

NIPPUR

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The situation at Nippur seems to be secure enough for now, although reports on the site come third hand from our guards through our agent in Baghdad. The unit of antiquities guards organized by the government, housed in a new building near the dig house, is reported to be still there, and they are taking responsibility for the neighboring sites as well as Nippur itself. When we might return to resume our research is another question entirely, and one that cannot be answered as yet. Unfortunately, I am hearing that money for the Antiquities service, especially in the south of Iraq, has either stopped or is greatly cut back, and this might affect Nippur eventually with a withdrawal of the Antiquities guards. It was already proven in 2003 that our own pair of guards cannot keep large and determined groups of looters from digging on the site.

In general, the lack of financial support for the Antiquities officials in various parts of the country means that guards who should be circulating in various areas and checking on sites to prevent looting do not have gasoline for their vehicles and they often do not have the support of the local government officials. This means that the looting of sites, which had gone down a lot in the

past year or two, is once again a major activity. Part of the increase in looting can be accounted for by the fact that there is little or no water in the canals in the south, and the farmers are seeking other ways to make money. There is a drought in southern Iraq for the first time in history. How can an irrigated zone have a drought? It is easy when the country at the head of both the Tigris and Euphrates has finally dammed both rivers to such an extent that there is a greatly reduced flow for the countries downstream. Despite international laws regulating the flow of shared rivers, Turkey has forged ahead for more than forty years to complete a massive water control project that it sees as the key to its economic and social prosperity. Ecologists have predicted that the twenty-first century would be a period of water wars, and the current situation on the Tigris and Euphrates is setting the stage for one of them. For now, the Iraqis have oil in abundance, and they can pay the Turks to release more water, but in future, when oil is much scarcer, what will Iraq do?

Our work on Nippur does continue here in Chicago. With a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, we are well into a project to publish the backlog of volumes on Nippur. First on the agenda is the Inanna Temple, which was discovered in the 1950s and was excavated until 1962 by Carl Haines and Don Hansen. The Inanna Temple publication has been eagerly awaited by archaeological and art-historical colleagues because



Figure 1. 7N 184, statue of a woman in translucent stone with a gold face. Found at Nippur in Level VIIB, plastered inside a bench. IM 66190. Early Dynastic IIIa

it was and is one of the very few examples of a temple that has been documented from the Early Dynastic Period (ca. 2900 B.C.) until the Parthian (A.D. 100). Excavating the Parthian temple and then demolishing it and going down to the next earlier one and then demolishing that and then down to the next and next, etc., until they reached the earliest building, Carl and Don were able to present a temple that was erected, used, demolished, and rebuilt for more than 3,000 years. What they had was a stack of temples represented by just the lowest meter or less of the walls and floors for each level, filled in with the debris from the demolished walls. But each level of the temple had in it altars, offering tables, and hundreds of objects left in situ, including dozens of stone statues and many clay tablets with the record of the operations of the temple through time.

Carl was preparing the architectural chapters in 1973, when his work was halted by illness. He asked me to visit him in Cape May, New Jersey, where he and Irene were living in retirement. I brought back with me two suitcases of notes and plans, and they became the basis for Richard L. Zettler's doctoral dissertation and book about the Ur III level of the temple.

In subsequent years, Zettler worked closely with Donald Hansen on the other levels, but they did not finish before Hansen's death in 2005.

In a subsequent meeting in New York, all those with an interest in the Nippur publications met to set a plan for publication. Zettler, Karen Wilson, and Jean Evans (Hansen's last student) took on the architectural and art-historical aspects of the Inanna Temple, with Bob Biggs in charge of the cuneiform tablets. Ed Keall, who had been given the rights to use the information from the Parthian level in his dissertation on Parthian Nippur, also attended and agreed to work with the others to get the publication finished. In the past year, Zettler has visited Chicago twice to work with the other team members. Karen Wilson has taken on overall oversight of the ordering and computer scanning of the basic records while she finishes other commitments, but in the next year she will be working mainly on writing the volume. Jean Evans is also finishing prior commitments, but she has also been able to contribute some of her time to the project. She will take on a much larger role next year. We have three students working on the scanning operation. This kind of preliminary work takes a lot of time and effort, but once the records are entered, they can be accessed by anyone on the project and the data can be manipulated in numerous ways.

One of the student scanners is entering the object catalogs, plans, and photographs from the 9th and 10th seasons, when the Nippur Expedition concentrated on the Parthian Fortress, which dates to about A.D. 100. Keall, who has the main responsibility for the Parthian Fortress volume, will be able to access these records in Toronto, where he has long had a position at the Royal Ontario Museum. Others who will be responsible for the analysis of the pre-Parthian



Figure 2. 7N 120, IM 66071, a stone vessel with relief carving of a lion fighting a snake. Found at Nippur in Level VIIB, on a floor

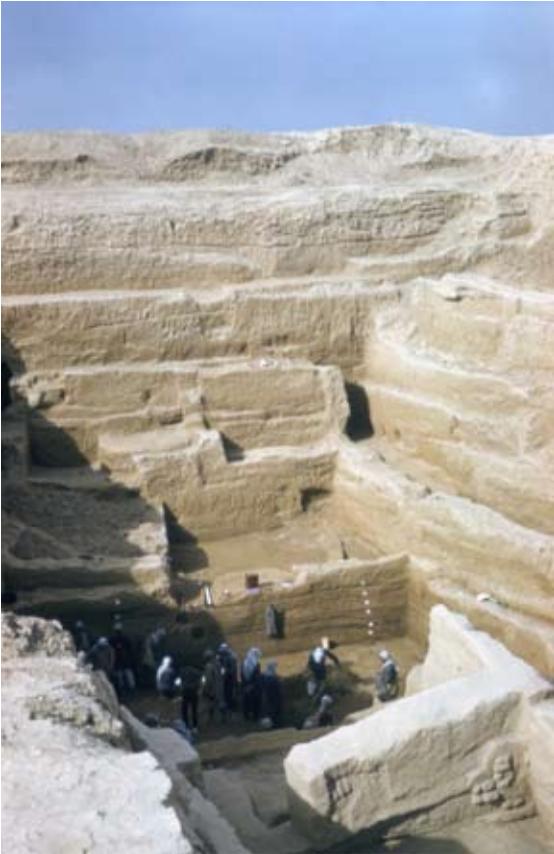


Figure 3. Inanna Temple excavation in 1962 when it reached the bottom, having taken away at least fourteen later versions of the temple

objects found in Parthian levels will also have that information available even on their laptop computers.

I am working on the excavations I carried out at Nippur from 1973 until 1990, expanding descriptive chapters when I get the time, and overseeing the scanning of the basic records of these seasons also. We have one advantage in these years of work because we began computerizing the plans and object catalogs as early as 1981. But the hundreds of photos and slides, as well as field notes, still need to be scanned.

In addition to the Nippur excavations, we have also taken on the publication of the first two seasons at Abu Salabikh, which Don Hansen carried out in 1962 and 1965. Bob Biggs served as epigrapher in those operations, and produced a very important volume of early texts found at the site (*Inscriptions from Tell Abū Ṣalābīkh*. OIP 99 [Chicago, 1974]). Hansen was a specialist in the Early Dynastic period, and he chose this site (12 km northwest of Nippur) as a place where he would find remains of that time right at the top of the mound. After those first two seasons, he was hired by New York University's Institute of Fine Arts, and he switched his fieldwork to Tell al-Hiba (Lagash). A British team under Nicholas Postgate (initially with Bob Biggs as

co-director) carried out several seasons of excavation at the site. Bob Biggs and Karen Wilson have taken on the duties of publishing Abu Salabikh after they finish their work on the Inanna Temple.

In summary, the publication project is well on its way, and we aim to have several volumes in press at the end of 2011.