

NIPPUR

McGuire Gibson

There is not much to say about Nippur itself. We get occasional reports from our guards that the site and the expedition house are safe. Besides our guards, there is a contingent of special guards from the government. Both the site and the house are slowly being weathered by rain and wind, but there is no looting. This next year will be a critical one in Iraq's history, with U.S. troops supposedly withdrawing (although I think that thousands will remain in several of the elaborate bases that have been built over the past decade). The withdrawal might lead to relative stability or its opposite. It may be possible to re-open investigations at Nippur in a year or two, but a team working at a very conspicuous site in a well-established house might present too tempting a target. Conditions seem to be fairly quiet in the south of Iraq, where Nippur is, and even farther south, they may be even better. Elizabeth Stone and Paul Zimansky are carrying out a short investigation of a site very close to Ur. This is a joint expedition with Abdul Amir Hamdani, an official of the Antiquities Service and also a doctoral student of theirs at Stony Brook. In addition, Abdul Amir is working with some Italians on another small site nearby, but that is also low-profile and essentially testing the waters. Carrie Hritz is planning an investigation of the area around ancient Girsu (modern Tello) and may start in the coming year.



Figure 1. View of the excavations at the Early Dynastic I Inanna Temple (ca. 2800 BC; level IXA). Note the curved platform for rituals

NIPPUR

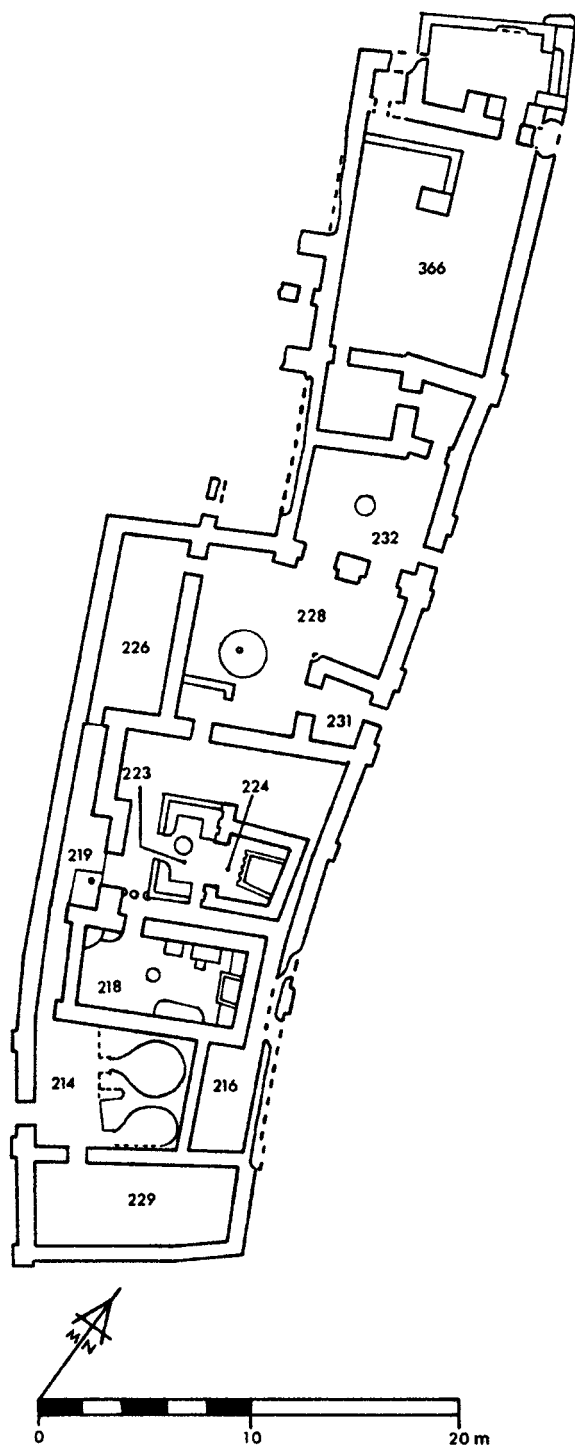


Figure 3. Two Early Dynastic statues of worshippers found in the Inanna Temple



Figure 4. Two of the bronze foundation statues of the Ur III king, Shulgi, buried under the temple when he built it. On his head is a basket of clay for the laying of bricks. Remnants of linen still cling to the statues

Figure 2. Central section of the Early Dynastic Inanna Temple (ca. 2600 BC; level VIII). Note the two shrines (218 and 224), the second of which is probably the Uzu-mu-a, where Enlil struck his pick into the ground and the first human sprang out

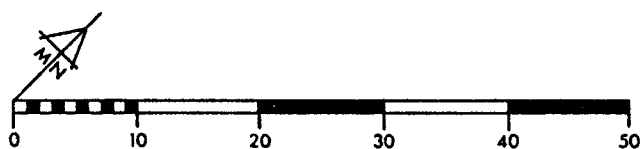
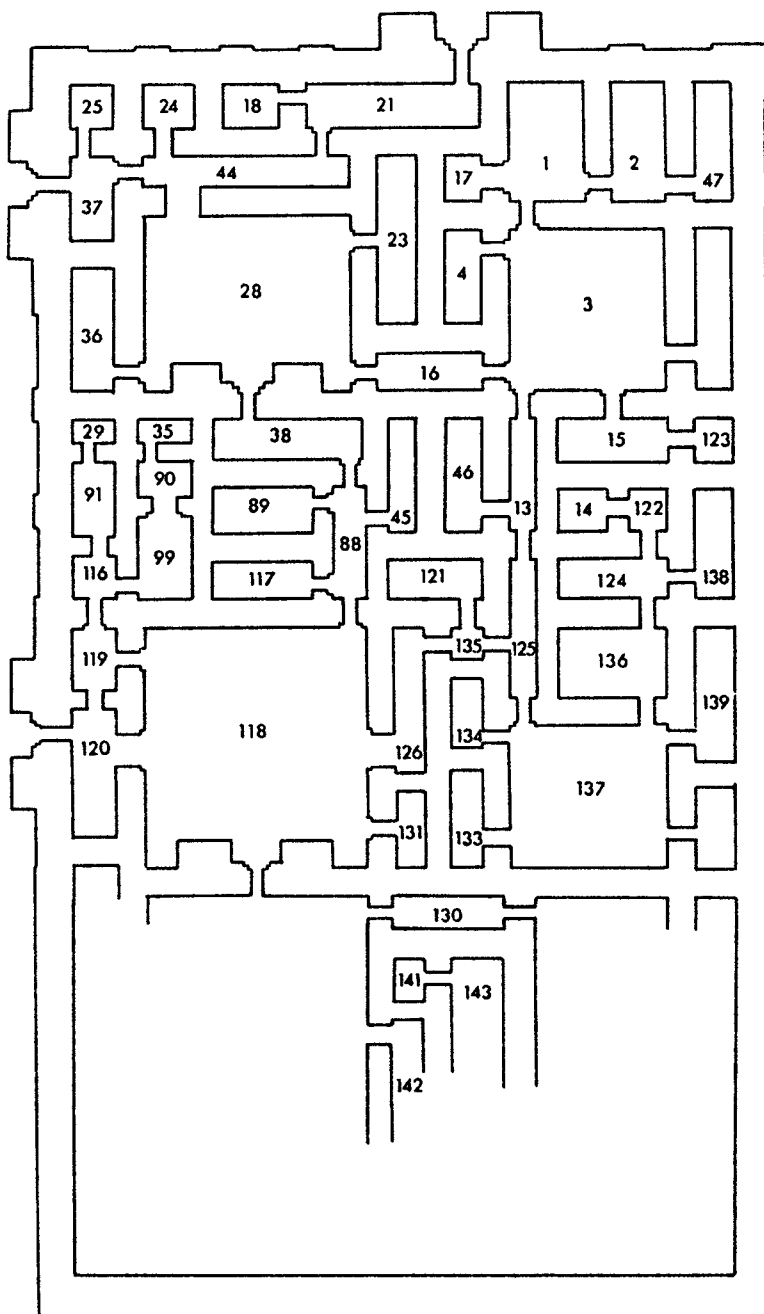


Figure 5. Plan of the Ur III version of Inanna Temple (ca. 2100 BC; level IV). The southern end was destroyed in antiquity, but we presume there were two shrines in the southern corner

NIPPUR

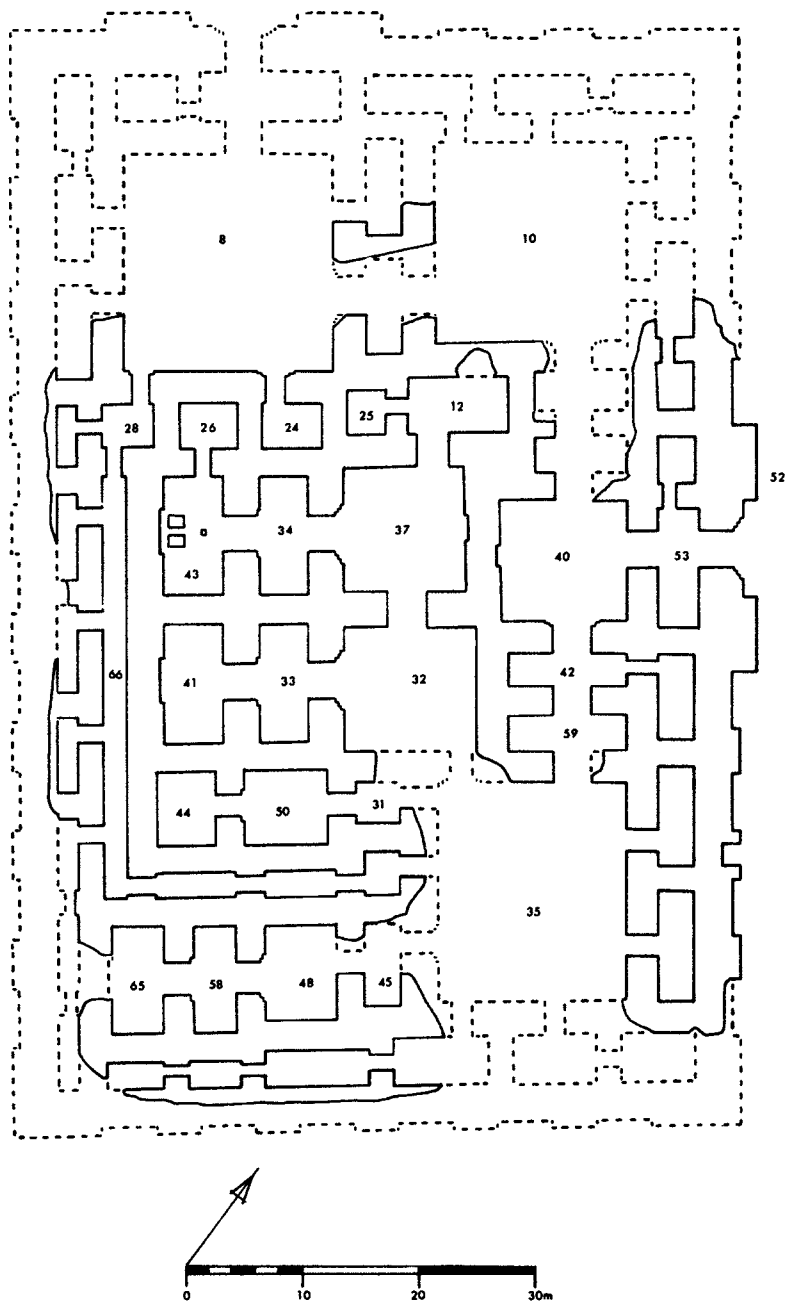


Figure 6. Plan of the Parthian version of the Inanna Temple (ca. AD 100; level II). Although more than six hundred years after the fall of Babylon, this temple, in classic Babylonian layout and detail, shows that the Mesopotamian religious tradition still held. Note the two shrines (rooms 41 and 43)

Meanwhile, we here at Chicago and elsewhere are hard at work on the preparation of reports on our years of work at Nippur. A National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant, which supported the project for the past three years, is about to end. That funding has allowed us to bring the Inanna Temple report very close to completion. It is clear that this one is going to be a multi-volume publication. Richard Zettler, who took on the Inanna Temple for his dissertation research in the 1970s and then went on to teach at Pennsylvania, has completed a huge manuscript on the architecture alone. The careful excavation and recording done by Carl Haines, Donald Hansen, and James Knudsted have made it possible for him to lay out numerous alterations in the succeeding versions of the Early Dynastic temples (2900–2450 BC), in which hundreds of stone statues, reliefs, and other objects were found (figs. 1–3). Karen Wilson and Jean Evans have prepared manuscripts on the pottery, sculptures, and other objects. Ed Keall, in Toronto, has the responsibility for the Parthian version of the temple, which is one of the best examples of the persistence of ancient Mesopotamian religion and its architecture, which existed here for more than six hundred years after the last king of Babylon had died (fig. 6.). Robert D. Biggs is working on the inscriptions from the temple. The group is able to work together, despite being hundreds of miles apart, because we have used part of the NEH grant to scan into a computer database and make accessible hundreds of field notes, notebooks, drawings, photographs, and slides. We have been very fortunate to have Jeremy Walker carry out the laborious job of scanning. As a second step, Karen Terras has then gone through the database to choose crucial but badly preserved documents and images on which she has worked magic with Photoshop, giving us a greatly enhanced result. During the summer of 2011, Zettler will return to Chicago for a working session, in which the entire team will push the project toward its completion.

In addition to the Inanna team, James A. Armstrong is revising his manuscript on the Kassite through Neo-Babylonian periods, and he will also be in Chicago again this summer. When I find time, I am still preparing manuscripts on two seasons of my own work at Nippur since 1972. And lately, I have dug out the partially completed manuscript on Umm al-Hafriyat, an industrial site out in the desert about 30 kilometers southeast of Nippur, where we did one season of work in 1977. We had planned at least one more season at the site, but commitments elsewhere in the subsequent years delayed our return. I last saw the site in 2003, from a U.S. helicopter about a month after the war. The site was riddled with holes made by looters who helped to feed the international market for stolen antiquities during the 1990s. It may be so badly damaged that no archaeologist ever works there again, and our report will be the only record of a remarkable town.
