever known. For two and one-half millennia, the only known account of this momentous event was in II Kings:18–19, which reports that Sennacherib's invincible army was laid low by the angel of the Lord, after which Sennacherib returned to Nineveh where he was murdered by his sons. Nineveh itself fell to the Medes and Babylonians in 612 BC, its splendour buried under the shifting dust of northern Mesopotamia.

In 1847 the young British adventurer Austen Henry Layard explored the ruins of Nineveh and rediscovered the lost palace of Sennacherib across the Tigris River from modern Mosul in northern Iraq. Inscribed in cuneiform on the colossal sculptures in the doorway of its throne room was Sennacherib's own account of his siege of Jerusalem. It differed in detail from the biblical one, but confirmed that Sennacherib did not capture the city. This find

generated an excitement that is difficult to imagine today, because amid the increasing religious doubt and scriptural revisionism of the mid-nineteenth century, it gave Christian fundamentalists an independent eyewitness corroboration of a biblical event, written in the doorway of the very room where Sennacherib may have issued his order to attack. The palace's interior walls were panelled with huge stone slabs, carved in relief with images of Sennacherib's victories. Here one could see the king and army, foreign landscapes, and conquered enemy cities, including a remarkably accurate depiction of the Judean city of Lachish, whose destruction by the Assyrians was recorded in II Kings 18:13–14.

Considering that the palace had been destroyed by an intense conflagration during the sack of Nineveh in 612 BC, the massive walls and many of the relief sculptures of Sennacherib's throne-room suite were surprisingly well-preserved. In the 1960s, because of the palace's historical importance and unique preservation, the Iraq Department of Antiquities consolidated the walls and sculptures and roofed the site over as the Sennacherib Palace Site Museum at Nineveh, where visitors could tour the remains, one of only two preserved Assyrian palaces in the world (Figs. 1 & 2). (The other is the palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud, Iraq, also restored as a site museum.) The four restored rooms of the throne-room suite contained some 100 sculptured slabs in various states of preservation. In two of these rooms, parts of nearly every slab survived, mak-

ing these the most completely preserved decorative cycles in the palace.

Because most of these reliefs have never been published, they needed to be documented in case the originals were lost or damaged and to guide future conservation efforts. As a member of the University of California, Berkeley, team at Nineveh in 1989 and 1990, I took roughly 900 photographs of the remains of the throne-room suite, with the objective of recording the surviving sculptures in detail. My book of these photographs, together with drawings, plans, and commentary, tentatively entitled *The Excavation and Destruction of Sennacherib's Palace at Nineveh, Iraq*, will be published by Yale University Press in late 1997.

An example will give some sense of what this project accomplished. In *Nineveh and Its Remains* (vol. 2, p. 469), A.H. Layard, who first excavated in the palace, published an engraving of a unique representation in which two Assyrians make an offering before two standards, which have the form of horned dragons or serpents attached to poles (Fig. 3). This image is of considerable interest for the study of Assyrian cult practice. Layard did not indicate which room or slab this representation was from, nor did he give any indication of scale, and the original drawing from which the engraving was made has not been located. My documentation work showed that this image is a detail from Slab 43 of Room V, the retiring room behind the throne



Figure 1. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, general view of site museum. (Photo: author.)



Figure 2. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, view of restored throne room. (Photo: author.)

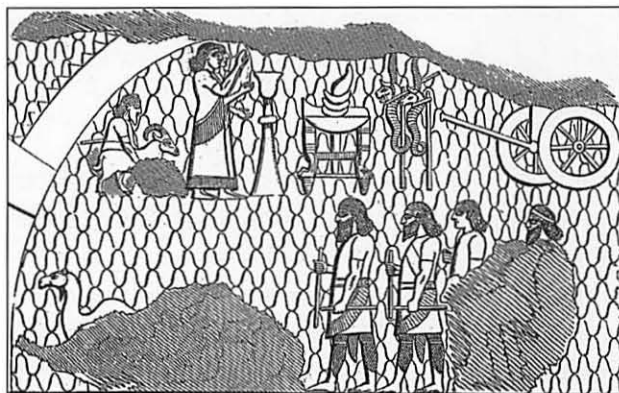


Figure 3. Nineveh, Layard drawing of unidentified scene. (After Layard 1849, vol. 2, 469.)

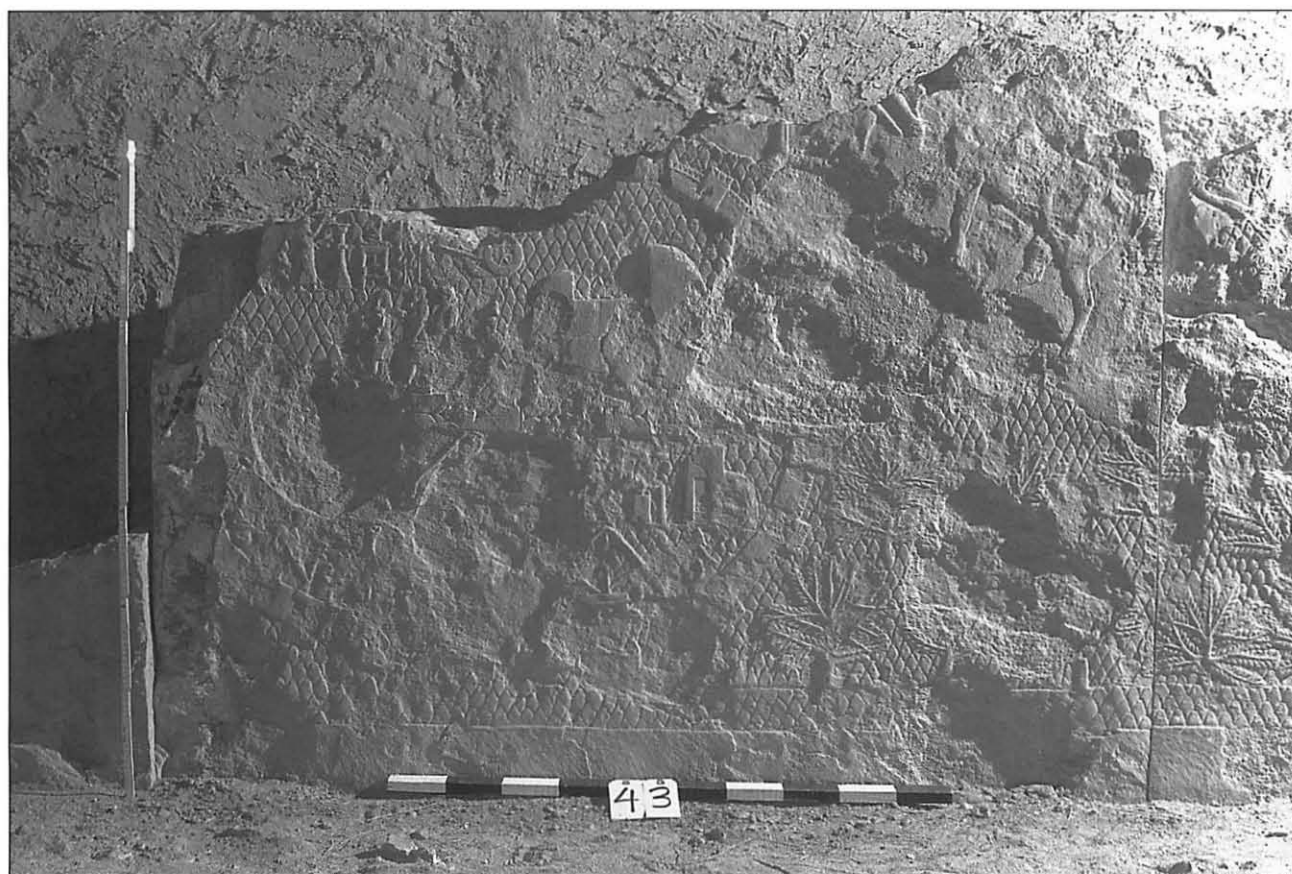


Figure 4. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room V, Slab 43, full slab, width 180 cm. (Photo: author.)

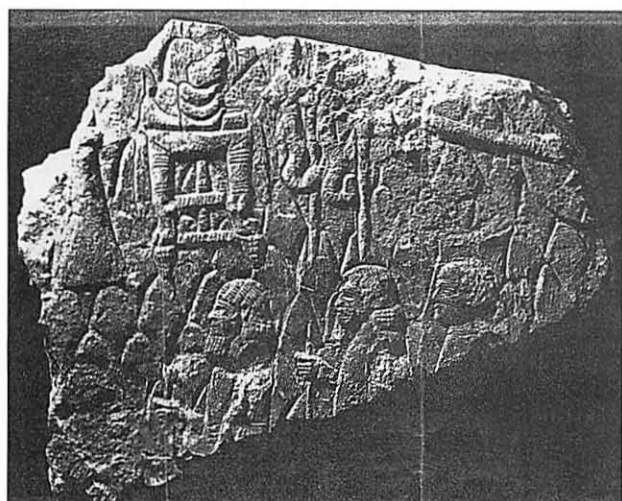


Figure 5. Looted fragment, Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room V, Slab 43, cult scene. (From a photocopy.)

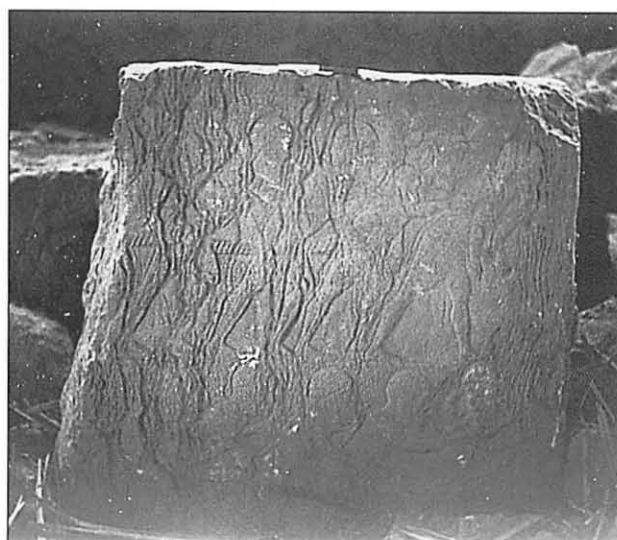


Figure 6. Looted fragment, Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room XLIX, labourers hauling a heavy object. (Photo: author.)

room (Fig. 4). As can now clearly be seen from the new photograph, the context of this scene is Sennacherib's military camp on one of his campaigns in a mountainous region. The heretofore unpublished slabs to either side show further events from this campaign, thereby placing this small detail within its larger visual narrative context.

The necessity of documenting the site

became devastatingly clear in 1995, when I was shown a photograph of an Assyrian relief fragment for sale on the antiquities market (Fig. 5). There is no doubt that it came from this same slab, which was intact in the Nineveh site museum in 1990, but which had since evidently been broken up by looters. Soon thereafter, I was shown photographs of two more fragments that

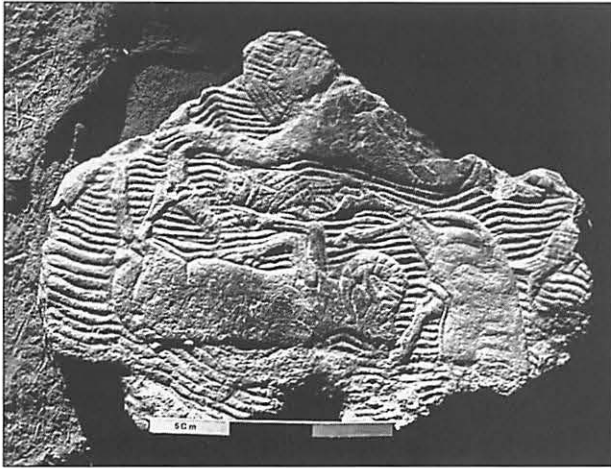


Figure 7. Looted fragment, Nineveh, Southwest Palace, West Façade (?), two dead sheep and a dead human in the water. (Photo: author.)

had been in storage at Nineveh in 1990, but which were also on the market. One (Fig. 6) shows labourers towing a load toward the right, from Hall XLIX of Sennacherib's palace (Russell 1991, fig. 86). The other (Fig. 7), which is more unusual, shows two dead sheep and a dead man floating in water. I know of no occurrence of domestic livestock shown this way, other than a fragment that shows a dead buffalo in the water, which was found by George Smith (1875, 148) at the west end of the palace. Both of these fragments may have belonged to the campaign 'to the Persian Gulf' that Thompson & Hutchinson (1929, 61) said embellished the west façade of the palace.

These fragments would be poor investments. Since they are documented as belonging to a museum in Iraq and have no export permits, Iraq would have clear legal grounds to reclaim them from any purchaser. Furthermore, possession of these fragments is a violation of the United Nation sanctions against Iraq, which means that they could be confiscated by customs authorities. It proved impossible to determine who was offering these three fragments for sale, or where they were being kept, so I published a note in *International Fine Art Reports (IFAR)* (May 1996) to alert prospective buyers that these sculptures had come from the site museum at Nineveh. The value of such publicity was confirmed when a London solicitor wrote to me, stating that his client, a London collector, had purchased the fragment showing labourers towing a sledge from an antiquities dealer in Belgium. He had then applied for a British export license, only to be



Figure 8. Looted fragment, Nineveh, Ishtar temple (?), fragment of Assurnasirpal II lion hunt, 25 x 18 cm. (Photo: author.)

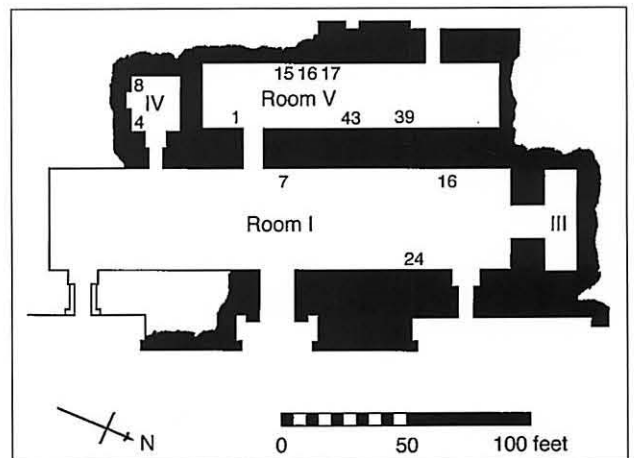


Figure 9. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, plan. (Photo: author.)

informed that the piece was among the ones published in the *IFAR* article. Discussions about the disposition of this piece are currently underway, but the solicitor assured me that if it proves to have been stolen, his client will return it to its true owner.

I was concerned that more looted Assyrian sculptures would appear on the market, but saw no further examples for more than a year. In

November 1996, I was contacted by a New York lawyer acting on behalf of a prospective purchaser



Figure 10. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room V, Slab 1, view of full slab before looting, width 121 cm. (Photo: author.)



Figure 11. Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room V, Slab 1, detail. (Photo: author.)

who had photographs of ten more Assyrian sculptures that were said to be on the market. The lawyer wanted to know if the sculptures were being sold legitimately. They were not. One of the fragments was from a lion hunt relief sculpture of Assurnasirpal II. This fragment was found along with a number of others by Thompson in the vicinity of the Nabu temple at Nineveh, but according to its inscription it originally belonged to the Ishtar temple (Thompson & Hutchinson 1929, pl. 7). I had photographed it at Nineveh in 1989 (Fig. 8). The other nine were further fragments of wall relief from the Sennacherib Palace Site Museum (Fig. 9). At least three of the relief slabs from which these fragments were broken have been published *in situ* in the site museum, slab 1:7 by Russell (1991, fig. 28), and slabs 1:24 and V:1 (Figs. 10–12) by Madhloom (1976, pls. 32 & 33a), the excavator of the palace.

Each fragment came from a different slab, and most of them had been broken from the middle of a slab, suggesting that the looters destroyed whole slabs to extract the best-preserved bits. In cases where the surrounding surface was not well



Figure 12. Looted fragment, Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room V, Slab 1, Assyrian archer marching to battle, 26 x 16 cm. (From a photocopy.)

preserved, these parts were broken away to create a well-preserved fragment, as on slabs V:15 and V:39. A similar case is a fragment, IV:4 (Figs. 13–15), that shows small figures behind a city wall. The large figures directly above the city were completely broken away, evidently so that their large scale would not distract from the interest of the miniature scene below.

In several cases (I:24, V:1, V:39) fragments were squared off to give the impression that these are complete, self-contained compositions. All of the fragments were mounted vertically on bases, in some cases without respect to the sculpture's original orientation. Fragment V:1 was squared off diagonally and then mounted vertically, so that the figure now seems to be falling forward, quite unlike its original position on the slab. Whoever mounted the fragments knew so little about Assyrian art that they did not realize that a lozenge pattern in the background, which represents mountains, is always oriented vertically. Fragment V:17, which shows a cowering crouching figure, is mounted so that the man is oriented as if standing, with the result that the mountain pattern angles to the left. Fragments V:39 and T:16 are also tilted. The most dramatic example of



Figure 13. *Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room IV, Slab 4, view of full slab before looting, width 78 cm. (Photo: author.)*



Figure 14. *Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room IV, Slab 4, detail. (Photo: author.)*

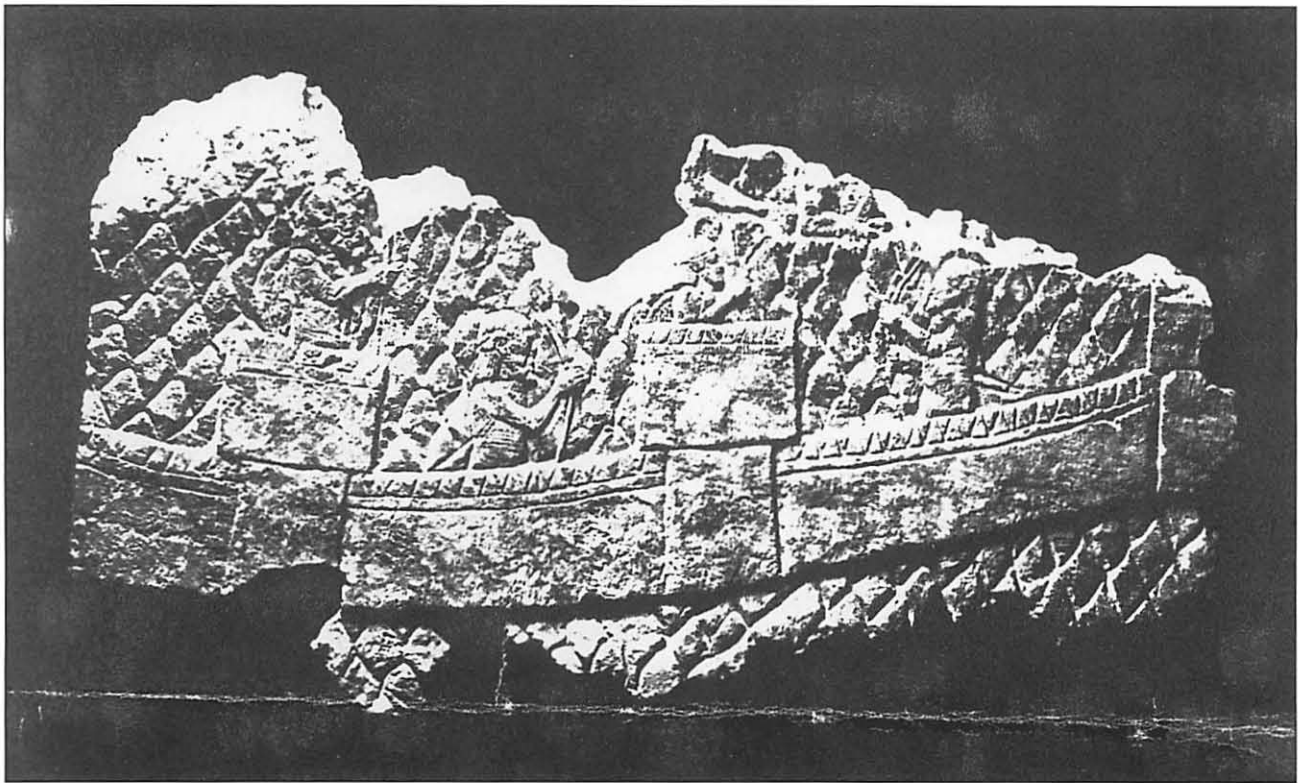


Figure 15. Looted fragment, Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room IV, Slab 4, archers in a walled city, 71 x 40 cm. (From a photocopy.)

this is fragment V:16 (Figs. 16–18), which showed a pair of archers shooting toward a city on top of a mountain. The piece was mounted so that the archers shoot horizontally, with the mountain pattern almost horizontal behind them.

All of these examples of trimming and reorienting show how important context is in understanding the significance of each fragment, and how much crucial information is lost in the breaking up of a sculptured slab into fragments for the antiquities market. Not only is a unique cultural artefact destroyed, but even the fragments that remain are reduced to incomprehensible ciphers, the meaning of which is lost with the destruction of the full composition. I also published these fragments in *IFAR* (December 1996). All of these fragments are illustrated in *Minerva* (May/June 1997) as well as on the *Archaeology* magazine web site (<http://www.archaeology.org/online>). In May 1997, I saw dealer photographs of two more Sennacherib fragments, which turned out to be the two halves of Slab 8 from Room IV. The lower part of this corner slab was intact when I photographed it at Nineveh in 1990 (Fig. 19), but the piece has since been broken in half, presumably to facilitate smuggling it out of Iraq. This continuing stream of dealers' photographs of

documented Sennacherib reliefs suggests that by now the only place where Sennacherib reliefs are in short supply is in the palace museum itself.

Nineveh is not the only Assyrian site that has suffered. In fall 1996, a London antiquities dealer was circulating a photograph that showed an unusual unpublished sculpture from the palace of king Tiglath-pileser III at Nimrud, Iraq (Fig. 20). This large fragment shows two Assyrian courtiers facing left, and apparently joins to a smaller fragment in the Louvre that shows the king facing right towards them (Barnett & Falkner 1962, pl. 22). Further investigation revealed that the new piece had been excavated and photographed by the Polish archaeological expedition at Nimrud in 1975. The sculpture has not yet been published, due to the untimely death of the excavator in 1976, but a photograph of it was shown at a major scholarly meeting, the *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, in Berlin in 1978. After its excavation, the sculpture was stored in the Iraq Antiquities Department house on the site of Nimrud, Iraq. There was no record that it had left Iraq legally, but here it was on the market.

In May 1997, I saw a dealer's photograph of another Tiglath-pileser fragment, showing an

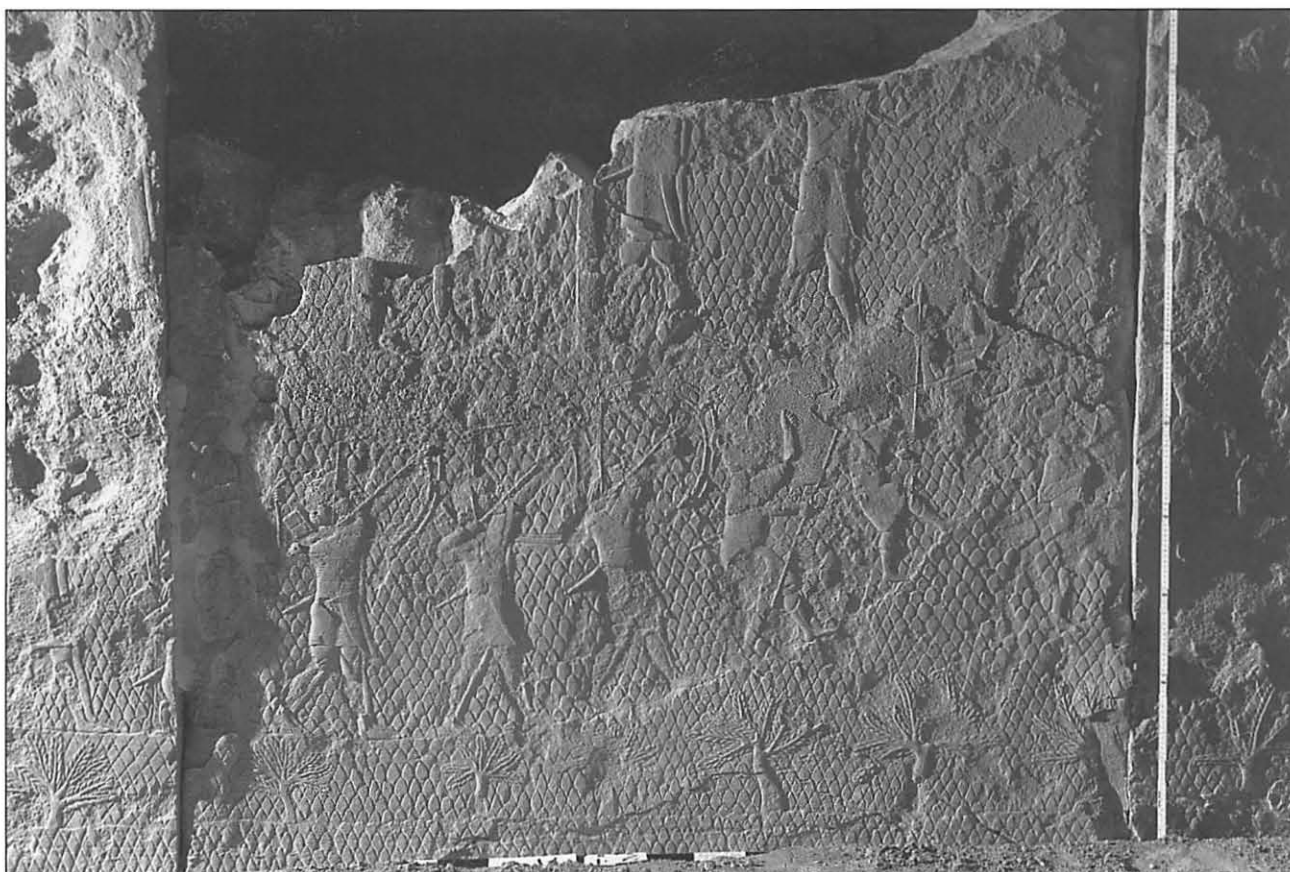


Figure 16. *Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room V, Slab 16, view of full slab before looting, width 187 cm. (Photo: author.)*



Figure 17. *Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room V, Slab 16, detail. (Photo: author.)*



Figure 18. *Looted fragment, Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room V, Slab 16, a pair of archers drawing their bows, 30 x 17.5 cm. (From a photocopy.)*

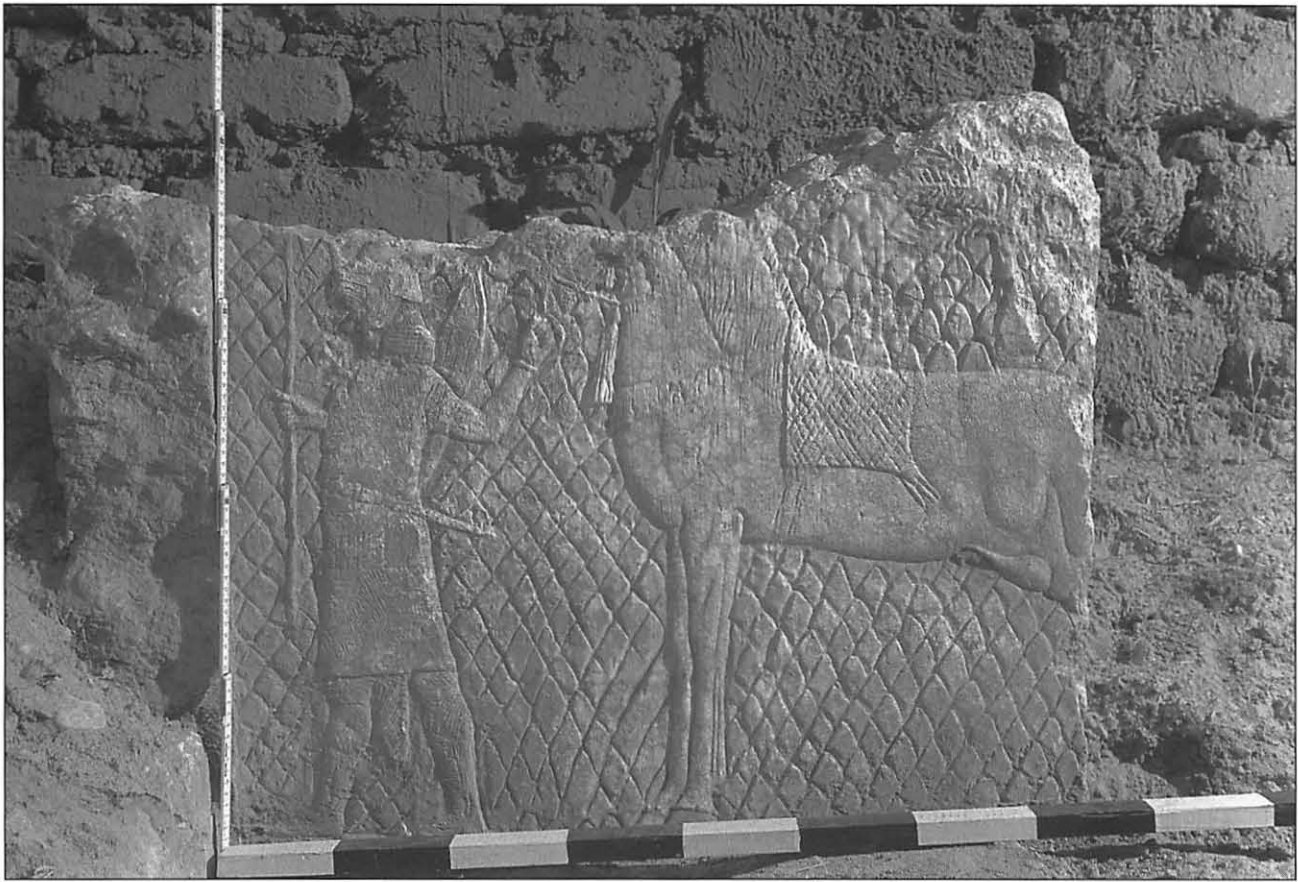


Figure 19. *Nineveh, Southwest Palace, Room IV, Slab 8, view of full slab before looting, width 76 cm. (Photo: author.)*

Assyrian soldier in a chariot facing left (Fig. 21). The slab from which it came had been excavated, drawn, and reburied by Layard (Barnett & Falkner 1962, pl. 9), and then re-excavated and published by the Polish expedition (Fig. 22). Unfortunately, the piece on the market was only the left half of the slab — as with the Sennacherib examples, this large, well-preserved slab had been broken up, presumably for greater portability or to disguise its resemblance to the published photograph. Certainly anyone who desires to purchase a recently-smuggled piece of an Assyrian palace should have no difficulty locating one. And such high-profile documented Assyrian sculptures are only the tip of the iceberg. Thousands of smaller antiquities, especially cuneiform clay tablets and stone cylinder seals, have left Iraq illegally in the years since the Gulf War. One collector observed that in the last few years there has been a tremendous increase in the quality, as well as quantity, of Iraqi antiquities on the market.

Why is this happening now? Iraq has a rich and varied heritage, and this heritage has been coveted by the West since the nineteenth-century heyday of imperial acquisition. Then, ‘like the

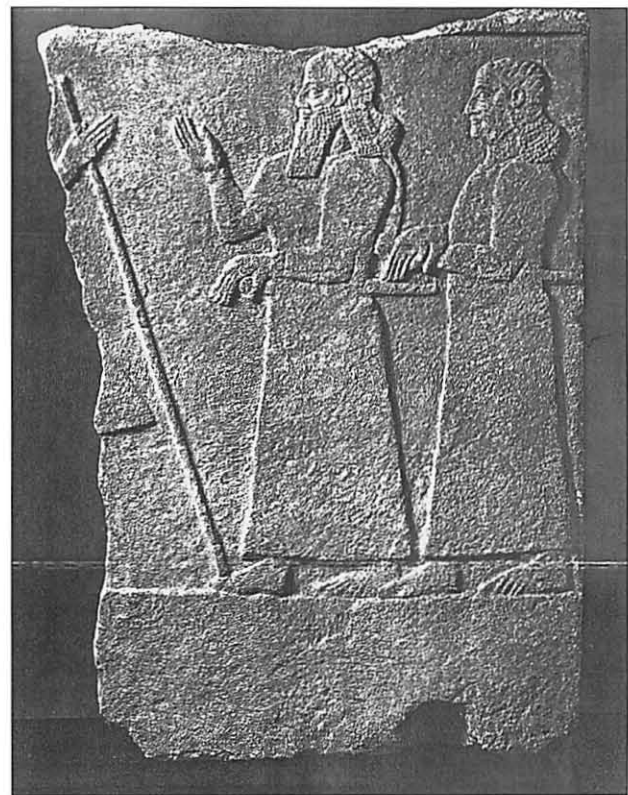


Figure 20. *Looted fragment, Nimrud, Palace of Tiglath-pileser III, courtiers facing the king. (From a photocopy.)*

wolf on the fold’, representatives of European governments descended on the palaces of Meso-



Figure 21. Looted fragment, Nimrud, Palace of Tiglath-pileser III, Assyrian chariot facing left. (From a photocopy.)

potamia and sacked them to fill the halls of the British Museum, the Louvre, and the Berlin Museum. Numerous sculptured slabs found their way into smaller collections in England and America as well. The most spectacular of these was a group of 26 Assyrian sculptures, including two human-headed lion and bull colossi, which were presented by Layard to his cousin, Lady Charlotte Guest, a distinguished scholar of Welsh literature, mother of ten, and wife of one of the wealthiest industrialists in England. She displayed them at her home, Canford Manor in Dorset, in the Nineveh Porch, a Gothic Revival garden pavilion built especially for them by Charles Barry, the architect of the Houses of Parliament. The bulk of this collection is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Their story is told in my new book, *From Nineveh to New York: the Strange Story of the Assyrian Reliefs in the Metropolitan Museum and the Hidden Masterpiece at Canford School* (Yale

University Press, 1997).

Today Assyria is in fashion again, and its sculptures are bringing unprecedented prices. In 1992, while doing research for the new book, I discovered an original sculpture still in place in the Nineveh Porch at Canford, now Canford School. In 1994 this sculpture was sold by the school at auction for £7.7 million, by far the highest price ever paid for an antiquity. To protect and promote its irreplaceable heritage in the face of such powerful market forces, modern Iraq has an excellent antiquities department, and the people of Iraq have a very high level of pride in their national heritage. Before the Gulf War, very few antiquities left Iraq, because every Iraqi carefully guarded that heritage. This attitude is essential for a country that possesses hundreds of major archaeological sites and tens of thousands of smaller ones. Even in the best of times, it would be impossible to guard all these sites without the co-operation of the Iraqi people.



Figure 22. Nimrud, Palace of Tiglath-pileser III, chariot followed by two soldiers, with a tree and archer at right. (After Sobolewski 1982, fig. 12.)

The United Nations sanctions against Iraq have caused unprecedented perils for Iraq's heritage while forbidding any form of outside assistance within the borders of Iraq in heritage matters. Because of the sanctions, little money is available in Iraq for the preservation of antiquities, at the same time that newly impoverished Iraqis, squeezed between ruinous inflation and critical shortages of basic necessities, have been forced to seek new sources of subsistence income. For antiquities and heritage, the combination of local desperation and international demand is a recipe for disaster. Some Iraqis with nothing left to sell have evidently turned to selling off bits of Iraq's rich heritage. These relatively small fragments would be easy to conceal and smuggle out of Iraq, most likely through the Kurdish territory only a few miles to the north of Mosul, but also through Iran, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, or Saudi Arabia. They are then apparently warehoused until a buyer can be located.

There is no evidence that Iraqi officials are involved in these thefts. Instead, this appears to be disorganized pilfering, probably carried out by

impoverished locals, and the sculptural fragments are very likely sold for a pittance, since such well-known pieces have no value on the international market. 'Like the wolf on the fold', the United Nations sanctions against Iraq have finally destroyed Sennacherib's palace, finishing the work begun by the ancient Medes and Babylonians who sacked Nineveh in 612 BC. To be sure, market and political forces are also at work here, but the fact remains that without the sanctions, this destruction would not have happened.

The Iraq Department of Antiquities and Heritage has responded by actively trying to staunch the flow of antiquities out of the country, but has been severely constrained by a limited budget, its inability to import photographic supplies (forbidden by the sanctions) or outside technical and scholarly expertise, and by the absence of international co-operation. Inside Iraq, the department is reportedly spending large sums — \$500,000 in 1996 — in a successful campaign of paying rewards to Iraqis who turn in stolen antiquities. This diligence is paying off. Early this year, the head of a colossal sculpture at Khorsabad

was hacked from its body. A few months later the head was recovered still in Iraq, cut into 11 pieces to facilitate smuggling. Some 40,000 artefacts have reportedly been recovered in Iraq, but thousands more have left the country.

The Iraq Antiquities Department has much less influence outside Iraq. This was highlighted by a recent case where British customs officials seized a number of boxes of antiquities apparently looted from archaeological sites in Iraq. Though British experts confirmed the Iraqi origin of the pieces, the court returned them to the shipper, despite the U.N. sanctions' prohibition on imports from Iraq, and regardless of the provisions of the 1970 UNESCO *Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property* and the 1995 UNIDROIT *Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects*, both of which provide for the repatriation of looted cultural property. It appears that to avoid such reversals in the future, Iraq will need to hire a lawyer who is a match for the ones working for the market.

Foreign specialists are anxious to collaborate with Iraqi colleagues in the protection and preservation of Iraq's heritage, but because of the sanctions, opportunities are limited. Before the Gulf War, the British School of Archaeology in Iraq maintained a beautiful expedition house in Baghdad. Many archaeologists, both British and foreign, enjoyed the warm hospitality, great food, and excellent library of this residential facility. Following the imposition of the U.N. sanctions in 1990, all foreign archaeological fieldwork in Iraq ceased. British School officers were allowed to make brief visits to Iraq to check on the house in 1992, but in 1993 the British Academy and Foreign Office issued a firm recommendation against further official visits by School members. In 1995, the library was moved out of the expedition house, which was deteriorating alarmingly due to termites, and in 1996 the house was permanently abandoned.

The Americans had a similarly discouraging experience. In early 1990, the newly-founded American Association for Research in Iraq was preparing to establish its own residential facility in Baghdad, which would have been the first long-term American research presence in Iraq. A

residence and director had already been selected when these plans were terminated by the sanctions. Going well beyond the restrictions of the sanctions, the American government prohibits even private visits by its citizens to Iraq. The American and British organizations, prevented from working in Iraq, began publishing *Lost Heritage*, a continuing series of fascicles that publish photographs and descriptions of the 4000 objects looted from Iraq's regional museums during the uprisings following the Gulf War. To date, three volumes have appeared in the series.

Today the Sennacherib Palace site museum at Nineveh represents a world heritage disaster of the first magnitude. Immediate emergency conservation measures are required to preserve what remains of its sculptures. One might think that international support for such a crucial undertaking could be readily obtained, but the obstacles appear insurmountable. The same United Nations sanctions that have contributed to the destruction of the palace museum also prohibit any form of outside cultural assistance to Iraq. Though the U.N. Sanctions Committee treats humanitarian assistance as an exception to the sanctions, no such exception has been allowed for the preservation of heritage. International teams from cultural organizations such as UNESCO have repeatedly been denied permission by the Sanctions Committee to assess damage and threats to the cultural heritage of Iraq in the wake of the Gulf War, despite the urgent need for documentation and conservation of Iraqi heritage due to wartime damage, post-war looting, and emergency agricultural development. This hostility reflects a widespread perception in the West that modern Iraq has no significant heritage, even though the West claims ancient Iraq, the 'Cradle of Civilization', as the foundation of its own heritage. This heritage disaster also highlights the role of the West as a myopic consumer of heritage, rather than cherishing it as a vanishing irreplaceable shared resource.

A giant step forward would be for the U.S. government and the U.N. Sanctions Committee to treat threats to cultural heritage as a humanitarian issue. Only with their permission can outside specialists participate in on-site assessments of damage, or collaborate in necessary conservation and preservation measures. The

1954 Hague *Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict*, and the 1970 UNESCO and 1995 Unidroit conventions are a good beginning, but the existing conventions make no provision for the protection of heritage against the effects of economic warfare, even though in the case of Iraq, the isolation and impoverishment wrought by prolonged trade sanctions and travel restrictions has led to far greater devastation of heritage than the armed conflict did. Today, the sanctions hold heritage hostage to a political agenda, facilitating its exploitation by outside market forces.

The present location of most of the looted Assyrian fragments is unknown. Anyone who is offered them for purchase is requested to notify the seller that the sculptures were removed illegally from Iraq, and to ask the seller to turn them over to an Iraqi embassy or interests section, Interpol, or to a customs agency, so that they may be returned to Iraq. Potential buyers of Assyrian sculptures should be aware that very few such pieces appear legitimately on the market, and that many more fragments may have been smuggled out of Iraq. Any Assyrian relief fragment should be treated with great caution.

Charles E. Jones has provided the following publication information for the first three fascicles of *Lost Heritage*, which are available, for a limited period, free of charge, by writing to the publisher of each fascicle:

Gibson, M. & A. McMahon, 1992. *Lost Heritage: Antiquities Stolen from Iraq's Regional Museums*, fascicle I. Chicago (IL): American Association for Research in Baghdad. 1 volume (xii + 54 pages [illustrated]).
available from: American Association for Research in Baghdad, 1155 East 58th St, Chicago IL 60637, USA.

Baker, H.D., R.J. Matthews, J.N. Postgate, 1993. *Lost Heritage: Antiquities Stolen from Iraq's Regional Museums*, fascicle 2. London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq. 1 volume (viii + 153 pages [illustrated]). ISBN: 0-903472-14-7.
available from: The British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 30-31 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY, UK.

Fujii, H. & K. Oguchi, 1996. *Lost Heritage: Antiquities Stolen from Iraq's Regional Museums*, fascicle 3. Tokyo: Institute for Cultural Studies of Ancient Iraq, Kokushikan University. 1 volume (xxi + 43 pages [illustrated]).

available from: Hideo Fujii, The Institute for Cultural Studies of Ancient Iraq, Kokushikan University, 844 Hirohakama, Machida, Tokyo, 195 JAPAN.

References

- Barnett, R.D. & M. Falkner, 1962. *The Sculptures of Assurnasir-apli II (883-859 BC), Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BC), Esarhaddon (681-669 BC) from the Central and South-west Palaces at Nimrud*. London: British Museum.
- Jones, C.E., 1996. Stolen Iraqi antiquities, Oriental Institute ANEnews web site, 31 December 1996, archived at www-oi.uchicago.edu/OI/ANE/ANENEWS-DIGEST/1996/v.1996.n015.
- Layard, A.H., 1849. *Nineveh and its Remains*. London: John Murray.
- Madhloom, T., 1976. *Nineveh*. (Historical Monuments in Iraq 4.) Baghdad: Directorate General of Antiquities.
- Paley, S.M., 1997. Nimrud and Nineveh again: documented bas-reliefs from Iraq offered in the West. *International Fine Art Reports* 18/6, 4-6.
- Russell, J.M., 1991. *Sennacherib's Palace Without Rival at Nineveh*. Chicago (IL): University of Chicago Press.
- Russell, J.M., 1996. Loss of wall reliefs from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, Iraq. *International Fine Art Reports* 17/5, 6-7.
- Russell, J.M., 1997. *From Nineveh to New York*. London: Yale University Press.
- Smith, G., 1875. *Assyrian Discoveries*. London: S. Low, Marston, Low, & Searle.
- Sobolewski, R., 1982. The Polish work at Nimrud: ten years of excavation and study. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 71, 248-73.
- Thompson, R.C. & R.W. Hutchinson, 1929. *A Century of Exploration at Nineveh*. London: Luzac & Co.
- Watson, P., 1997. Stolen biblical gems touted in London. *The Observer* 18 May, 8.
- Watson, P., 1997. Nineveh 'Palace without Rival' looted. *International Fine Art Reports* 18/5, 6-7.

John Malcolm Russell
Department of Art History and Archaeology
826 Schermerhorn Hall
Columbia University
New York, NY 10027
USA

Returned antiquities: a case for changing legislation

ERICA C.D. HUNTER

The embargo which was imposed on Iraq following the termination of the Gulf War in 1991 has had far-reaching consequences on the archaeology of Iraq. Prior to the Gulf War, a black-market trade in antiquities was almost unheard of. Now the situation has made a complete turn-about. Countless clandestine excavations are in force, and there are substantiated reports of museums and libraries, as well as monasteries, being looted of their contents. These disturbing events point to the activities of an international 'mafia', well organized and with a network of connections both within and without Iraq that extends to London and other European cities.

Antiquities, whose only provenance can be Iraq, are known to have arrived in London, often in transit to Switzerland and New York among other destinations. In this trade, London has a central and pivotal importance, being the place where consultations and valuations are made, often by members of the scholarly community. It is not surprising or unusual to find a whole range of antiquities in many dealer's shops in Portobello Road and Davies Mews near Bond Street. Other antiquities never appear 'on the market', but are commissioned by wealthy patrons who specify particular pieces and are willing to pay exorbitant amounts to procure them. It is possible that the famous Bacchus relief, designated a world heritage by the World Heritage Convention, which was stolen from Hatra in 1994 was removed 'to order'.

Heathrow Airport is the entry point for many antiquities. In late 1994, careful surveillance by H.M. Dept. of Customs and Excise led to four boxes being apprehended, apparently due to an irregularity in labelling. When opened, this consignment included cuneiform tablets, terracotta figurines, carinated plainware pottery and incantation bowls. The physical characteristics of the seventeen incantation bowls are typical of the genre, as are the decorative attributes,

palaeography and texts. Four of them were written in Mandaic, and eight in Aramaic with the remaining five being in 'pseudo-script'. This breakdown of script suggests that the specimens come from a single location within Mesopotamia, where all substantiated sites for incantation bowls have, to date, been located.

H.M. Dept. of Customs and Excise planned to prosecute the Jordanian woman to whom the boxes were addressed. In response to their request, I examined the incantation bowls and prepared a detailed report in early 1995 and on two later occasions I was asked to furnish statements about the incantation bowls. In late 1996, when I had heard no further news I telephoned the investigating officer who informed me that the four boxes had to be returned to the importer because of loopholes in the legislation, The Jordanian woman, the daughter of a well-known antiquities dealer, had refused to accept the boxes, which had at that stage been impounded, and because she did not accept them prosecution could not proceed. The legal issue is concerned with people trading in goods, not goods *per se*. It is not sufficient that the consignment was illegal, someone had to claim it.

The U.K. legislation governing the importation of goods from Iraq is based on the Statutory Instruments of the U.N. Sanctions Orders on Iraq and Kuwait (nos. 1768, 2144) which are ratified by Parliament. The root of the problem does not lie, however, with the Statutory Instruments but rather with The United Nations Sanctions Orders on Iraq and Kuwait. One of the first tasks confronting scholars concerned about illegal antiquities from Iraq should be effecting changes in the U.N. Sanctions laws to close this loophole. This has been done in the subsequent legislation which was drawn up in response to the Bosnian situation. An international body of scholars should continue to petition for changes to the Sanctions Orders on Iraq and Kuwait, for only when this has been achieved can the Statutory Instruments be amended.

Legislative changes would not stem the haemorrhaging of antiquities from Iraq, but at least it would allow illicit goods to be seized upon their arrival in the U.K. and not just returned as happened, but returned to their rightful owners. The situation described above is only a single

instance where an illegal consignment was apprehended. How many others have not been detected is anybody's guess, as is the whereabouts of the incantation bowls, and the rest of the material which were given back to the Jordanian woman. Perhaps they will one day surface in the collection of a museum where, under the guise of legitimate ownership, they will be published by renowned scholars to the accolades of their colleagues. More probably, by now these antiquities are part of the holdings of private collectors where their contribution to scholarship

will be, almost certainly, lost.

Any persons interested in setting up a committee to petition for changes to the Sanctions Orders on Iraq and Kuwait should contact the author.

Erica C.D. Hunter
Department of Middle Eastern Studies
University of Manchester
Oxford Road
Manchester
M13 9PL

Short notes

The problem of the illegal antiquities trade with respect to Iraq is two-fold. In the first instance there are items excavated prior to the Gulf War which were stored or displayed in the regional museums; some of these museums were looted in the aftermath of the war and objects from them occasionally appear on the antiquities market. In the second instance, there are items which have probably been illegally excavated since the Gulf War and which are now appearing on the market. There is unfortunately little we can do about this latter category of items, since proof of prior ownership by Iraq is elusive and would be based on art historical analysis (or internal textual evidence in the case of tablets) and on the absence of evidence for legitimate ownership, none of which are convincing in the context of legal proceedings. For those items for which there are Iraq Museum accession numbers and independent excavation records, the situation is theoretically simple. The three fascicles of *Lost Heritage* give lists, descriptions, and some illustrations of all the objects which were known to have been looted from Iraq's regional museums at the end of 1991; but recovery is regrettably hampered by admittedly poor-quality photographs and gaps in documentation. Only a few items have been successfully identified and recovered using those volumes, and there is disturbing evidence that the lists in those volumes are incomplete.

Confirmation of this problem comes from the sighting in London of a Neo-Assyrian cuneiform tablet excavated by Sir Max Mallowan in 1956 from the site of Balawat, in northern Iraq. This tablet (excavation number BT 125) had been in the possession of the Iraq Museum and was published by Barbara Parker in the journal *Iraq* 25 (1963), 97–8 and pl. XXV. Another tablet seen on the same occasion has been tentatively identified as coming from Tell al-Fakhar, a site in northeastern Iraq. It is also very likely to have been stolen from one of the regional museums in Iraq.

In a separate incident, a basalt door- or gate-socket was offered to the Merrin Gallery in New York, which wisely made inquiries of the British Museum as to the legitimacy of the object's ownership. The door-socket dates to the Isin-Larsa Period and has a two-column inscription of Shulishu, second king of the Isin dynasty; it is one of a pair excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley at Ur in the 1922–23 season (excavation number U. 421 and Iraq Museum accession number IM 373) and was published by C.J. Gadd and L. Legrain in *Ur Excavation Texts*, vol. I (1928, British Museum & The University Museum of Pennsylvania), no. 100, pl. N. The size and weight of this piece, which is approximately half a metre across by 22 cm thick, indicate that it must have been shipped to the US as freight, rather than hand-carried, and moved undetected through customs.

There has also been a report from Dr Muayad Damerji, the Director General of Antiquities and Heritage in Iraq, that the head of a recently-excavated human-headed bull from the palace at Khorsabad, which had been left *in situ*, was broken off and stolen. Its size and easy recognizability would make it difficult to sell on the open market and it is likely that it was stolen 'to order'. Fortunately, it has been found (in a garden in Mosul); but in the course of its removal it had apparently cracked into two pieces, and then it was further sawn and chiselled into a total of eleven pieces for easier transport and concealment. It is now in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad awaiting restoration. An unknown number of relief heads from the site of Hatra have also been stolen, with the result that many of the sculptures remaining *in situ* have been plastered over or hidden behind temporary walls in the effort to preserve them.

The Department of Antiquities and Heritage in Iraq is gradually achieving increased success in encouraging individuals who find antiquities to bring them to the Iraq Museum rather than selling or exporting them. A system of rewards has been put in place by the government; and the site of Tell an-Namil, where the Antiquities Department is currently conducting excavations, was brought to their attention by an individual bringing in pottery uncovered in the course of agricultural work. It should be noted that one of the effects of the economic embargo on Iraq has been a necessary increase in the area of land brought under cultivation, with the inevitable result that more sites are being encountered and damaged by ploughing and irrigation, and more undocumented artefacts are being uncovered. The so-called 'Third River', a deep drainage channel between the Tigris and Euphrates,

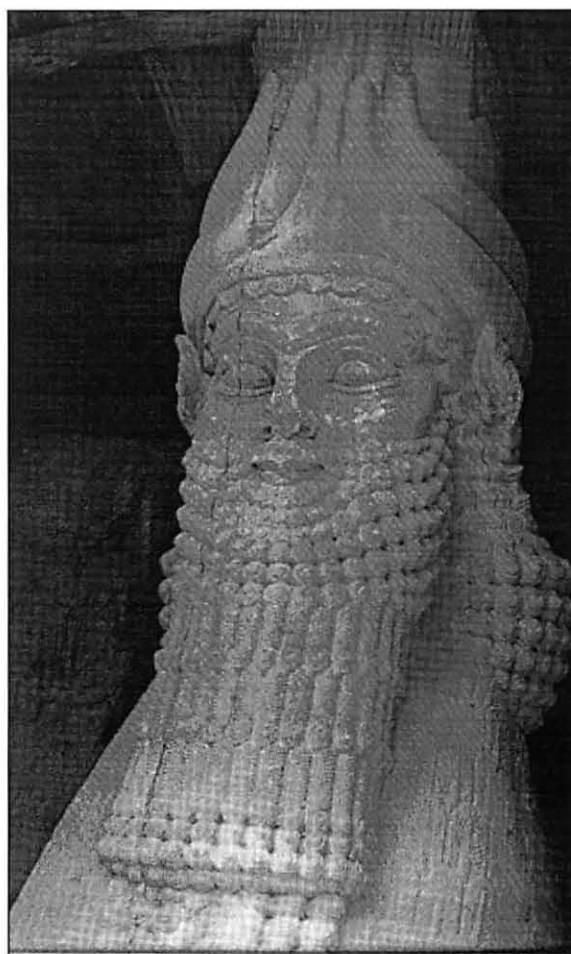


Figure 1. Human-headed bull from Khorsabad, before theft.

which was engineered to remove brackish water resulting from irrigation in northern Babylonia and to expel it into marshes near the Gulf, is apparently now being used, *contra* its original intention, for irrigation of new fields which have expanded into the formerly dune-covered centre of the country. When the channel was dug in 1989 and 1990, it revealed a number of completely buried and hitherto unknown single-period sites, and these and other already-registered sites in this area are now under severe threat of destruction as more farmers move into the area.

Illicit Antiquities Research Centre

Statement of Intent

The Illicit Antiquities Research Centre has been established in response to concerns expressed about the loss to our knowledge of the past caused by the illicit excavation of archaeological sites. It intends to:

1. Raise public awareness in Britain and internationally about this issue and seek appropriate national and international legislation, codes of conduct and other conventions to place restraint upon it;
2. Monitor the sale and transfer of illicit antiquities within the UK and raise public awareness of the scale of such sale and transfer overseas;
3. Develop an overview of the national and international legislation bearing on these issues;
4. Argue, as a provisional measure, for the widespread adoption of the central tenet of the 1970 UNESCO convention on the illicit transfer of cultural property, that unprovenanced artefacts which cannot be shown to have been known and published prior to 1970 should be regarded as illicit and should not be acquired by public collections whether by purchase, gift or bequest nor exhibited by them on long- or short-term loan and should not be purchased by responsible private collectors. It should be recognized, however, that local or national museums may on occasion be the appropriate repository for such unprovenanced objects as can be shown with reasonable confidence to have originated within the territory of their responsibility.
5. Seek agreement among national organizations and museums in the UK on the appropriate policy for such bodies to adopt on the acquisition, display and publication of unprovenanced artefacts;
6. Seek to cooperate with dealers and auction houses in furthering the evolution towards the understanding of such issues and the adherence to appropriate practices;
7. Work with the Council for British Archaeology and other British bodies to encourage the application of appropriate principles to portable antiquities originating within the United Kingdom;
8. Investigate and make known illicit activities relating to antiquities in the Near East, Egypt and Asia Minor and to publish such information in the periodical *Culture without Context*;
9. Select such other geographical areas for comparable investigation and publication as may be practicable;
10. Establish working relationships with data-search organizations relating to stolen antiquities (i.e. antiquities which formed part of a recognized collection from which they were stolen) as well as illicitly excavated antiquities which have not, so far as is known, been recognized as forming part of a public collection or a major and well documented private collection;
11. Promote educational measures which will stimulate and develop respect for the archaeological heritage of all nations.