

dition of the throne-room reliefs when he viewed them in 1989, deterioration which came primarily from exposure. He advocates removal to a museum or careful re-burial as the only ways to preservation, but there are strong arguments for retention of the reliefs in their proper context, and for allowing them to be viewed there, worthy ideals which are difficult to reconcile with the equally worthy ideal of conservation of the reliefs as art. Dr Russell outlines his plan for an intensive measuring and photographic recording of the monuments remaining in Sennacherib's throne room before they were completely destroyed. This project was only in its initial stages when it was overtaken by the events of 1990–91.

The second phase of the final sack occurred in the aftermath of the Gulf War. And there is finally no ambiguity. It was destruction, and it is illegal according to local and international laws. In 1995 and again in 1996, Dr Russell was shown photographs of 12 Assyrian relief fragments which had clearly been removed from Sennacherib's palace or a nearby storage room and were being offered for sale on the international antiquities market. He already had photographs of the some of the same reliefs *in situ*; and in 1997, Dr Muayad Damerji, then Director-General of the Iraqi Department of Antiquities, documented the further destruction at the site (broken slabs, gaps where entire slabs had been removed) and sent the photographs to Dr Russell. Concern for and care of Iraq's cultural heritage, which until 1990 had been a model for the rest of the region, broke down irreparably in the face of the dire economic situation there after the Gulf War. The resources of the Department of Antiquities were cut back to almost nothing, making patrol of and upkeep of monuments impossible. And rising living costs and widespread shortages meant that some Iraqi people

turned to the one thing freely available for which demand exists outside their borders, their archaeological heritage. Looting of many other sites in Iraq has been reported, but none is as well documented as the case for Nineveh.

The explicitly stated reason for this volume is to make public the reliefs from Sennacherib's palace and their context, to prevent any more from being looted, or if looted, to prevent their onward sale. To this end, a good two-thirds of the book are devoted to photographs and excellent drawings of the reliefs, so that any others which might appear on the market can be identified. This is supplemented by an extensive catalogue, describing the scenes, and giving dimensions, distinctive details and notable damage marks. There is also excellent description of how the separate slabs fit into longer sequences to form an integrated decorative programme.

More broadly, the book aims to bring into the public eye the difficult situation faced by the people of Iraq and the archaeological heritage of Iraq. I fear this may end up being a case of preaching to the choir, in that most people who might buy and read it will already hold the same views as the author. And those with the opposing view have already marshalled the usual arguments long ago, revolving around Iraq's inability to appreciate and to protect its own heritage. The lack of respect accorded the Iraqi people in this regard, and the assumption that their heritage can be bought and sold in the West with impunity while their economic situation is so appalling, is as symbolic as the Medes' vicious hacking of the faces of the Assyrian kings during the first sack of Nineveh.

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