

## EDITORIAL

Last year saw the BSAI celebrate its seventy-fifth anniversary. This was marked at the AGM by a unanimous vote to change our name to the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (Gertrude Bell Memorial), or BISI for short, and by the adoption of a new set of regulations. While our traditional focus on ancient Iraq remains in place, the new remit highlights the value of studying Iraqi heritage, culture and society across a wider range of disciplines and time periods. BISI members now have the option to subscribe to the *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, in addition to *Iraq*. The anniversary AGM was commemorated with a lecture on “Mesopotamian Discovery: 75 years of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq” by the new Chairman, Professor Roger Matthews.

\* \* \*

The lecture programme this year has been very busy, with a particular emphasis on recent and current events in Iraq, five years after the invasion. On 5 December 2007 Rory Stewart, former Deputy Governor of Maysan and Dhi Qar Provinces and author of *Occupational Hazards*, gave a BSAI Appeal Talk on “My Time Governing in Iraq”. On 13 March Professor Charles Tripp discussed: “What Can Iraq’s History Tell us about its Future?” On 22 April Professor Olivier Rouault lectured on “The Excavations of the Syrian-French Archaeological Mission at Ashara-Terqa in Syria”, co-sponsored by UCL Institute of Archaeology. On 27 May at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Dr Abbas Al-Hussainy (Al-Qadissiyah University) and Professor Roger Matthews (UCL) presented “The Present State of Archaeological Heritage in Iraq”. On 11 June Professor Elizabeth Stone gave the BISI Bonham Carter Lecture on “The View from Above — Site Damage in Southern Iraq and Prospects for Understanding Mesopotamian Settlement Patterning”. On 19 June William Dalrymple delivered to a full house a BISI Appeal talk on “From the Holy Mountain: A Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium”, held jointly with the British Museum’s Department of the Middle East. On 18 September Sir Hilary Synnott, the Coalition Provisional Authority’s Regional Coordinator for Southern Iraq from July 2003 until January 2004, gave a BISI Appeal talk on his experiences and his book *Bad Days in Basra*. The 2008 BISI AGM will take place on 11 December, followed by Professor James W. Allan’s lecture on “The Shrines of the Shi’i Imams: Najaf, Kerbala and Kazimayn”.

\* \* \*

This year BISI has allocated research grants as follows: to Dr Joan Oates and Dr Augusta McMahon for Tell Brak Excavations; to Dr Lisa Cooper for work on the “Archaeological Achievements of Gertrude Bell” (Dr Cooper presented a paper on her research at the BRISMES conference “Do We Understand the Middle East?” in April); to Dr Marie-Christine Ludwig to assist in the publication of the literary texts from Woolley’s excavations at Ur; to Dr Lloyd Weeks to co-sponsor with the Society for Arabian Studies a conference on “Death, Burial and the Transition to the Afterlife in Arabia and Adjacent Regions”, to take place on 27–29 November 2008 at the British Museum; to Dr Harriet Crawford, Dr Augusta McMahon and Professor J. N. Postgate to support a conference in Cambridge “Preludes to Urbanism: Early Complexity and Material Change in the Ancient Near East” in honour of Dr Joan Oates’ eightieth birthday; to Dr Konrad and Dr Dahmi for the “Samarrafinds” Project. Reports on the grants will be published in forthcoming BISI newsletters.

In May 2008 Dr Erica Hunter organised the fifth in the Christianity in Iraq seminar series: “The Syriac Bible and its Heritage in Iraq”, co-sponsored by BISI, the Department for the Study of Religions, SOAS, and the Anglican and Eastern Churches Association.

\* \* \*

The Development Committee has ensured a busy programme of outreach activities this year. In February a very successful joint Birkbeck and BISI study day on “The Sumerians: Iraq’s First Civilization” was organised by Dr Frances Reynolds. This was the third in the Mesopotamia series. The fourth, organised by Dr Mariana Giovino and Frans van Koppen and co-sponsored

by the Egypt Exploration Society, will take place on 7 February 2009: “From Babylon to Amarna: Ancient Middle Eastern Interactions in the Days of Akhenaten”. In September two workshops, one student-oriented and another family-oriented, were hosted by the Holborn Community Development Project, with support from the Enheduanna Society, Birkbeck College Faculty of Lifelong Learning and the British Institute for the Study of Iraq, and with the collaboration of the British Museum.

\* \* \*

Under the leadership of Mr Peter Davies the Appeal committee has brought the total raised to date to almost £135,000 (with interest and gift aid). During the past year we have been fortunate to have been involved in bringing to the UK Dr Abbas Al Hussainy, Chair of the Department of Archaeology at Al-Qadissiyah University, and Mr Hikmat Bashir, Director of the Mosul Museum, who will visit again later this year. BISI is also co-sponsoring the research leave of a senior Iraqi anthropologist at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, during the 2008/2009 academic year and the visit of an Iraqi artist for a residency at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park organised by ArtRole. The Institute is very grateful for the continued generosity of donors.

\* \* \*

This year BISI will publish at least three new volumes: *New Light on Nimrud — Proceedings of the Nimrud Conference 11th–13th March 2002*, edited by J. E. Curtis, H. McCall, D. Collon and L. al-Gailani Werr; *Ivories from Nimrud VI — Ivories from the North West Palace (1845–1992)*, by G. Herrmann, S. Laidlaw with H. Coffey; and *Once There Was a Place: Settlement Archaeology at Chagar Bazar, 1999–2002* by A. McMahon. A further two volumes are in an advanced state of preparation: *Archaeological Atlas of Samarra (Samarra Studies II)*, by A. Northedge and D. Kennet; and Dr Campbell’s report on Diana Kirkbride’s excavations at Umm Dabaghiyah. The ongoing publication of Nimrud ivories has been assisted this year by a fee received for the loan of twelve of our Nimrud ivories to the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris, for an exhibition “Les Phéniciens et la Méditerranée, de Tyr à Carthage”, which took place from November 2007 to April 2008.

After twenty-five years of tireless service Dr Dominique Collon stood down from Council this year, but happily she remains co-editor of *Iraq*, alongside Professor Andrew George. Dr Jon Taylor now chairs the Publications Committee. Since July this year *Iraq* has been available online on JSTOR: <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublication?journalCode=iraq>. Starting with the 2009 issue, all articles in this journal will have Arabic summaries.

\* \* \*

The attention of the editors of *Iraq* has been directed to an assertion in a newly issued book that an article which this journal published eight years ago (J. E. Reade, “Alexander the Great and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon”, *Iraq* 62: 195–218), “is a spoof” (S. Dalley, *Esther’s Revenge at Susa: From Sennacherib to Ahasuerus*. Oxford University Press, 2008: 25 fn. 40). Professor Reade’s article is a serious contribution to academic knowledge; the editors reject Dr Dalley’s assertion as completely without foundation.

\* \* \*

Professor Donald Wiseman served the British School of Archaeology in Iraq, as it then was, for half a century, successively as epigrapher on the School’s excavations at Nimrud and Tell al-Rimah, Joint Director of its activities in Iraq, editor of the journal, Chairman and President. Twenty years ago the School expressed its appreciation by dedicating the fiftieth volume of *Iraq* jointly to Professor Wiseman and the late Lady Mallowan, who had just completed their seventieth and eightieth years respectively. It is appropriate, as the journal itself achieves its seventieth issue and Professor Wiseman reaches ninety, again to record the Institute’s gratitude for his long years of service.