

which he later added golf), his “prodigious gift for languages, ancient and modern” (the latter to include Italian, French, Arabic and Turkish), and his academic accomplishments. At school, for instance, “as a senior boy ... his party trick was to read the lesson at House Prayers in English, but from a Greek testament, without [the] housemaster detecting what he was up to”, and “in later years [he] could astonish a party of modern Greeks by reciting in ancient Greek an ode on the death of Heracleitus”. He quoted from some of David’s letters. In one David wrote, in January 1951, of his experiences in Libya, “The short time I have spent in another atmosphere has shown me how much more I have to learn, and made me wonder whether the values of the academic world were not overrated ... I feel that I want to do something more directly useful than academic research.” Thus David bridged another gap, that between academic research and practical field archaeology. He successfully passed on these skills to his students at the Institute of Archaeology and to generations of eager archaeologists.

D.C.

Jeremy Black, MA, DPhil
(1951–2004)



Dr Jeremy Black died unexpectedly in his sleep at home in Summertown, Oxford, on 28 April at the age of fifty-two. Jeremy was naturally companionable, a dear friend to a great number of people. The remarkably large congregation that packed St Andrews in Oxford for his funeral service in May was voluble testimony to the very great personal impact that his quiet and modest personality had on the intersecting worlds of Assyriology, the University of Oxford and music. His loss was felt internationally; that month a memorial service took place in Chicago. His life is already commemorated by the establishment of a new fund, the Jeremy Allen Black Trust for Assyriology. It is good also to learn that former graduate students plan a volume of essays to honour the memory of a gifted linguist, teacher and scholar.

Jeremy Allen Black was born in Middlesex and grew up in Berkshire, where he received his early education. While reading Classics as an Exhibitioner at Oxford he fell under the spell of languages and cultures of ancient Iraq, and after gaining his BA took a BPhil in Cuneiform Studies in 1975. His bachelor’s thesis was entitled “A History of Nippur, from the Earliest Times to the End of the Kassite Period”, demonstrating already a preoccupation with Sumer and Sumerian that became the hallmark of his academic career. The thesis was much cited in the more recent study of Nippur by Steven W. Cole, *Nippur in Late Assyrian Times* (1996), who described it as the “only systematic treatment of Nippur’s early history to date”. Despite this, it was never published. Jeremy’s postgraduate research, guided by O. R. Gurney, his teacher at Oxford, and

supervised by Edmond Sollberger of the British Museum, took him into the field of Sumerian grammar and ancient linguistics. His DPhil thesis on “Ancient Babylonian Grammatical Theory” was submitted in 1980 and published four years later under the title *Sumerian Grammar in Babylonian Theory*; a second, revised edition appeared in 1991. It remains the only book-length examination of the linguistic thinking that underpinned the Babylonians’ understanding of Sumerian.

Having acquired his doctorate Jeremy worked briefly for St Catherine’s Foundation at Cumberland Lodge in Windsor Great Park. An opportunity soon arose to continue his career in Assyriology, for in 1981 he joined the Oriental Institute in Chicago as a Research Associate. Here he was exposed to the unique atmosphere and demanding workload of the Assyrian Dictionary project; his contribution to what is one of the most extraordinary team-based projects in modern lexicography is recorded on the title pages of volumes 14 (R, 1999) and 17 (Š, 1989–92).

Jeremy’s next post was of a very different kind: in 1982 he moved to Baghdad to take up the Assistant Directorship of the British Archaeological Expedition to Iraq, as the School’s presence in Baghdad was then known. He succeeded Michael Roaf, who had been promoted Director. Roaf left Iraq at the end of 1985, and Jeremy followed him in the senior post also, staying on in Baghdad until early 1988. Five-and-a-half years in Iraq left a great impression on him. The friendships he made there with Iraqi scholars and visitors to Baghdad were many and enduring, but the landscape of the ancient land in which he found himself evoked in him the strongest reaction. I recall a journey by car to Babylon and Sippar in April 1987, a day informed by his enthusiasm for the surrounding countryside and punctuated by his delight in putting ancient names to the wayside trees and bushes. The pleasure of this conversation made it less noticeable that in his distraction he did not always steer the car on the safest trajectory. Jeremy’s feeling for landscape and his knowledge of mythology led him to picture Sumerian literature in its physical environment with rare ability. He demonstrated this at the School’s AGM in 1996 with a memorable and beautifully illustrated lecture on “The Sumerians in their landscape”, later published in a commemorative volume for Thorkild Jacobsen (2002).

As a leader of the School’s activities in Iraq Jeremy contributed his expertise to several of its projects in the field, notably as epigraphist at Robert Killick and Hermann Gasche’s exploration of Nebuchadnezzar II’s Median wall (Habl es-Sakhr) and for Warwick Ball’s first two seasons at Tell Hawa. Most of his research in Baghdad, however, was conducted in the Iraq Museum, where he set about making first-class pen-and-ink copies of tablets excavated by earlier British archaeologists at Nimrud and Ur in order to complete their publication. The Nimrud tablets were published by the School as the fourth volume in the series *Cuneiform Texts from Nimrud (Literary Texts from the Temple of Nabû*, with D. J. Wiseman, 1996). His copies of the tablets from Ur are expected to appear as the tenth volume of *Ur Excavations, Texts (Miscellaneous Texts*, with D. Loding and M. Sigrist). Jeremy also worked with Iraqi Assyriologists, notably Farouk Al-Rawi of the University of Baghdad; their articles presenting editions of important newly discovered tablets were published in this journal and elsewhere. Another joint project that grew out of friendships made in Iraq was an illustrated dictionary of ancient Mesopotamian religion, which came out in 1992 and has since been reprinted (*Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, with Anthony Green, illustrated by Tessa Rickards). Members of the School will remember how Jeremy’s interest in the physical form of religious icons known mostly from mythology had earlier been elaborated in a typically entertaining lecture delivered at the AGM of 1987, entitled “The slain heroes: Some monsters of Mesopotamia”. In Baghdad he had time also to deploy old skills in Greek philology, contributing to *Sumer* a paper on the history of Characene as illuminated by a newly discovered inscription of Vologases IV of Parthia. And there too he found a wife, the archaeologist Ellen McAdam.

The Parker Report into Asian and African Studies of 1986 resulted two years later in an injection of government funds into some of the universities that specialized in these fields. As a consequence, the University of Oxford was able to re-establish a full-time post in Assyriology, which had been lacking since Gurney’s retirement in 1978. Jeremy was appointed University Lecturer in Akkadian and elected Fellow of Wolfson College. Leaving Baghdad in January 1988, he enjoyed a gradual cultural rehabilitation by taking up temporary visiting fellowships in East

Berlin, at that time capital of the German Democratic Republic, and then Toronto, before moving that autumn into the Oriental Institute in Pusey Lane, his academic home until his death. Back in England Jeremy's close association with the School continued. Council benefited from his knowledgeable presence as the nominated representative of the University of Oxford for eight years from 1988, and as an elected member from 1997 to 2001 and from 2003. He would surely have gone on to become a distinguished chairman. He was deeply affected by political events in Iraq. In the face of the obstructive sanctions imposed on it after the Kuwait campaign of 1991, he was particularly concerned to maintain academic links with Iraqi scholars and, especially, students. Despite the bureaucratic difficulties he did so with some success.

At Oxford he was able to turn his attention more fully to the study of Sumerian linguistics and literature. He wrote several innovative articles on aspects of Sumerian linguistics, and inaugurated the School's study day on the Languages of Iraq in November 2003 with a lucid and witty introduction to the language, to be published next year under the editorship of Nicholas Postgate. His pursuit of Sumerian literature, practised with the study of cultic lamentations in the early 1980s, brought in the following decade engagement with the entire canonical tradition of the Old Babylonian period, leading to a ground-breaking book on the critical reading of that corpus, *Reading Sumerian Poetry* (1998). The book displays, among his other talents, a real sensitivity to Sumerian imagery. Jeremy's own use of imagery could be vivid, as when he sought to convey the indelible mark made on him by years of residence in Iraq: "I have the word 'Farida' tattooed on my chest!" Farida was a brand of local beer, a comfort to many expatriates, as also to visitors.

At Oxford Jeremy's time was interrupted by bouts of administration, first as Senior Proctor of the University (1995–6) and then as Chairman of the Faculty Board of Oriental Studies (1999–2001). When he was free of these duties collaborative research again dominated. His lexicographical talents were put to use on Postgate's team-based project to compile a short dictionary of Akkadian, published in 1999 as *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (with Andrew George and Nicholas Postgate, reprinted 2000). An active member of the peripatetic Sumerian Grammar Discussion Group and the Mesopotamian Literature Group (Groningen), in 1997 Jeremy established his own collaborative project with the aim of making available to users of the internet transliterations and translations of the Sumerian literary corpus of the early second millennium. During the ensuing years he and his research assistants built his Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature into an invaluable anthology of Sumerian literature. Though still under development, it is already complete enough to be a unique resource and is much used by specialists and non-specialists alike. A version of the anthology in book form will be published by Oxford University Press at the end of this year under the title *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (with Graham Cunningham, Eleanor Robson and Gábor Zólyomi). Both the website and the printed volume will long be prominent and useful monuments to a talented Assyriologist who had already given the field so much when his life was cruelly foreshortened.

A.R.G.

Donations to Dr Black's memorial fund should be sent to the Jeremy Allen Black Trust for Assyriology, c/o The Oriental Institute, Pusey Lane, Oxford OX1 2LE.