

REMEMBERING DONNY - RECORDANDO A DONNY
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Members of the Spanish Archaeological Mission (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid-UAM) with Donny George, during the 1997 season, in the National Museum of Iraq (Miguel Á. Núñez)

September 16, 2000.

"It was a wonderful day! Our team remained in Baghdad for a few days before our travel to tell Mahuz (Kirkuk). It would be a nice chance to visit our Iraqi colleagues Donny Georges and Nawala al Mutawali, who were working in Umm al Qarib and Umma respectively at that time. After a moving trip to the archaeological sites -under a blazing sun- guided by Donny, we met the Iraqi teams in the



archaeological mission to have a lunch. Shadow, water, food and friends were waiting for us in the house, Donny got all ready for us. I took this picture after take a rest; thanks to this we can remind all members of the Iraqi and Spanish teams like a family. Yes, actually we spent that day with the family, because we felt at home whenever Donny were with us."

Carmen del Cerro

NEWS FOCUS

Rifle-Toting Researcher Fights to Protect Ancient Sites

BAGHDAD—Early one morning at the end of the Gulf War, Donny George was driving home to Baghdad after examining the ancient city of Hatra for signs of bomb damage or looting. A couple of allied jets roared over his car; the Iraqi archaeologist thought nothing of it until minutes later, when he came upon the bullet-pocked wreckage of a group of vehicles attacked by the same planes.

George has had more than his share of such Indiana Jones-style adventures. He kept a constant vigil at the Iraqi Museum in Baghdad during the Gulf War, catching a nap in the cellar in between air raids; he organized opposition to the truckloads of armed looters who scoured the countryside in the mid-1990s; and he later survived a brutal assault by an unknown assailant. All the while, George has played a critical role in keeping his field alive during a traumatic time. "He really has been cradling Iraqi archaeology for years," says Michael Müller-Karpe, an archaeologist at the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum in Mainz, Germany, who has known George for some 25 years. "Archaeology owes a lot to him."

George, 50, started his career working in the museum storeroom; recently, he was named director general of research and publications in the newly created State Board of Antiquities. In that capacity, he is overseeing a series of new excavations, struggling to revive scholarly publications and conferences, and encouraging a new generation of researchers to enter the field. His fluent English—his father was an accountant at the British consulate—and skills at cutting red tape have been major factors in easing the return of foreign excavators.

A senior member of a northern tribe, George earned all his degrees in Baghdad; his Ph.D. was on grave goods from a 6th-millennium-B.C. site. Later

were killed in the Kurdish north and Shiite south. Then came devastating inflation. The bulk of Iraq's archaeologists, facing drastic reductions in their real income, fled the department for jobs elsewhere; even paying for guards was difficult. Excavation work was at a standstill.

By the mid-1990s, looting was rampant at remote sites. In one unexcavated Sumerian city, George says, "a large force of some 50 to 70 looters appeared, and there was a full day of fighting between our government forces and the looters." At Larsa, an ancient site dug by French researchers, a guard was killed in a similar fight. And a guard at Warka (ancient Uruk) killed a looter. "I'd say we've

had a dozen of our people injured and killed in these fights," he adds.

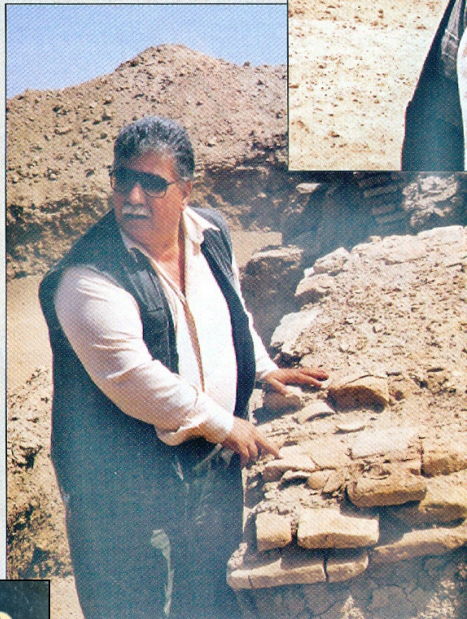
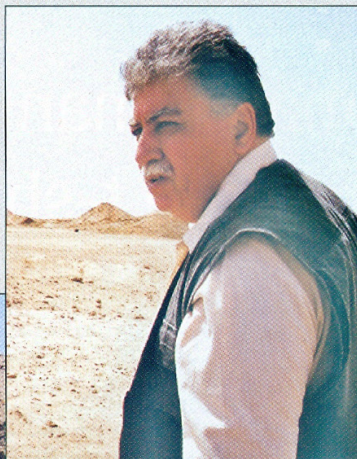
George himself was likely the victim of a looter reprisal. Coming home from work one night, he was struck three times with a blunt object. The assailant made no attempt to steal his wallet or car but fled when George—who is short but burly—resisted. He recovered with 14 stitches to his head. George's colleagues, both Iraqi and foreign, say there is little doubt his antilooting policies antagonized the organized groups who had enjoyed a largely free hand for years.

Shortly after that 1999 attack, and with reluctant approval of the presidential palace, George and some of his colleagues began to dig at a few remote looted sites to recover what they could while discouraging further damage. There was no resistance—thanks in part to careful diplomacy with the local sheiks who have day-to-day control over the rural areas of Iraq. "We've managed to maintain very good relations with the sheiks," says George. "We visit and talk frequently with each other; when they have funerals we go and pay respects. Sometimes people come from outside the area and test our control, and of course we have 24-hour armed guards, and I also have 'ears' in the area." George himself kept a Kalashnikov rifle handy during a recent visit to the south.

His local sources tell him that the looters have given up where the government has asserted a presence. "The dangerous part is that they simply switched to other sites," he says. "But it's tough; we can't dig everywhere." Meanwhile, new digs have begun, including his own at Umm Al-Aqirib (see p. 38), and he is training a new generation of researchers—which boasts a high percentage of young women—to assist in the work. And he hopes to increase his department's research credibility by expanding its number of publications.

"He's effective," says Müller-Karpe. "And if there's a problem, he solves it."

—A.L.



st. Donny George has had narrow escapes in the line of duty.

time to dig and do research. In continual crisis management. The massive effort of boxing and is in the Iraqi Museum prior to rained in the museum. "We had re was bombing," he says. d, George immediately set out influenced city built of stone in e potential damage. Looting of and some museum personnel



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On 6 July 2001, the journal *Science* (Vol. 293, No. 557, pp. 32-43) published a long article written by Andrew Lawler on the destruction of Iraq's archaeological heritage. On page 39 it is widely spoken of Donny George, his business and his dedication to the defense of the Archaeological Heritage (Joaquín M^a Córdoba)



May 2003, Professor John Malcolm Russell and Donny George in the Assyrian gallery of Baghdad Museum. The friendship between them began in 1990, going on during sanctions' period until the death of Donny. Professor Russell, author of the famous The Final Sack of Nineveh (1998) has been and is one of the strongest advocates of the archaeological heritage of Iraq (Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly).



The years of the blockade imposed on Iraq had destructive effects on all areas of the country, including science. Amid hardships of all kinds, during the year 2000, Donny George got re-edit the secular journal Sumer, of the Directorate of Antiquities and Heritage of Iraq. Rightfully proud of the effort and results since, Donny shows the cover of that issue of the magazine during an interview (Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly)

**ORO
MRUD**

de tres milenios y
rante una década,
s tesoros del mun-
ente ha visto la luz.

Las deslumbrantes
cuatro tumbas de
consortes de varios
siglos VIII y IX a.C. Los
descubrieron el tesoro
alidad. Las piezas
tes de la guerra del
s fueron depositadas
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ud aparecieron prácti-
los historiadores del
onas, pendientes y
no de los más hermosos
jamás hallados.



EL ARQUEÓLOGO QUE SE QUEDÓ

El estruendo de los tanques por las calles de Bagdad despertó

al arqueólogo iraquí Donny George antes del alba, cuando el 8 de abril las fuerzas estadounidenses entraron en la capital iraquí. George y un pequeño grupo de colegas llevaban semanas turnándose para dormir en el Museo de Iraq, con intención de protegerlo contra los saqueos. A última hora de la mañana, los soldados de Saddam estaban escalando los muros del museo, mientras los helicópteros estadounidenses se cernían amenazadores sobre ellos. El jefe de los arqueólogos decidió entonces abandonar el complejo. A causa de los combates y de los rígidos controles, el grupo no pudo regresar hasta tres días después. George se enteró del pillaje en el museo a través de la BBC. «Aquella noche no pude dormir», recuerda. Cuando volvió, encontró las oficinas desvalijadas, una cantidad indeterminada de piezas destrozadas o desaparecidas y hordas de periodistas. En un par de días, el investigador se había convertido en una especie de portavoz de la institución, gracias a su perfecto inglés, sus modales imperturbables y su pasión por las piezas del museo. Mientras que muchos arqueólogos iraquíes emigraron, George permaneció en el país durante la sombría década de 1990.



Donny George en la devastada galería asiria del Museo de Iraq, en Bagdad.



In October 2003, the Spanish edition of National Geographic (pages 58-75) published a report by Andrew Lawler, with photographs by Steve McCurry and Randy Olson, which details the situation that then Iraqi heritage suffered as a result of war, the looting of museums and plundering of archaeological sites. On page 73 is remembered Donny George's performance in defending the museum and heritage of Iraq. A photo of Donny evokes his presence in the room just devastated Assyria (Joaquín M^a Córdoba)



Wissenschaft

Krone der unbekannten Königin aus Gruft 3

Semiramis im Blitzgewitter

ARCHAEOLOGIE

Antikencoup in Bagdad: Das US-Oberkommando will Weltpresse den verschollen geglaubten „Schatz der Königin Nimrud“ präsentieren – 57 Kilogramm pures Gold aus As. Die Herrscherinnen-Skelette werden derweil in Göttingen un-

Is Mesopotamiens Kultur schon 2000 Jahre alt war und Abendlicht über Euphrat und Tigris leuchtete, als Schubkarre und Schrift, Gesetzbuch und Bier längst erfunden waren, bestieg im Norden dieses Garten Eden ein schlimmer Hitzkopf den Thron.

Assurnasirpal II., so sein Name, besaß zwar ein Wasserklo, auch ließ er sich täglich den Bart kämmen. Doch im Herzen dieses Mannes, so formulierte es der Orientalist Wolfram von Soden, keimten „widerwärtigste Regungen“.

„Ich verbrannte Jünglinge und Mädchen mit Feuer“, röhre der Grobian. „Ich star-

lastes in Nimrud fanden vier ihre letzte Ruhestätte. Die jü mit kaum 20 Jahren.

Es war im Frühling 1988, als d Antikendienst östlich von Mos erste Gruft stieß. Ein Jahr spä nächste Kammer zum Vorschein

„Beigaben von atemberaubend wie es im vorläufigen Grabungst Kristallbecher und Juwelen aus Lapislazuli, Diademe, Arm 400 Keilschrifttafeln bargen di aus den Gewölben. Im August noch eine dritte Kammer dazu

aufgebaut eine – ramentürl



Armreif mit Türkis, Malachit und Lapislazuli-Einlagen (Gruft 2)



Opterschale (Gruft 3), Armringe (Gruft 2)

Die Edeldamen vom Tigris, keine Frage, sind ein Knüller. So sieht es auch das Oberkommando der US-Streitkräfte im Irak. Obwohl durch Bagdad immer noch bewaffnete Banden laufen, soll der Schatz am Mittwoch von der Bank ins Nationalmuseum verbracht werden. Für Donnerstagsmittag ist in der Haupthalle ein Foto-shooting angesagt: Der schönste Goldfund aus dem Zweistromland wird der Welt-presse gezeigt.

Puderdosen und Kristallkeleiche, dazu Armringe, in denen winzige Steine aus Türkis, Malachit und Tigeraugen sitzen, will das Militär unter Bewachung vorführen. Das schwerste Einzelstück, ein Fußring mit Blumendekor, wiegt über 1100 Gramm.

An dem Geschmeide klebt Blut: Es stammt aus der brutalsten Phase in der Geschichte des Alten Orients. Hergestellt wur-

* Bei der Präsentation einer sumerischen Priesterstatue, die nach der Flunderung wieder aufgedacht ist.



Antikenverwalter George, US-Soldaten* Im Hintergrund ziehen die Amerikaner die Strippen



Weltmacht am Tigris
Assyriens Ausdehnung im 7. Jh. vor Christus

250 km

DER SPIEGEL 27/2003

Number 27 of 2003, the magazine Der Spiegel in its pages 152-156, published a long article signed by Matthias Schulz and Bernhard Zand. It realizes looting suffered by the National Museum of Iraq and of the first activities of the U.S. military. A picture captures a moment of videoconferencing between the authorities in Washington and his soldiers in Baghdad. Among the military appears responsible for the late and incomplete efforts of the military (Joaquín M^c Córdoba)



Donny George Youkhanna and Ali Hussein Faraj at Donny's house in Baghdad (2004). At that time Donny George was tutor of the Ali Hussein Faraj's PhD thesis "Jewish Aramaic Incantation Bowls from the Iraqi Museum" (Carlo Lippolis)



This picture contains perhaps one of the happiest moments of the life of Donny George. In May 2003 the head from the Lady of Warka was recovered, one of the most important pieces from the National Museum of Iraq was missing when the looting of the museum. In the hands of Donny finally, this image belies the sincere emotion he experienced that day (Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly)



Donny George at Amman, with Iraqi and Jordan colleagues. The picture was taken in September 2004 inside of the storerooms of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, where a large amount of Iraqi antiquities were temporary stored. The artefacts, stolen from Iraqi museums or coming from illicit excavations, had been confiscated by the Jordanian Customs and Police Authorities between 2003 and 2004. Thanks to the cooperation between the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Antiquities of Jordan and to the active, tireless support of Donny George, the archaeologists of the Centro Scavi di Torino recorded and catalogued these materials between December 2004 and February 2005 (Roberta Mepgazzi)



In 2011, in Texas, Donny lectured in the AIA meeting that took place there. In this picture, he is next to Elisabeth Stone and Paul Zimansky, during a trip, since Donny was there for a short time after the meeting (Joanne Farchakh Bajjaly)