



DAVID OATES AT NIMRUD IN 1981

# David Oates

## 1927–2004

DAVID OATES was a distinguished Mesopotamian archaeologist whose name is closely associated with three of the best-known sites in the Middle East, namely Nimrud, Tell al-Rimah and Tell Brak. He was a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and Lecturer in Archaeology, 1957–65, Director of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1965–9, and Professor of Western Asiatic Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology, University of London, 1969–82. In some ways he was a product of the same tradition that had spawned eminent predecessors such as Sir Leonard Woolley and Sir Max Mallowan, but he brought to his task a keen appreciation of ancient languages and cultures, a sharp eye for the interpretation of ancient architecture, and a good understanding of political, social and economic history and their relevance to archaeological enquiry. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1974.

(Edward Ernest) David (Michael) Oates was born on the 25 February 1927 in the village of Stoke Climsland, Cornwall. He was the youngest of three children, the eldest being Mary who was born in 1915. The middle child, (Sir) Thomas Oates, born in 1917, went on to become the Governor and Commander-in-Chief of St Helena, 1971–6. Their father, Thomas Oates, was Headmaster of the primary school in Stoke Climsland, and the family home was the Stoke Climsland school house. Thomas Oates is remembered as ‘an inspired and dedicated teacher’ and his wife Dora B. Strike as ‘a most resourceful and practical person’.<sup>1</sup> They were caring and ambitious parents, who provided an ideal environment for their talented

<sup>1</sup> Pers. comm., Sir Thomas Oates.

children to grow up in. In 1939 Thomas Oates was appointed Headmaster of the Boys' School in Wadebridge in mid-Cornwall, and the school house there then became the family home. David was educated first at his father's primary school in Stoke Climsland, and in 1936 he went on to Callington County School, some three miles away from Stoke Climsland. This was a journey that had to be done by bicycle, whatever the weather. The village of Stoke Climsland is a few miles to the west of the River Tamar that separates Cornwall from Devon, and throughout his life David was proud of his Cornish roots. In fact, both David's parents and their forebears came from the west of the county, and had relatives there. Both in his childhood and adolescence, David revelled in the delights of the Cornish coast. He enjoyed surfing at Polzeath on the north coast and exploring the rock pools at Porthleven on Mounts Bay. He was also interested in the history and antiquities of Cornwall, and enjoyed visiting ancient sites in the county. He seems also to have taken some interest in the Cornish language, particularly as expressed through place-names.

In 1939 he won an entrance scholarship to Oundle School in Northamptonshire, and spent one year in the junior school before progressing upwards to the senior school, where he became a member of Laxton House. In the words of a fellow pupil, David 'displayed a prodigious gift for languages, ancient and modern, from the start. As a senior boy in Laxton (his House) his party trick was to read the lesson at House Prayers in English, but from a Greek testament, without our housemaster detecting what he was up to. He was therefore seen . . . as a distinguished classical scholar in the making.' As well as being distinguished for his academic achievements, he was also good at the game of fives and played competent tennis. He also played rugby (although the school team had an undistinguished record during this period) and it is thought to have been at this time that he sustained the back injury that caused him such problems in later life. As this was wartime he not only belonged to the Officer Training Corps at school (OTC) but also helped unofficially with the Wadebridge Home Guard during the holidays. He ended his days at Oundle as Head Boy, and in 1944 he won a major entrance scholarship in classics to Trinity College, Cambridge, where his elder brother had studied some years before. After leaving school he wanted to do his National Service in the Royal Navy, and entered 'via the Y-Scheme'. The first stage of this training for naval officers was six months at Cambridge, part drilling and part instruction. However, Oates was forced out of the course and out of the navy by terrible migraines. Already at this time, a friend (John Thomson) was impressed by his 'poise and intellectual assurance'.

At Cambridge he had a brilliant career, reading classics and then archaeology and graduating in 1948 with first-class honours. He took part II of the Archaeology Tripos in one year. Friends made at this time, who all remained friends for life, included Tom Faber,<sup>2</sup> Richard Adrian,<sup>3</sup> and John Thomson.<sup>4</sup> Extracurricular activities included table tennis in the Union and golf on Saturday afternoons. In his tribute at David's funeral service, Tom Faber recalled that he and David visited each other's families in Cornwall and Sussex during the holidays: 'I also remember with pleasure a long day in Sussex when I took him to see a local hammer pond and we explored a system of ancient ditches and sluice gates through which the water from it must once have been channelled, just as David later explored vestigial irrigation systems in the wadis of North Africa. That was the first occasion on which I glimpsed that he was really an archaeologist in the making and not a literary scholar at all.'

His success as an undergraduate led to a scholarship at the British School in Rome where he was Rome Scholar in Classical Studies for the period 1949–51. During this period he made a thorough exploration of the eastern Gebel of Tripolitania, and recorded about 100 Roman and post-Roman sites. It is typical of Oates that he involved a number of his Trinity friends in the beginning of this enterprise, and he was accompanied as far as Florence in a brand new five-ton truck by Tom Faber, Richard Adrian and Tej Srivastava. On the way, they were treated 'to a gourmet lunch' by Glyn Daniel at Les Eyzies and they saw the newly discovered prehistoric paintings in the Lascaux caves.<sup>5</sup> Some seventy of the sites surveyed in Libya dated from the main period of Roman influence, extending from the first to the middle of the fourth century AD. Amongst these sites there were a few small villages, but mainly they were farmsteads of various sizes. Associated with many of these farms were installations that Oates identified as olive presses. Previously, the standing stones associated with these erstwhile olive presses had often been regarded as phallic symbols. In the subsequent 'Berber' period of the fifth

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Faber (1927–2004), Cambridge University physicist and Chairman of Faber and Faber 1977–2004.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Adrian (1927–95), FRS, Master of Pembroke College 1981–92, Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University 1985–7.

<sup>4</sup> Sir John Thomson (1927– ), High Commissioner to India 1977–82, UK Permanent Representative to UN 1982–7. Also members of the same circle were Tej Srivastava (later head of the Indian Foreign Service), Humayun Khan (Pakistan High Commissioner to the UK 1990–2, Director Commonwealth Foundation 1993–8) and his brother Afzal Khan (later head of Shell in Karachi).

<sup>5</sup> Pers. comm., T. Faber.

to sixth century AD, after the olive presses had fallen into disuse, a small number of the Roman sites were reoccupied and there were some new settlements that were described by Oates as ‘prosperous but barbaric’. This work in Libya was written up and submitted for a Research Fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge, which was duly awarded (1951–7). It was published in two articles in the *Papers of the British School at Rome*.<sup>6</sup> In addition to providing a catalogue of the sites, he also published some Latin inscriptions found in the course of the work. Already, the qualities that characterised Oates’s later work are evident: accurate and informative plans made of the sites (often using rudimentary surveying equipment) and keen interests in technology (note the schematic drawing of an olive press), topography and political geography. In October 1952 he was again back in Libya, visiting with his Cambridge supervisor Olwen Brogan a Roman period temple in Tripolitania known as Gasr el-Gezira, possibly built for the worship of a Punic deity. Together they published a record of this temple, again in the *Papers of the British School at Rome*.<sup>7</sup>

This was followed by participation in 1953–4 in the excavation of the Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors at Istanbul, directed by David Talbot Rice. Here he worked with John Ward-Perkins with whom he shared an interest in ‘architectural archaeology’ and who remained a close friend. In the 1954 season, Oates was in charge of the work in the field. Also during this period, he undertook a survey of Roman sites in Cilicia with Michael Gough. In 1958 he returned to Istanbul to direct the excavation and structural examination of the Church of St Saviour in the Chora (Kariye Camii) on behalf of the Byzantine Institute, and he wrote a summary report on both the 1957 and 1958 seasons that was published in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*.<sup>8</sup> Working in Italy, Libya, and Turkey gave David an opportunity to develop his considerable linguistic talents, and to fairly fluent Italian and Turkish was soon to be added a good command of colloquial Arabic.

Oates’s introduction to Iraq came in 1954 when at the suggestion of Sir Mortimer Wheeler he went to Iraq in order to, in David’s own words,

<sup>6</sup> ‘The Tripolitanian Gebel I: settlement of the Roman period around Gasr ed-Dauun’, *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 21 (1953), 81–117; ‘The Tripolitanian Gebel II: the Berber period’, *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 22 (1954), 91–117.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Gasr al-Gezira, a shrine in the Gebel Nefusa of Tripolitania’, *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 21 (1953), 74–80.

<sup>8</sup> ‘A summary report on the excavations of the Byzantine Institute in the Kariye Camii: 1957 and 1958’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 14 (1960), 223–31.

‘undertake the completion of Sir Aurel Stein’s work’.<sup>9</sup> Stein had originally established a considerable reputation for himself through his expeditions in Central Asia and his discovery of a large number of manuscripts in the ‘Caves of the Thousand Buddhas’ near Dunhuang in Chinese Turkestan. He had also undertaken four archaeological surveys of Iran between 1932 and 1936 with very valuable results. Then in the late 1930s he turned his attention to the Roman frontier in Iraq and Transjordan. According to Stein himself, he had first conceived the idea of this project many years before while tracing the western frontier of the Chinese empire, and he thought then it would be useful to compare this with the eastern frontier of the Roman empire. He was also much impressed by the work of Père Poidebard who had surveyed the Roman frontier in Syria and published his results in a much-praised volume entitled *La Trace de Rome dans le désert de Syrie* (Paris, 1934). Stein’s survey was completed in the course of two seasons of fieldwork in 1938–9, during which time he worked in close collaboration with the Royal Air Force, who took many aerial photographs on his behalf. Stein published preliminary reports in the *Geographical Journal*,<sup>10</sup> and on completion of the work he wrote a lengthy account which he called his *Limes Report* and which he intended should be published accompanied by maps, plans, and ground and air photographs. Before leaving on his last expedition to Afghanistan, where he died on 26 October 1943, he asked one of his friends and executors, Colonel Kenneth Mason, Professor of Geography at the University of Oxford, to arrange for publication of the manuscript in the event of his death. Unfortunately, that did not happen. The next words on the subject come from Sir Mortimer Wheeler, who in his Foreword to *Studies in the Ancient History of Northern Iraq* wrote: ‘Subsequent examination of the manuscript, however, and of such of its illustrations as had survived the war years showed that in fact they were not in a condition for publication, and both Colonel Mason and others of Stein’s friends felt that, had the author lived, he would have been of the same mind.’<sup>11</sup> There was the added complication that at some stage most of the accompanying plans and photographs had apparently been lost.<sup>12</sup> With the benefit of hindsight it seems clear that on this occasion Stein’s friends did not serve

<sup>9</sup> Acknowledgements in David Oates, *Studies in the Ancient History of Northern Iraq* (London, 1968) (hereafter referred to as *Studies*).

<sup>10</sup> *Geographical Journal*, 92 (1938), 62–6, and 95 (1940), 428–38.

<sup>11</sup> Foreword to *Studies*.

<sup>12</sup> For a full discussion about the history of Stein’s manuscript, see Gregory and Kennedy (below), pp. 369–81.

him well. In 1985 the manuscript was eventually published,<sup>13</sup> and even without the accompanying illustrations it has proved to be a valuable resource. To return to Wheeler, having decided that Stein's manuscript was not in a fit state for publication, he seems to have thought that Oates would be the ideal person to revise it and expand on the work, and it was this that prompted him to suggest that David should go out to Iraq to undertake more work on the Roman frontier. Although the failure to publish promptly Stein's manuscript might be regretted, it was in fact the catalyst for Oates's engagement with Iraqi archaeology, which has led in its own way to very positive results.

The upshot of Wheeler's intervention was that between 1954 and 1958 Oates's work on Roman and post-Roman remains in Northern Iraq was supported by grants from the Stein–Arnold Fund of the British Academy. His wife Joan Oates recalls that the project was first discussed at a committee meeting in 1953 where Sir Mortimer Wheeler and Max Mallowan were both present.<sup>14</sup> Wheeler suggested that the British Academy should pay two-thirds of the cost of the Land Rover that was needed while Mallowan offered 'the outstanding three-fifths' on behalf of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq. Oates took advantage of this possibly unintentional generosity to cover the cost of petrol. For the 1954 campaign he was accompanied by the architect Geoffrey Clarke, and together they drove in the Land Rover out to Baghdad, visiting a number of ancient sites en route. From Damascus onwards they were accompanied by Tom Faber, whose brother Dick was at that time in the British Embassy in Baghdad. In 1970, the Land Rover in question, a short wheel-base model by then repainted in a distinctive light blue colour, was still being driven around Baghdad at high speed by Theodora Newbould, the Secretary-Librarian of the British School. After arriving in Baghdad Oates and Clarke checked into the British School and spent the next ten days visiting sites in and around Baghdad. In early April heavy rain made the main roads impassable, so the Land Rover had to be transported to Mosul by train, on a flat car hired by the ever resourceful Barbara Parker, who was then the Secretary-Librarian of the School.<sup>15</sup> During the next month and a half they visited many of the principal sites in Northern Iraq, but the Roman site of Balad Sinjar was the main focus of attention.

<sup>13</sup> Shelagh Gregory and David Kennedy, *Sir Aurel Stein's Limes Report*, BAR-S272, 2 parts (Oxford, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> In her preface to the second edition of *Studies*, p. xii.

<sup>15</sup> Joan Oates, preface to the second edition of *Studies* (2005), p. xiii.

In addition to this, however, they inspected and surveyed several *castella*<sup>16</sup> in the vicinity and the site of Khan as-Sur which was originally thought to be a *castellum* but later turned out to be medieval.<sup>17</sup> At Hatra, Oates met Dr Najj al-Asil, Director-General of Antiquities, as well as Fuad Safar and Mohammed Ali Mustafa, the excavators of Hatra, and was shown three Latin inscriptions which he later published in *Sumer*.<sup>18</sup> Recently, Geoffrey Clarke has written about the 1954 expedition as follows: ‘My contribution . . . was very modest . . . In essence, I helped David with the surveying and measuring and then produced the drawings to record what we had done . . . He organized everything . . . all the while maintaining a sanguine outlook, a constant good humour, a sense of the ridiculous, and the capacity for real enjoyment when the immediate tasks were over. I have never met anyone else like him.’<sup>19</sup> In spring 1955 work was again concentrated on Balad Sinjar, but a brief sounding was also made at Tell Abu Sheetha on the south bank of the Upper Zab, about twenty kilometres east of Nimrud. The large number of Islamic graves here made extensive excavation impossible, but some interesting Hellenistic pottery was recovered.<sup>20</sup>

At Balad Sinjar (Roman Singara), which was intermittently under Roman control between AD 114 and AD 363, Oates surveyed the Roman walls and the surviving bastions and produced a plan and elevation of the South Gate. A sounding on the site of the North Gate in 1955 revealed the road but ‘cast a gloomy light on the prospect of more general excavation’ as most of the original stone blocks had been removed for lime-burning.<sup>21</sup> The results of this work on the Roman frontier in 1954–5 were described in a lecture to the British Academy which was published in the *Geographical Journal* for June 1956,<sup>22</sup> together with drawings by Geoffrey Clarke. In this article, the description of Singara is preceded by a masterly discussion of Roman foreign policy and the Roman presence in Iraq that is still one of the most important sources on this subject.

After 1955 Oates was, as we shall see, increasingly preoccupied with Nimrud, but his interest in Roman and post-Roman occupation in

<sup>16</sup> For a map showing the *castella* that were surveyed in the vicinity of Sinjar, see *Iraq*, XXI (1959), fig. 1 on p. 209.

<sup>17</sup> *Studies*, p. 72 and n. 1

<sup>18</sup> ‘A note on three Latin inscriptions from Hatra’, *Sumer*, XI (1955), 39–43.

<sup>19</sup> In a letter to Joan Oates dated 20 Feb. 2005.

<sup>20</sup> *Studies*, pp. 65–6.

<sup>21</sup> *The Geographical Journal*, 122 (1956), 196.

<sup>22</sup> ‘The Roman frontier in Northern Iraq’, *The Geographical Journal*, 122 (1956), 190–99.

Northern Mesopotamia continued and found expression in the recording and excavation of several more sites. Thus in 1956 he made an architectural survey of a church known as Qasr Serij, near the village of Qusair about sixty kilometres north-west of Mosul.<sup>23</sup> This small basilica-type church, thought to have been founded in the sixth century AD, is made of carefully dressed limestone blocks and is dedicated to St Sergius.<sup>24</sup> Then, one year later, in the autumn of 1957, he and Joan conducted brief excavations at Ain Sinu (Roman Zaguræ) just to the north of the modern main road from Mosul to Sinjar. At this extensive site, more than one kilometre long, excavations were undertaken at two locations at the west end of the complex (AS I and AS II). It was established that AS I comprised seven pairs of barrack blocks in a walled enclosure, while AS II was a *castellum* which had been destroyed and contained large amounts of pottery and some small objects. On the basis of the coins Oates was able to conclude that the Roman frontier post of Zaguræ was established in the reign of Septimius Severus at the end of the second century AD and was overrun during the northern campaign of the Sasanian king Ardashir I in AD 237. This was gratifying because at Balad Sinjar dating evidence had been elusive.<sup>25</sup> Later in his career, Oates was able to continue with his interest in the Roman frontier in the east when he worked at Tell Brak, and this found expression in an article written with Joan for the Adnan Bounni Festschrift.<sup>26</sup>

In spring 1955, Oates was persuaded by (Sir) Max Mallowan to join his excavations conducted on behalf of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq at the great Assyrian capital city of Nimrud. The first excavations at Nimrud had been by Austen Henry Layard who worked there in the middle of the nineteenth century. He found a wonderful series of colossal gateway figures in the form of winged bulls and lions and stone bas-reliefs showing the Assyrian king sitting in state or out hunting and the Assyrian army on campaign. Most of these sculptures, some of which are now in the British Museum, came from the North-West Palace of Ashurnasirpal who reigned from 883–859 BC and it was in the same building that Mallowan restarted the work on behalf of the

<sup>23</sup> Published in *Iraq*, XXIV (1962), 78–89, and in *Studies*, pp. 106–17.

<sup>24</sup> On this church, see now the note by St John Simpson in *Iraq*, LVII (1994), 149–51.

<sup>25</sup> The excavations at Ain Sinu were published in *Sumer*, XIV (1958), 97–100, *Iraq*, XXI (1959), 207–42, *Studies*, pp. 80–92, and in J. E. Curtis, *Fifty Years of Mesopotamian Discovery* (London, 1982) (hereafter *Fifty Years*), pp. 120–2.

<sup>26</sup> 'Aspects of Hellenistic and Roman settlement in the Khabur basin', in P. Matthiae *et al.* (eds.), *Resurrecting the Past: A Joint Tribute to Adnan Bounni* (Leiden, 1990), pp. 227–48.

British School of Archaeology in Iraq in 1949. He had many early successes, finding beautifully carved ivory plaques in a well and a stela recording a great banquet which Ashurnasirpal arranged at Nimrud to mark the completion of his new palace.

At Nimrud, David met Joan Lines of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York who had been a member of the Nimrud expedition since 1952, and they married in 1956. They had a twin son and daughter (Tom and Jenny, b. 1959) and a daughter (Susie, b. 1961). After their marriage David and Joan became a formidable team, and nearly all subsequent enterprises were jointly undertaken. Throughout the remainder of his career, David benefited greatly from Joan's unwavering help and support. In 1967–8 they collaborated in the excavation of the prehistoric site of Choga Mami, and this shared interest in prehistory was later reflected in a popular book on *The Rise of Civilization* (Oxford, 1976). It is a measure of Joan's own scholarly achievements that in 2004 she was belatedly elected a Fellow of the British Academy. This was a well-deserved honour, but the only sadness here is that this was after David's death. Since 1971 she has been a Fellow of Girton College, Cambridge, and from 1989 until 1995 she was Lecturer in the History and Archaeology of the Ancient Near East at Cambridge.

By 1955, when Oates arrived at Nimrud, Mallowan was ready to move on to investigate other buildings on the citadel mound. He quickly recognised Oates' flair and potential and instantly understood how much he could contribute to the Nimrud project. It is sometimes joked that Mallowan wanted him for his Land Rover, but the truth is that Mallowan was a shrewd judge of ability and character, particularly when it came to advancing the interests of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq. In his autobiography, Mallowan describes him as 'a master of mudbrick' and notes that 'there is no better field worker in all Mesopotamia'. He remembers him as 'an Apollo looking down from an Olympian height'.<sup>27</sup>

David was quickly given a position of great responsibility, and in the years 1955–7 he was entrusted with the difficult task of sorting out the stratigraphy of the Nabu Temple and the Burnt Palace and supervising the excavation of the later Hellenistic settlement in this part of the mound, all of which was accomplished with distinction.<sup>28</sup> For these tasks Oates was ideally suited, being particularly skilled in the excavation of

<sup>27</sup> Max Mallowan, *Mallowan's Memoirs* (London, 1977), pp. 278–9.

<sup>28</sup> Preliminary reports on this work were published in *Iraq*, vols. XVIII (1956), 22–39; XIX (1957), 26–39; XX (1958), 109–13; XX (1958), 114–57.

mud-brick structures and with a special interest in architecture. In fact, the planning and interpretation of complex structures quickly became his metier. After the North-West Palace, the Nabu Temple complex (Ezida) is the largest excavated building on the Acropolis at Nimrud. It boasts two shrines, one dedicated to Nabu, the god of writing, and the other to his consort, Tashmetum. In one of the rooms (NT 12) was a library of cuneiform tablets that included some important literary texts, while in the throne room in the north-west part of the building were found the so-called 'Vassal Treaties' of Esarhaddon recording an agreement with the tribal leaders of Western Iran in which they recognised his eldest son Ashurbanipal as his legitimate successor. Also found in the Nabu Temple were ivory plaques with incised designs in Assyrian style. Separated from the Nabu Temple by a narrow street was the Burnt Palace, excavated from 1951 onwards, and it is a tribute to Oates's excavation skills that he was able to correlate the levels in the two buildings and to identify seven different levels of occupation. Particularly good evidence for Hellenistic occupation at Nimrud was found above the Nabu Temple and in the area to the south of it, known as the AB or South-East Palace. Here, six different levels were excavated, spanning the third and second centuries BC, and a rich collection of pottery, figurines, coins and stamped jar handles was recovered, making a considerable addition to our knowledge of the Hellenistic period in Northern Iraq. It was a project about which Mallowan himself was unenthusiastic, focusing as it did on late periods, but this excavation, together with Ain Sinu, still provides the best comparative material for Roman and Hellenistic settlement in this area.

Then from 1957 until 1965, Oates was Fellow and Lecturer in Archaeology and Ancient History at Trinity College, Cambridge. Joan Oates remembers that at this time he and Moses Finley taught a much-praised seminar on Greece, Mesopotamia and Persia.<sup>29</sup> David's increasing interest in the Middle East during this period may be gauged from the fact that during the Suez Crisis of 1956 he organised the sending, together with twenty-one other Cambridge academics,<sup>30</sup> of a protest telegram to Prime Minister Sir Anthony Eden and the members of his cabinet. The message reads: 'We, the undersigned members of Cambridge University, wish to protest against the vetoing of the American resolution, and the

<sup>29</sup> Pers. comm.

<sup>30</sup> The other signatories of the telegram were R. D. Keynes, T. E. Faber, K. Bailey, M. McCrum, J. Harley Mason, H. Barlow, G. S. Brindley, E. W. Clarke, R. J. Leppard, J. S. Morrison, D. S. Robertson, H. C. Longuet-Higgins, P. W. Duff, R. R. Neild, John (Jack) Gallagher, Peter Laslett, R. A. Leigh, F. A. Simpson, R. H. Adrian, H. O. Evenett and P. Swinnerton-Dyer.

threat of force at Suez, as acts which have split the Commonwealth and the western Alliance, and will unite the Arab nations against us, without solving the Israel or Suez problems. British lives, and our international standing, should not be risked in such unprincipled and miscalculated ventures.' So far as is known, the telegram elicited no response!

After the 1957 season at Nimrud, Mallowan decided that the time had come to withdraw from the field, and David Oates was appointed Field Director for the season in spring 1958. Thus he found himself at the age of just 31 in charge of one of the largest archaeological excavations of the day. Mallowan's decision to relinquish control of the field operations (although not the directorship of the project) was in part inspired by the fact that his wife Agatha Christie was by now in her late sixties and finding it difficult to cope with conditions in the field, although the Mallowans did join the expedition for the last fortnight of the 1958 season.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, Mallowan's decision to step down was a mark of the confidence he had in Oates's ability to direct the project. Thereafter the Mallowans visited Iraq only rarely.<sup>32</sup> This was partly for health reasons, but also because they were disenchanted with Iraq following the 1958 revolution that had upset the existing social order in Baghdad and affected so many of their Iraqi friends. This was the military coup of 14 July 1958 that overthrew the British-supported Hashemite monarchy and resulted in the murder of Feisal II and his entourage in the royal palace.

From 1958 onwards the main focus of operations at Nimrud was the vast building in the south-east corner of the outer town known as Fort Shalmaneser, where excavation had already started on 21 March 1957.<sup>33</sup> The term Fort Shalmaneser, adopted in 1957 following the discovery of an inscribed brick of Shalmaneser III, is in fact a misnomer, as the Akkadian term 'ekal mašarti' makes it clear that the building was actually a 'review palace' or an 'arsenal'. Four seasons of excavation between 1958 and 1962 showed that the building was about 200 m × 300 m in size and divided into four quadrangles, three of them (Areas NE, NW and SE) with rooms arranged around large courtyards.<sup>34</sup> An extension to the south-west of the building (Area S), built on higher ground, contained rooms of state and the royal apartments. By a combination of selective excavation and surface scraping, Oates managed to produce an overall

<sup>31</sup> *Iraq*, XXI (1959), 93.

<sup>32</sup> H. McCall, *The Life of Max Mallowan* (London 2001), p. 184.

<sup>33</sup> *Iraq*, XX (1958), 106–8. See also *Mallowan's Memoirs*, p. 264.

<sup>34</sup> Preliminary reports appeared in *Iraq*, vols. XXI (1959), 98–129; XXIII (1961), 1–14; XXIV (1962), 1–25; XXV (1963), 6–37.

plan of Fort Shalmaneser, which must surely rate as one of his finest achievements. Apart from Area S, it became clear that the rooms in the different quadrants were a mixture of residential units for guards and officials, workshops, and above all storerooms. In one of his inscriptions Shalmaneser specifically mentions the storage of military equipment and 'booty taken from the enemy'<sup>35</sup> in his 'ekal mašarti' and the contents of the excavated rooms reflect this. Great quantities were found of horse harness, armour, weapons, pottery, cuneiform tablets (particularly records of wine rations) and above all ivories. These carved ivory plaques, mostly used to decorate furniture, were found in many locations at Nimrud, both in Fort Shalmaneser and elsewhere, but there were particularly large concentrations in Rooms SW7, SW11–12, SW37, and T10. They were carved mostly in North Syria and Phoenicia, and were presumably brought to Assyria as booty or tribute. Some of these ivories were burnt at the time of the destruction of Nimrud, but the forms are still perfectly recognisable and in all they are an invaluable resource for the study of Ancient Near Eastern material culture in the early first millennium BC.<sup>36</sup>

Outstanding finds in Fort Shalmaneser included a carved stone throne base of Shalmaneser III decorated around the sides with scenes of tribute and at the front Shalmaneser greeting the client king of Babylon. To remove the throne base from Fort Shalmaneser and transport it to the new Iraq Museum in Baghdad was a complicated task for which Oates had to enlist the help of the Iraq Petroleum Company. The operation was successfully accomplished with the use of a crane, but not before Oates had to persuade an over zealous epigraphist not to stand beneath the stone block to inspect its underside while it was being lifted out of the trench. Also of considerable interest was a panel of polychrome glazed bricks that had originally been set up above a doorway in Courtyard T. When found the panel was represented by a pile of bricks collapsed on the ground, but when it had been reconstructed (by Julian Reade) it showed representations of Shalmaneser III beneath a winged disc, an inscription and a pair of antithetical bulls, framed by a border of kneeling goats and floral motifs.

<sup>35</sup> J. and D. Oates, *Nimrud*, p. 145.

<sup>36</sup> Three fascicules devoted to ivories from Fort Shalmaneser have so far appeared in the series 'Ivories from Nimrud': M. E. L. Mallowan and G. Herrmann, *Furniture from SW7 Fort Shalmaneser* (London, 1974); G. Herrmann, *Ivories from Room SW37 Fort Shalmaneser* (London, 1986); G. Herrmann, *The Small Collections from Fort Shalmaneser* (London, 1992). Further volumes are expected on the ivories from SW11–12 and T10.

Then in 1962 David Oates handed over the mantle of field director to Jeffrey Orchard for the last season in 1963. It is sometimes regretted that the British School of Archaeology did not continue with its excavations at Nimrud—instead the Iraq Department of Antiquities took over (they had already begun restoration work in 1956) and went on to discover the tombs of the Assyrian queens with their vast quantities of gold jewellery—but Oates believed that the time was right for a change. He had worked under the shadow of Sir Max Mallowan for nearly a decade, and felt the need to strike out on his own.

From 1966 onwards, Oates was the first Resident Director of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq in Baghdad. He had been Assistant Director of the School 1958–61 and Joint Director (with Donald Wiseman) 1961–5. As the Resident Director in Baghdad, Oates moved with his family into the traditional courtyard house on the banks of the Tigris in Karradet Mariam that the School leased at that time. This beautiful house was made all the more attractive by the rich contents of furniture, textiles, and paintings, much of it assembled by Agatha Christie and some dating back to the time of Seton Lloyd. Writing in *The Interval*,<sup>37</sup> Seton Lloyd comments: ‘Later in the same year (1966) . . . we stayed with David and Joan Oates in the premises of the British School of Archaeology: a building rather like our old South Gate establishment on the other side of the river. The illusion was increased by the furniture, much of which I had sold to Max Mallowan when I left in 1949, and the Oates’ hospitality was overwhelming.’ The years 1966–9 may seem now to have been a difficult time to be in Baghdad, spanning as they did the Six Day War in 1967 and the Baathist coup in 1968, but David and Joan Oates did not find them so, and derived much pleasure from living there during this period. At the beginning of the Six Day War, Oates ignored Foreign Office advice to UK nationals to leave the country, and chose instead to stay in Baghdad with his family, with the full support of the Iraqi Department of Antiquities and the Minister of Defence, who offered to post a guard on the Oates’ house, an offer politely refused by David. The next year, however, they had to contend with the Baathist coup, and it became something of a challenge for David and Joan to prevent their young children from seeing some of the worst excesses of the resulting violence, such as public hangings. The close friends David made in Baghdad, both while he was Director of the School and before that, included (Lord) Humphrey Trevelyan, British Ambassador to Iraq

<sup>37</sup> Seton Lloyd, *The Interval* (Faringdon, 1986), p. 175.

1958–61, and David liked to recall how years later in 1979 when they met on a Cambridge to London train, Trevelyan (then Chairman of the Trustees of the British Museum) asked him if he was interested in the post of Director of the Museum, which was being advertised at that time. History does not record David's response.

Following a decision to close down the excavations at Nimrud, in 1964 Oates branched out on his own and started a major new excavation in the eastern Jazira at Tell al-Rimah near Tell 'Afar, a site that had originally been discovered by Seton Lloyd.<sup>38</sup> Having discovered much new information about Assyria in the first millennium BC at Nimrud, he was anxious to excavate a site that would yield information about Assyria in the second millennium BC, and the smaller provincial site of Tell al-Rimah was selected for this purpose. It proved to be an ideal choice and the excavations here continued until 1971.<sup>39</sup> In the later seasons the whole Oates family participated in the excavations, and the presence of David and Joan's three young children was, I believe, much welcomed by most members of the dig team.

The two most significant buildings at Tell al-Rimah, the Great Temple in Site A and the earliest palace in Site C, are thought to have been built at the time of Shamshi-Adad of Assyria (c.1813–1781 BC). The Great Temple complex consisted of a lower terrace from which a stairway led up to a second terrace on which the temple stood. Attached to the west side of the temple, and approached from its roof, was a ziggurat. The outside of the temple building and the high terrace, together with the interior walls of the courtyard, were decorated with nearly 300 engaged columns. These columns were made of mud-bricks carved either with spiral decoration or with imitations of two types of palm trunk, 'one trimmed close to the trunk, the other with longer triangular frond scars'.<sup>40</sup> The successful articulation of these columns was a mark of Oates' expertise in the excavation of mud-brick structures. Most of the ground floor rooms around the Temple courtyard had vaulted mud-brick roofs with a high crown. This in itself was interesting, but in later repairs to the Temple and in earlier buildings on the AS site, to the south of the Great Temple,

<sup>38</sup> See *Iraq*, 5 (1938), 137–8, no. 29, and also *The Interval*, p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> Preliminary reports have appeared in *Iraq*, vols. XXVII (1965), 62–80; XXVIII (1966), 122–39; XXIX (1967), 70–96; XXX (1968), 115–38; XXXII (1970), 1–26; XXXIV (1972), 77–86. See also C. Postgate, D. Oates and J. Oates, *The Excavations at Tell al Rimah: The Pottery* (London, 1997), and *Fifty Years*, pp. 86–98.

<sup>40</sup> *Fifty Years*, p. 95. See also D. Oates, 'Innovations in mud-brick: decorative and structural technique in ancient Mesopotamia', *World Archaeology*, 21 (1990), 388–406.

another technique of vault construction known as 'pitched-brick vaulting' was discovered. This consists of 'laying successive ring fragments of bricks with their edges across the long axis of the vault'.<sup>41</sup> Oates himself notes that the same technique was used 2,000 years later in the Arch of Ctesiphon and in the Great Palace of the Byzantine Emperors in Istanbul.<sup>42</sup> His discoveries at Rimah showed that the technique was already known in the late third millennium BC in Mesopotamia. The Great Temple continued in use, but with modifications, in the Mitanni (c.1550–1400 BC) and Middle Assyrian (c.1350–1200 BC) periods. Stone impost blocks, one with a representation of the demon Humbaba and the other with a representation of the goddess Lama, with an eroded inscription, were found in the Mitanni Temple, but were in a secondary context and probably derived from the earlier Temple. In one of the rooms of the Mitanni Temple was a significant group of glass and faience objects (including mosaic glass), and the objects from the Level I (Middle Assyrian) Temple included a number of faience masks.

In the Late Assyrian period (eighth century BC) a small temple was built in Site A, partly cut into the brickwork of the earlier ziggurat. In the cella of this temple was a stone stele erected by Nergal (Palil)-eresh, the Governor of the province of Rasappa, in the name of Adad-nerari III (810–783 BC) and dedicated to 'Adad who dwells in Zamahu'. The accompanying cuneiform text contains important historical information about towns and villages in Rasappa, but has been partly erased in antiquity. Four limestone orthostats each showing the head of a lion holding a dagger in its mouth were also found in the temple.

Remains of three superimposed palaces were found in Site C, of which only the latest, built in the time of Hammurabi of Babylon (c.1792–1750 BC), could be extensively (but still only partially) excavated. In an area of about 1,000 square metres, part of a palace complex was revealed with a throne-room and ante-chamber and two courtyards. From the different phases of the palaces at Rimah comes an important collection of tablets and seal impressions. The tablets include letters from Zimri-lim of Mari and show that the name of Rimah at this date was either Karana or Qatara. After the destruction of the Old Babylonian period palace, there was occupation on Site C in the Mitanni, Middle Assyrian and Late Assyrian periods, mostly in the form of private houses and small shrines.

<sup>41</sup> *Fifty Years*, p. 94.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

A celebrated and by now iconic inlaid glass beaker was found in a Mitanni period shrine on this site.

Two further areas were investigated at Rimah, Site B where there were Late Assyrian houses and Site D where there was a sequence of second millennium levels. Also, graves ranging in date from the later third millennium BC down to the Islamic period were found in various parts of the site. The excavations at Rimah were an unconditional success, making significant contributions to knowledge in areas as diverse as political history (the tablets and seal impressions), architecture (the building techniques) and technology (the glass-making industry). Last, but not least, the recent publication of the pottery from Rimah, particularly the Khabur, Nuzi and Middle Assyrian wares, has greatly enriched our repertoire of known ceramic forms from Northern Iraq.

Both Nimrud and Tell al-Rimah were excavations in the grand style, employing up to several hundred workmen (particularly at Nimrud) supervised by a team of specialist archaeological diggers (Sherqatis) from the town of Sherqat near Ashur. Much of the specialist work such as tracing mud-brick walls and other features and identifying archaeological deposits was done by these Sherqatis, so that young western site supervisors had much less of a hands-on role than they do in modern excavations. Rather, their task was to record what the Sherqatis were finding rather than to direct their work closely, as would be the case now. This approach has sometimes been criticised in recent years, but defendants of this system point to the spectacular results obtained, which cannot be gainsaid, and claim that large Near Eastern tells can only be properly understood through large-scale excavation. However this may be, it is undeniable that one of the great merits of the traditional system of digging was that it entailed more active participation by specialist workmen such as the Sherqatis and more interaction with the local people. Here, David Oates really came into his own. As noted above, he had a good command of colloquial Arabic, and he went to great lengths to establish good relations with the local villagers and with the workforce, particularly the skilled Sherqati workmen. In this respect nothing was too much trouble for him, and the Sherqatis still talk fondly of 'Sheikh Daoud'.<sup>43</sup> I recall one incident at Tell al-Rimah in 1971 when one of the Sherqati workmen complained of a stomach ache in the middle of the night. It seemed unlikely that it could be anything serious (and indeed it turned out not to be), but Oates thought nothing of driving him the sixty kilo-

<sup>43</sup> On one occasion he received a letter addressed simply to 'Sheikh Daoud, Mosul'.

metres to hospital in Mosul. Such gestures are not quickly forgotten in this part of the Middle East.

The excavations at Tell al-Rimah, right up to the last season in 1971, were still conducted on a grand scale. In 1971 the foreman was actually the headman from Sherqat, Abd el Halaf el Anqud. He was not himself a skilled archaeological workman, but he was a great organiser and controlled the workmen and moved them around the site with the sort of efficiency that is usually found only on a construction site.<sup>44</sup> Also from Sherqat was a team of about twenty workmen (Sherqatis) who provided the specialist labour on the site. It was they who headed up the gangs and did the actual digging, or at least the delicate digging, with pick-axe (*kasma kebir*), small pick (*kasma saghir*) and trowel (*chamcha*). Removal of the earth, usually by basket (*zanbil*), was done by the non-specialist local workmen who provided the unskilled labour. This part of the workforce consisted of about seventy workmen from the towns and villages around Tell al-Rimah. In 1971, the most intricate excavation work was done by a Sherqati named Dowla who was famous throughout Iraq for his archaeological skills. Also in 1971, we were privileged to receive a visit from an ancient Sherqati named Hassan Abdullah who had apparently been Walter Andrae's tape boy at Ashur where excavations ceased just before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.<sup>45</sup> The excavation team of six people had its headquarters in a mud-brick dig-house that enclosed three sides of a courtyard and contained a workroom, dining-room, kitchen, storerooms, dark-room and Director's office and accommodation. The team members lived in nearby tents and were well looked after by the 'house-boy', Sandu, an elderly Indian who had seen service in the British army and brought hot water for shaving to the men's tents every morning. He also waited at the table and served the dishes prepared by the Indian cook, Bashir, who had also served with the British forces. Bashir was temperamental, and many was the time when he had to be calmed down by David. For the western team members the atmosphere on the dig was relaxed, as David hated regimentation. Thus site assistants were expected to be on the dig as early as possible, but not necessarily for the start of work. In their absence, the Sherqatis would carefully observe where pottery and objects had come from and impart this information as

<sup>44</sup> In previous seasons there had been two foremen, Abd el Halaf and Mohammed Halaf el Musla, who was a specialist excavator and supervised the technical side of the digging.

<sup>45</sup> This same Sherqati workman excavated the well in Room AB at Nimrud in 1953, and was nearly killed when the sides of the well caved in. See J. and D. Oates, *Nimrud*, pp. 99–100.

soon as possible (as well as making sure that young site supervisors recorded the information in their notebooks). However, this did not mean that team members on Oates' excavations worked any less hard than their counterparts on other excavations. In fact, the contrary may have been true, as people revelled in the degree of responsibility they were given and the trust that was placed in them.

As well as enjoying excellent relations with the local people and with the workforce, Oates also went out of his way to help fellow archaeologists. During the 1971 season at Tell al-Rimah there were exceptionally heavy spring rains that resulted in widespread flooding. This was manifested at Tell al-Rimah by a torrent of water in the normally dry wadi next to the site. More seriously, word reached Rimah that the other British School excavation at Umm Dabaghiyah near Hatra, directed by Diana Kirkbride, had been cut off and was in need of supplies. He set out to drive across the desert, but was unable to get there. This was not for want of trying, but because the tracks were impassable. It should also be recorded that he was on very good terms with the Russian excavators of nearby Yarim Tepe, another site discovered by Seton Lloyd,<sup>46</sup> and in 1971 there were memorable visits to and from Yarim Tepe, quite remarkable occurrences in the time of the Cold War.<sup>47</sup>

Towards the end of Oates' time in Baghdad his *Studies in the History of Northern Iraq* (London, 1968) was published. This had grown out of the work undertaken with grants from the Stein–Arnold Fund of the British Academy. It had been Wheeler's hope that David would somehow revise or expand Stein's manuscript on the Roman frontier, but this was probably never a realistic option. Instead, Oates decided to concentrate on a publication of his own, apparently with Wheeler's blessing. Nevertheless, the book was dedicated to the memory of Sir Aurel Stein in recognition of the fact that he had been the original inspiration for this work. In part, the book brings together in one place all the work that Oates did on Roman and post-Roman sites between 1954 and 1958. There are therefore sections on Ain Sinu (Zaguræ), Beled Sinjar (Singara), and Qasr Serij, as well as much useful commentary and analysis about these late periods. In addition, however, two chapters of the book are about Assyria, with interesting discussions about climate, communications, economic potential, and settlement patterns based on ancient evidence

<sup>46</sup> See *Iraq*, 5 (1938), 138, no. 34, and also Seton Lloyd, *The Interval* (Faringdon, 1986), p. 70.

<sup>47</sup> The excavations at Yarim Tepe were directed by R. M. Munchaev and N. Ya. Merpert, with N. O. Bader as a major collaborator.

combined with modern economic and social data. In many respects, Oates should legitimately be regarded as the forerunner of modern landscape archaeologists. In particular, there are informative sections about the Negub Tunnel that supplied water from the Greater Zab to the Assyrian canal that led to Nimrud, about the irrigation system of Nineveh, and about the population of Nimrud, based on figures given in Ashurnasirpal's Banquet Stela. This is an innovative and pioneering book that considers for the first time in a Mesopotamian context the implications of geography and climate for the ancient history of the area. After this book was published its significance was quickly recognised, which led to the original edition published by the British Academy being quickly sold out. It is gratifying that it has recently been reprinted (2005) by the British School of Archaeology in Iraq,<sup>48</sup> with the help of a grant from the Charlotte Bonham-Carter Charitable Trust in David's memory.

Oates left Baghdad in 1969 to take up an appointment (in succession to Seton Lloyd) as Professor of Western Asiatic Archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology in the University of London, but he did not enjoy teaching as much as field archaeology and took early retirement in 1982. Nevertheless, he supervised a number of Ph.D. students during these years, including Ismail Hijara, Jabr Ismail, Lamia al-Gailani, Rosemary Ellison, Howard Hawkes, and the present author, and BA or diploma students taught by him included Shereen Ratnagar, Michael Roaf, Iris Furlong, St John Simpson and Tim Clayden.

Meanwhile Oates had embarked on his third great project, the excavation of one of the largest sites in northern Mesopotamia, Tell Brak in North-East Syria. This was initiated in 1976 and continues to the present day; because of ill health Oates' last full season as field director was in 1993, although he did return for a scaled-down season in 1997. Nevertheless, he continued as permit holder and director of the project until his death. From 1980 onwards he benefited greatly from the collaboration of his wife Joan, and she has now succeeded David as the permit holder. Tell Brak had previously been excavated by Sir Max Mallowan in 1937–8, and he had found there a fourth millennium BC temple with hundreds of alabaster eye idols in its foundations, after which it was called the 'Eye Temple', and a so-called 'palace' of Naram-Sin of Akkad (c.2254–2218 BC), actually a heavily fortified administrative building. The decision to reopen the excavations at Brak was taken after Oates had conducted a survey in North-East Syria with Kassem Tuweir of the Syrian

<sup>48</sup> With a preface by Joan Oates.

Department of Antiquities in February–March 1975, as a result of which ‘it seemed that many important questions about the history of the region could best be answered at this important site, or in its immediate vicinity’.<sup>49</sup> Also, third millennium levels were accessible on the southern part of the tell, unusual on large and important sites. After a few teething troubles, when it proved difficult to correlate the new excavations with the previous work of Sir Max Mallowan, the excavations flourished and produced important results that have established Brak as one of the most important sites in the Ancient Near East. The earliest levels at Brak have not yet been reached, but excavations have now pushed the history of settlement here back to the ‘Ubaid period in the fifth millennium BC. In the succeeding Late Chalcolithic (Uruk) period, that spanned the long period from the late fifth millennium BC down to the end of the fourth millennium BC, Brak was probably the largest city in Northern Mesopotamia, covering an area of over 100 hectares. This discovery has shown that the urban revolution was not the exclusive preserve of Southern Mesopotamia, as previously thought. In addition to obtaining a reliable ceramic sequence for the fourth millennium BC, some interesting and important finds have been made in these Uruk levels. They include a number of small stone bears, some proto-tablets, seals and sealings, tokens, and a hoard of beads in carnelian and precious metal.

In the third millennium BC Brak was known as Nagar, and before the Akkadian conquest around 2250 BC it was the centre of an important independent kingdom. From this period there comes a magnificent limestone bull with a human head, now one of the star objects in the museum at Deir es-Zor. The animal is represented as couchant with its head turned to the side and added decoration is in the form of ivory and bitumen inlays. A number of clay bullae with seal impressions come also from this pre-Akkadian period. Apart from the ‘palace’ of Naram-Sin, there were two other significant buildings of the Akkadian period (in areas SS and FS), showing that Brak was a major administrative centre at this time and also an important regional stronghold for the Akkadian kings from Southern Mesopotamia. An extraordinary feature of the SS building was ‘the unique, decorative, shallow fluted pilasters in the mud wall plaster’.<sup>50</sup> Both of these buildings contained temples, and there were ritual deposits in both buildings, but the most impressive was in the FS temple

<sup>49</sup> D. Oates in *Fifty Years*, p. 62.

<sup>50</sup> J. Oates, ‘Archaeology in Mesopotamia: digging deeper at Tell Brak’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 131 (2005), 8.

courtyard. This was a hoard that included quadruple spiral beads in silver. Dating from the second millennium BC was a Mitanni period palace and adjacent temple, in which were found cuneiform tablets and, testifying to industrial activities in this building, some unfinished ivory objects and some glass ingots. It is interesting that evidence for a glass industry at this date had also been found at Tell al-Rimah. The first two parts of a projected three-volume final report, co-authored with his wife Joan and Helen McDonald, appeared in 1997 and 2001.<sup>51</sup> There remains only the volume on the fifth and fourth millennium levels, that is now being prepared by Joan Oates.

From 1994–6 Roger Matthews took over as Field Director at Tell Brak,<sup>52</sup> and from 1998 until 2004 this responsibility was shared by Geoff Emberling and Helen McDonald. More recently (2006) Augusta McMahon has been the Field Director. The outstanding discoveries since 1994 have been a hoard in an Akkadian-period house in Area HS, that included a gold and lapis lazuli pendant of the mythical eagle Imdugud and a gold plaque with crossed lions; a unique secular monumental building and associated late fifth millennium BC manufacturing activities in Area TW; and the chance discovery in 2006 of a great ‘death pit’ full of skeletons in the outer city.<sup>53</sup> In 2002 a new and intensive survey began, with Henry Wright as Field Director, aimed at recording all sites and archaeological features within a twenty-kilometre radius of Tell Brak. This survey has produced important results, and is already achieving its objective of putting Brak into a proper regional context.

In his latter years, David Oates was dogged by ill health, particularly back problems. As we have seen, these may have originated in a rugby accident at school and, in the view of his wife, ‘were of course exacerbated by constant bending over a drawing board’. Nevertheless, he and Joan continued to visit Tell Brak regularly even after he had handed over the field directorship, and they went to great lengths to maintain contacts with Syrian and Iraqi colleagues. This included attending conferences in the Middle East and elsewhere, and they were regular visitors to Iraq until the Second Gulf War of 2003, recognising how important it was to put in an appearance at the annual festivals organised by the Iraqi government.

<sup>51</sup> David Oates, Joan Oates and Helen MacDonal, *Excavations at Brak, Vol. 1: The Mitanni and Old Babylonian Periods* (Cambridge, 1997); David Oates, Joan Oates and Helen MacDonal, *Excavations at Brak, Vol. 2: Nagar in the Third Millennium BC* (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>52</sup> Roger Matthews (ed.), *Excavations at Tell Brak, Vol. 4: Exploring an Upper Mesopotamian Regional Centre, 1994–6* (Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>53</sup> A. McMahon and J. Oates, ‘Excavations at Tell Brak 2006–2007’, *Iraq*, LXIX (2007), 145–71.

Here they were able to meet up with friends old and new. Many of these friendships were of long standing, and dated back to a time when as students in Britain the Iraqi colleagues had been generously entertained at the Oates' house in Barton near Cambridge. The publication of the work at Brak occupied much of Oates' time in retirement, but he also found time to write (together with Joan) some important works such as *Nimrud: An Assyrian Imperial City Revealed* (London, 2001). This is an authoritative description of what is arguably one of the most important sites in the Ancient Near East and it will be a standard source of reference for many years.

In his long and distinguished career, Oates received many honours. He was elected Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1954, received the Cuthbert Peek Award of the Royal Geographical Society in 1956, was a visiting fellow at Dumbarton Oaks (Harvard University) in 1963, was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1974, and became a Fellow of the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research in the University of Cambridge in 1997. After his retirement from the Institute of Archaeology he was made Professor Emeritus of the Archaeology of Western Asia. He was particularly pleased to receive in 1999 the Gertrude Bell Medal of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq, reflecting both his outstanding contributions to Mesopotamian archaeology and his long association with the British School. He became the third recipient of this honour after Max Mallowan and Seton Lloyd. He was Vice-Chairman of the School 1970–88, and Chairman 1988–95. He was made President in 2000. It is a mark of the high esteem and affection in which David Oates was held that forty-one scholars from fourteen different countries contributed to a Festschrift to honour his seventy-fifth birthday in 2002. This was published as *Of Pots and Plans: Papers on the Archaeology of Mesopotamia and Syria Presented to David Oates in Honour of his 75th Birthday*.<sup>54</sup> It was particu-

<sup>54</sup> Edited by Lamia al-Gailani Werr, John Curtis, Harriet Martin, Augusta McMahon, Joan Oates and Julian Reade, and published by Nabu Publications (London, 2002). This volume contains a list of David Oates' most important publications up to 2001. To that list should now be added the following:

- (i) 'The eastern Roman frontier in the Khabur region', in *The Syrian Jezira, Cultural Heritage and Interpretations* (Damascus, 2002).
- (ii) 'The role of exchange relations in the origins of Mesopotamian civilization', in J. Cherry, C. Scarre and S. Shennan (eds.), *Explaining Social Change: Studies in Honour of Colin Renfrew* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 177–92 (with J. Oates).
- (iii) 'Tripartite buildings and early urban Tell Brak', in D. Beyer *et al.* (eds.), *Les Espaces Syro-Mesopotamiens (Margueron Festschrift), Subartu XVII*, pp. 33–40 (with J. Oates).
- (iv) 'Ebla and Nagar', in F. Baffi *et al.* (eds.), *Ina kibrat erbetti (Matthiae Festschrift)* (Rome, 2006), pp. 399–424 (with J. Oates).

larly gratifying for David that the list of contributors included eight archaeologists of Iraqi origin and two Syrian colleagues. They, like colleagues in Britain, appreciated his quiet, understated and often slightly wicked wit, coupled with a suitable seriousness when it was appropriate.

David Oates died in Cambridge on 22 March 2004 aged 77 after a short spell in hospital. Appropriately, the funeral service was held in Trinity College Chapel on 31 March, followed by tea in the Old Kitchen. The cremation took place at Cambridge Crematorium the following morning. Obituary notices have appeared in *The Independent*,<sup>55</sup> *The Times*,<sup>56</sup> *Archiv für Orientforschung*,<sup>57</sup> the *Annual Report* of the McDonald Institute,<sup>58</sup> *Iraq*,<sup>59</sup> and *Antiquity*.<sup>60</sup> One of his obituarists has remarked that ‘he could be described as the last of the great quasi-imperial Middle Eastern archaeologists, but that would be to underestimate his achievements’.<sup>61</sup> That is indeed true. The fact is that his career mirrored the developments that have taken place in Near Eastern archaeology over the last sixty years, and much of the recent work at Tell Brak is appropriately multi-disciplinary and may favourably be compared with current work being done anywhere in the region. Having said that, it needs also to be recognised that while the excavations at Nimrud and Tell al-Rimah may perhaps be regarded as traditional, they nevertheless made major contributions to our understanding of Mesopotamian history and archaeology.

The last year of David’s life was inevitably clouded by political developments in the Middle East. Like so many of his fellow archaeologists and diplomats who knew Iraq, Oates was appalled at the decision of the British government to join the invasion of Iraq in 2003, recognising that while Saddam Hussein needed to be contained or replaced there were other ways of dealing with the problem. He would be greatly saddened if he knew that nearly five years on the problem is still no nearer a solution.

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*Fellow of the Academy*

(v) ‘The excavations of the British School of Archaeology in Iraq’, in J. E. Curtis, H. McCall, D. Collon and L. al Gailani-Werr (eds.), *New Light on Nimrud: Proceedings of the Nimrud Conference 11th–13th March 2002* (London, 2008), pp. 31–8.

<sup>55</sup> 1 April 2004.

<sup>56</sup> 7 April 2004.

<sup>57</sup> Vol. 50 (2003/4), 512–13.

<sup>58</sup> *McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research: Annual Report 2003–2004*, p. 10.

<sup>59</sup> Vol. LXVI (2004), v–vii.

<sup>60</sup> Vol. 78 (2004), 497–9.

<sup>61</sup> Harriet Crawford in *Antiquity*, 78 (2004), 497.