

## EDITORIAL

This issue of *Iraq* once again sees a good mix of junior and senior scholars, as well as several articles authored or co-authored by Iraqi colleagues. Assyrian reliefs are once again well represented, as is the topic of Assyrian identity, which has become popular in recent issues. We are particularly pleased to welcome publications of cuneiform tablets from the Iraq Museum and it is great to see articles which combine archaeological with philological methodologies and subject-matters. The articles in this year's issue cover our usual wide chronological range from prehistory to the Parthians, present recent archaeological research and textual analysis, and address research questions of resource recycling, cross-regional exchange and contact, administrative structures, and material culture traditions. We hope you enjoy reading and consulting these for years to come.

After a number of inquiries and discussions with the Editorial Board we here clarify our policy on publishing unprovenanced antiquities from Iraq. Our basic policy is that we do not do this, although exceptions may be made for the frequently unprovenanced collections of the British Museum and for other older museum collections, as well as for any museum collection in Iraq. We will not publish artefacts that are likely to have been unearthed illicitly in Iraq after 1970 and are kept in museums or other collections outside of that country.

Again, in response to queries, and in order to support authors who might wish to publish full text editions that stretch our word limits, we are planning a dedicated *Iraq* page on Oracc, on which such data-rich materials may be placed. Any supplementary data deposited there will have a specific Oracc designation number, be attributed to the author, and will be widely accessible. We thank Professor Eleanor Robson for initiating and developing this feature.

The covid-19 epidemic has limited archaeological excavations across the globe this year, including in Iraq, so we have not included our usual summary of Current Projects. However, colleagues from the Suleimaniyah Museum have been engaged in rescue excavations ahead of a planned motorway in the region; Kurdish members of the Erbil Plain Archaeological Survey team have mapped and collected more sites; colleagues from the University of al-Qadissiyah and SBAH have conducted a survey of irrigation channels west of Nasiriyah; colleagues and students at the University of Babylon are excavating at Dilbat, including an exciting project analysing bitumen samples for provenance and implications about trade networks; and a new Iraqi–Italian project at Nineveh has commenced. The shift of teaching and conferences online has had a positive effect in fostering greater interaction among colleagues across Iraq, Europe and the Americas, without the usual roadblocks of visa applications and travel expenses. We are particularly pleased that it is especially our Iraqi colleagues who have been leading the way in this movement towards online conferencing.

We were saddened to learn of the recent death of our colleague Emeritus Professor David Stronach, of the Near Eastern Studies Department at the University of California, Berkeley. David spent much of his career in Iran until 1979, directing our sister institution in Tehran, the British Institute of Persian Studies, while excavating at the important Median and Achaemenid sites of Nush-i Jan and Pasargadae. In Iraq, he excavated at Nimrud with Max Mallowan and later directed excavations at Nineveh in the late 1980s. An obituary will appear in the next issue of the journal.

As the journal went to press, the news of the closing of the Ancient Near Eastern Studies programmes at SOAS (University of London) was made public. We particularly deplore the early forced retirement of Professor Andrew George, who edited the journal from 1995 to 2012 and whose contributions to our field are immense. We recognise that it is becoming more and more difficult for small subjects like cuneiform studies to survive in the currently market-oriented funding environment at UK universities, where small institutions such as SOAS are almost entirely dependent on student fees for survival. London without cuneiform studies seems unimaginable or even preposterous, given the huge cuneiform collections of the British Museum. It is to be hoped that some way will be found to put the subject on a firm footing in the capital for the foreseeable future, meaning that it will need to be protected against further financial vicissitudes. Whether this can ever be possible under the current funding system for universities in the UK remains to be seen.

As usual, we extend our warmest thanks to our Editorial Board members and to Craig Baxter and Olivia Hassall at Cambridge University Press for their support and the efficient processing of articles. We owe many thanks to Saadi al-Timimi for translating the abstracts into Arabic. And we are indebted to all colleagues who have cheerfully and promptly reviewed articles during this unusual year.

AUGUSTA MCMAHON AND MARK WEEDEN