

NIPPUR

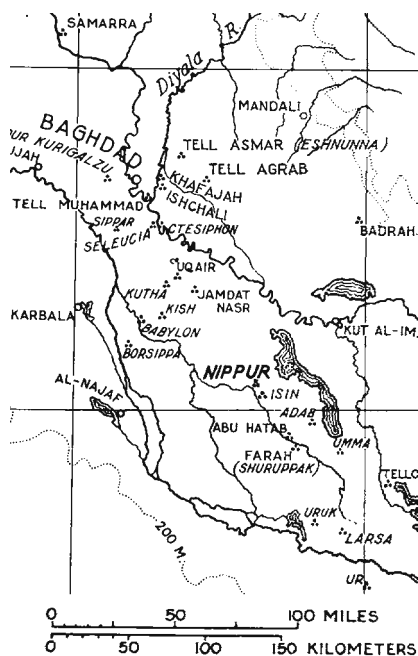
McGuire Gibson

As far as anyone can tell from this distance, Nippur is relatively safe from looting. Our guards report to our representative in Baghdad that the site is fine and that they wish we would come back to dig. Besides our guards, there are supposed to be a number of special antiquities guards housed in a new building near our expedition house. These new guards are responsible not only for Nippur but also for the other sites in the area. A fairly recent satellite image showed that there was no new illegal digging at Nippur. The damage done in 2003 was restricted to the northern part of the West Mound, and the holes were relatively shallow. A couple of small outlying mounds of Sasanian and Islamic date were also dug on, but they probably did not give the diggers much,

unless they found some glass bottles, for which there is a very active market.

The looting of sites is still going on all over southern Iraq. Again, satellite images show dramatic increases in the areas of mounds that are being destroyed. The images shown here are of the site of Isin, which is only about 30 km south of Nippur. It was already being dug on in the 1990s, when the embargo was creating economic problems in Iraq, which resulted in the laying off of many government employees, including antiquities inspectors. At the same time, because the government had very little control over the south of Iraq, looters could dig with impunity. The first photo is from 2002, and you can see a lot of holes in one part of the site. The second photo is from 2006, and you can see the great increase in the digging. Isin, as one of the important capitals in Babylonia in two different periods (2017–1794 and 1157–1026 B.C.), has drawn the interest of scholars for a century, and a German expedition worked there from the 1970s until 1990. Whether anyone will be willing to work there in the future will depend on how much of the site is left intact. Although the antiquities organization is currently trying to stop looting at some sites in the south, it is not certain that it can have much effect, especially at places like Isin, which is miles from a town, and therefore hard to police. Nippur, being only five miles from the town of Afak, is more easily brought within the orbit of whatever government presence there is.

Here in Chicago, we continue to work on publication of our excavation reports, and there is slow progress. The recent death of Donald P. Hansen, longtime professor of art history and archaeology at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, adds greater urgency to the need for publishing previous work at Nippur. Don was an excavator of extraordinary skill, and a great



Map of Mesopotamia



Isin: (left) 12/27/02 and (right) 12/25/06

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synthesizer of material. Working as a Research Associate of the Oriental Institute under Carl Haines, the director of the Nippur excavations in the early 1960s, he was the person responsible for the detailed excavation of the Inanna Temple, with its dozens of fine statues, seals, and other objects of the Early Dynastic period (ca. 3000–2450 B.C.). That sequence of temples gave the evidence for a new organization of the pottery and other objects of the period, with Hansen eventually coming to the conclusion that instead of dividing the era into three parts, it would be better divided into two. His arguments were given in a series of brilliant articles, and in a dissertation by one of his students, Jean Evans. But even with all this work, the manuscript of the final report that Hansen was doing with Richard L. Zettler, professor at Pennsylvania, is not yet finished. We now need to assemble all the persons with an interest in the Inanna Temple and in the two seasons that he conducted for the Oriental Institute at Abu Salabikh and decide how best to parcel out the effort to see all his work to publication. At the same time, I need to gather together all the pieces from different team members to get my own excavations at Nippur finished. This will take up a lot of time in the next year, and I expect it to lead to real results.

James A. Armstrong, former team member at Nippur and now the Curator of the Semitic Museum at Harvard, received a grant to work with Hermann Gasche in Paris with the aim of finishing the Corpus of Second Millennium Pottery that the University of Ghent and the Oriental Institute have been cooperating on for more than twenty-five years. Steven Cole hosted Gasche for a week in Chicago in order to proceed with the analysis of the southern end of the Iraqi/Iranian alluvial plain, another aspect of the cooperation that the Ghent and Nippur expeditions have fostered.

Augusta McMahon's *The Early Dynastic to Akkadian Transition*, volume five in the *Nippur* series, for which I wrote an introduction and did the initial editing, appeared this year. It is a very handsome book, reflective of the care and precision that has been McMahon's hallmark. During the year, I wrote a long article on the history of excavation at Nippur, listing all the operations and the important findings. I delivered a digested form of this article at the British Association for Near Eastern Archaeology meetings in Edinburgh. The article was supposed to go into a volume being published in Britain. As it happens, most of the other contributors did not meet the deadline, and the volume was canceled. I am looking into an alternative for publication, probably a journal. If I could find the time, I would like to expand it into a book about the site, its significance, and the history of investigations there.
