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In the wake of the Gulf War in 1991, the looting of Iraqi archaeological sites became a widespread pandemic. In 1997, John Malcolm Russell published The Final Sack of Nineveh which argued that the strict economic sanctions placed against Iraq were the primary cause for the rise of the Iraqi antiquities black market. United Nations sanctions, the book argues, forced the Iraqi people to resort to selling their own history in order to survive. However, while it is clear that economic sanctions decimated the Iraqi economy, the claim that sanctions are the sole cause for the surge in the black market of Iraqi antiquities is unfounded. There are three factors that greatly contributed to the rise in the black market of Iraqi antiquities. First, the disposition of the Iraqi economy was not as sunny as portrayed by Russell in the text. The Iraqi economy had been in decline since the late 1970s, when the Ba’athist government ceased fiscal planning and increased spending while the oil market plummeted. It is during this time that the popularity of Iraqi antiquities increased and because of the dire economic conditions in Iraq due to both the war and the drop in oil prices the illicit market thrived. Second, war damages from both the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf War rendered many sites obsolete which provided further incentive for looting. Damaged sites were easy targets for looters because in many cases artifacts had been looted by mortars or machine gun fire and many sites were actually used as bases for military operatives. Third, difficulties in identifying looted artifacts make it harder to recognize a rise in looting. The time lag between discovery, documentation, and publishing of archaeological data exacerbates this problem as it is extremely difficult to positively authenticate looted artifacts, especially if findings have not been published. Thus, while Russell is correct that the economic sanctions against Iraq affected the black market of Iraqi antiquities he overestimates the correlation between the two while ignoring other important factors that help explain the trend.