

Iraqi archaeology under threat

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Abstract: For the last couple of decades, Iraq is known as a country of war, danger, fear, hunger and terror. Three wars have occupied this period, bringing along terrible consequences. The chaos and poverty of the country, in combination with an destabilised authority, has made people to start large-scale looting of archaeological sites in the desert of Southern Iraq, as an alternative way of income. the antiquities they dig up from the ground are sold to smugglers, which again sell them on to collectors, museums and institutions all over the world through the illegal trade market. Unfortunately, the looting and selling of these ancient objects does not happen occasionally, but it happens on a gigantic scale and gets worse and worse. Entire villages, clans and tribes are involved in the trade and profit from it. Furthermore, powerful elites mingle in the trade, which is why it is completely intertwined with the country's political situation. Starting in 1990 with the first Gulf war, the problem has never had such a magnitude as with the start of the Second Gulf War in 2003, and it is still increasing today. Not only is this process destructive for the archaeological objects, monuments, and science, it also further destabilizes the country as looting groups are armed, merciless, dangerous and powerful. Furthermore, especially during the 2003 war but also before, sites have been damaged by military forces and bombs, and museums have been robbed. This bachelor thesis explains what kind of archaeology destruction has occurred in the past of Iraq, how looting has developed and why, why it is so hard to stop and most importantly, how we can counteract it.

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