

Foreword

This issue of *Journal of the Assyrian Academic Studies* (JAAS) is in honor of Dr. Robert D. Biggs for his invaluable scholarly contributions to Assyriology and ancient Near Eastern Archaeology.

Several scholars would be needed to do the equivalent work that Dr. Biggs has accomplished during his 40 years of devotion to the study of the arts and sciences coded in the Mesopotamian ancient cuneiform texts of the mid-third millennium B.C. Within the vast domain of cuneiform studies, he has chosen to specialize in the most challenging genre: Babylonian divination texts (science of foretelling events from omens) and transliteration and translation of Babylonian medical texts, which require laborious effort as they form a highly technical genre.

Besides his professional work as an archaeologist, epigrapher and professor of Assyriology at the University of Chicago, Dr. Biggs has been holding several important posts such as: Associate Editor on the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*; Editor of *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* for 34 years; and President of the *Chicago Society of the Archaeological Institute of America*. Until his retirement in 2004 as the professor of Assyriology, Dr. Biggs taught courses on Babylonian literature, Divination, Medicine, and religious texts.

Several articles in this issue give the reader a glimpse of Dr. Biggs's vast expertise in ancient texts on Assyrian and Babylonian medicine. His autobiographical article titled *My Career in Assyriology and Near Eastern Archaeology* not only provides a wealth of information on Mesopotamian archaeology and his association with well-known archaeologists and Assyriologists, but it also takes the reader to the archaeological sites where one learns the personal side of doing archaeology and the challenges of fieldwork when one is faced with extreme climates and unfamiliar food and dwelling arrangements.

Dr. Biggs's latest contribution has been serving on a team of experts to help in the identification and recovery of the stolen antiquities after the looting of the Iraq Museum and the destruction and looting of archaeological sites in the aftermath of the 2003 war in Iraq. His article, *The Theft and Destruction of Iraq's Ancient Past* is a detailed report on the extent of looting and destruction and what has been recovered thus far.

Paula von Bechtolsheim's article is an edited version of a talk she gave as a tribute to Dr. Biggs at his retirement reception. As the managing editor of *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, she has worked closely with Dr.

Biggs. In this piece she emphasizes the interesting fact that an editor has a grave responsibility in maintaining a balance between “form and content” which means the editor must render in a most professional form, the meaning that the author intends in the article. Thus the editor must be not only an expert writer, but also must have the sensitivity of a “mind reader.” This is an art that Dr. Biggs has mastered skillfully.

Editorial Board