



OPEN SHUTTERS IRAQ

edited by Eugenie Dolberg

TROLLEY, PB, £19.99

In 2006, a small group of Iraqi women gathered in a house in Damascus. They had been brought together by Eugenie

Dolberg, a British photographer who had become frustrated by the narrowly sourced media coverage of US-occupied Iraq. Her plan was to teach the women photographic skills so that they could return home and document their own lives. It wasn't 'about making beautiful pictures, but about taking photographs that expressed what they wanted to say and how they felt', she writes.

The resulting book is a series of intimate photographic essays produced by women from across the country, ranging from a six-year-old girl to a mother of three grown-up children. Together they give an extraordinary insight into what it's really like to live through an invasion, when electricity and gas 'become dear visitors who rarely honour us with their presence', going to work can result in being kidnapped and beaten or worse, and sunshine leaves people feeling depressed because it reminds them of happier times before the occupation.

In one essay, a college lecturer witnesses a shooting on the way to work and returns home to find a bullet casing in her handbag ('I will never forget the terror I felt – that bullet could have gone through me'). In another, a young woman goes to visit her friend at university and notes the human flesh hanging from the trees – the day before, a suicide bomber had targeted a group of female students being dropped off at the college.

As a whole, the book is a powerful reminder of the human lives behind the newspaper headlines, and the fact that nobody ever gets used to living in such close proximity to violence and death. As one contributor writes: 'It's as if we are all carrying our blood in spoons, trying not to spill it.'

OLIVIA EDWARD



A poet crouches in the ruins of Al Mutanabbi Street, Baghdad's cultural heartland, after a bomb exploded there in 2007, killing more than 30 people



COAST: Our Island Story

by Nick Crane

BBC BOOKS, HB, £18.99

A coastal trek is, by definition, littoral, but 'the journey I take is not literal', writes Nick Crane: for this exploration of our islands' edges, he has half-imagined, half-recreated the forces that have played upon our coasts. So here are stories of ports, smugglers, lighthouses and holidays.

We learn what geological pressures contrived to hoist the delightfully named (for *The Man from UNCLE* fans) Illya Kuryakin onto Anglesey, creating a Very Serious cliff climb; and discover that Viking graffiti was of much

the same standard as that found in bus shelters nowadays. But historical evidence isn't always reliable, as Crane acknowledges: 'Cartography has the misleading characteristic of portraying places as "fixed"', he notes. And nowhere is this truer than on a coastal path: the village of Eccles on a 1574 map of Norfolk surrendered to the sea 30 years later.

Elsewhere, he finds constancy: the Romans used a 'triple curtain of coastal defence, a roving fleet, coastal watchtowers and fixed defences or bases'; a system more

or less identical to the one still used in 1940. Among coastal towns, rivalries flourish: Yarmouth was the first to aspire to the role of health resort, being cited as such in 1619. But seven years later, a Mrs Farrow found a spring in Scarborough that 'opened the belly': this spa put the town on the European map, and Yarmouth in the shade.

Crane's book, the culmination of five years' work on the BBC series of the same name, is full of such stories, delivered with wit and charm.

MICK HERRON

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