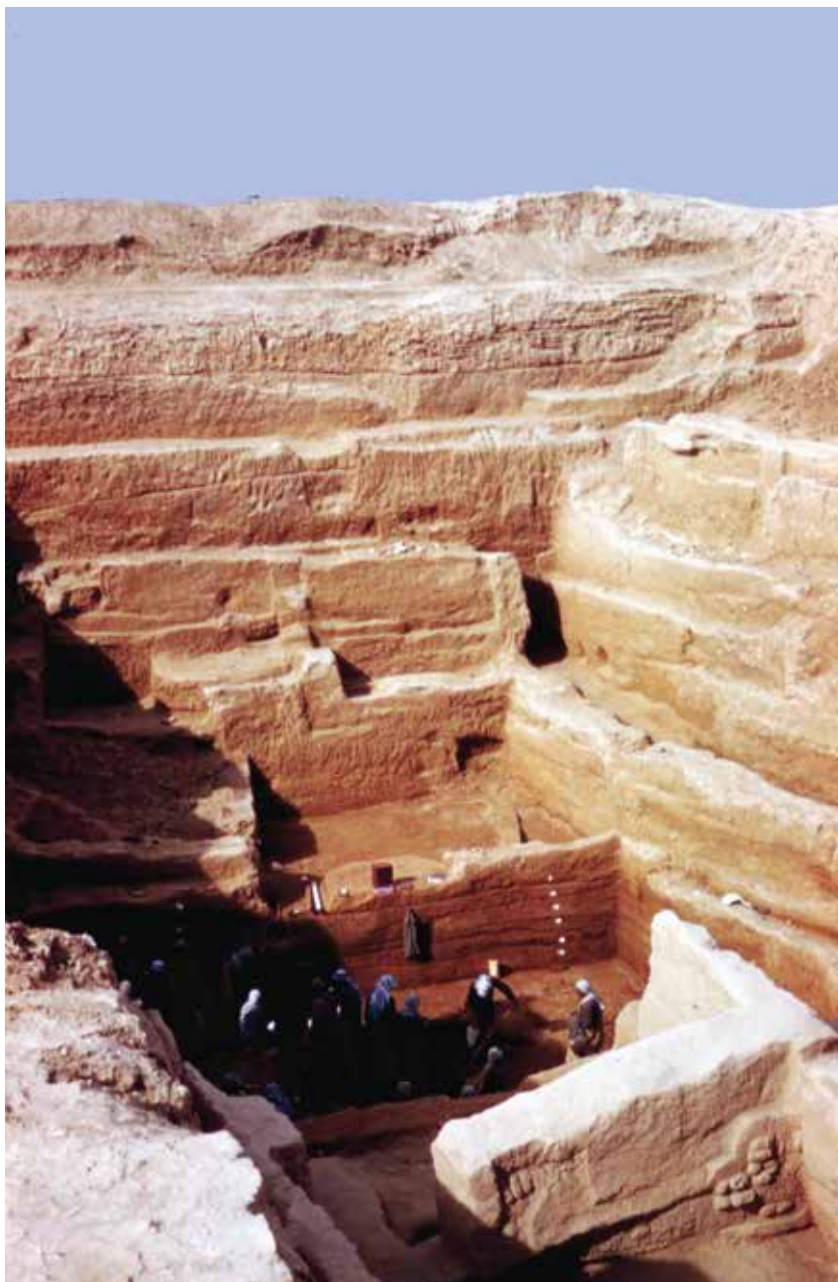# NIPPUR

McGuire Gibson

During the past year, the repairs and re-equipping of the dig house at Nippur were completed, and we expected to be in the field for the month of December to resume work at the site by doing a relatively short preliminary survey of the surrounding area, ground-checking locations of probable sites located by the study of satellite images. This was to be the main responsibility of Oriental Institute Research Associate Carrie Hritz. While doing this mapping work, we would also assess damage to the region from looting that took place in the 1990s and after 2003. I wanted especially to locate a site from which Kassite period (ca. 1400–1200 BC) cuneiform tablets might have come. Some stolen tablets with features that link them to Nippur surfaced a few years ago in private collections in Europe, and initially the scholars who looked at them thought they came from Nippur. Since I had been to Nippur a number of times throughout the 1990s and several times after 2003, and I had examined the mounds of Nippur thoroughly each time, I knew that the tablets could not have come from the city itself. Although there was a short period of a couple of weeks in 2003 in which men dug illegally on the north side of the West Mound, I looked over the holes and I could see that there were no Kassite pottery sherds around them, but only those of later periods. There are, however, several Kassite mounds within a few kilometers of Nippur, and we knew that we would be able to spot signs of looting and that we could suggest that one or the other of those sites was the source of the looted tablets.

As it happened, the visas for our proposed season at Nippur were not granted, so this survey and later projected excavations at the site will have to be delayed. I have to assume that the problem has to do with fears for our security.

Iraqi excavators are at work on a number of sites in the south of Iraq, and extremely valuable surface surveys by them have located more than 1,200 sites in and around what used to be the great marshes. Some foreign expeditions have been allowed to begin work in the southernmost parts of Iraq, where it is relatively secure, especially at and around Ur, and there is some news of excavations in the Lagash area. Perhaps Nippur can be added to that list in the coming year.

In the meantime, more than twenty groups are doing survey and excavations in the Kurdish Autonomous Region, and as a result we will know more in the next ten years about Assyria than we have since Layard first began to dig at Nimrud and Nineveh has been badly damaged. Speaking of those sites, while mounds in the entire area under control of ISIS are being looted, the Assurnasirpal palace at Nimrud has been obliterated with explosives and Nineveh has been badly damaged. Last year ISIS posted footage of the blowing up of the palace of Assurnasirpal at Nimrud. In the past few months, satellite imagery and ISIS propaganda videos show that, at Nineveh, winged bull figures in city gates have been destroyed and bulldozers have destroyed the massive stone and mudbrick city walls and gates that Iraqi archaeologists had spent many years and many dinars carefully reconstructing. Lately, a highway has been constructed across the site, and increasingly we see new houses built on the high mound, which has been kept relatively safe until now, although the lower, southern end of the city has been covered with houses.

Inanna Temple excavations from the Surface to Level XVII, view from northwest (sm 2432)

Here in Chicago, we continue to work on Nippur publications. As mentioned last year, the Inanna Temple final report is done and is now in the editorial process. It should appear in about a year. And I can now return in a major way to the Nippur reports that I left almost finished when I took on the commitment to publish reports of Iraqi excavations that had been damaged in the looting of the Iraq Museum in 2003. I hope to have one of the Nippur reports, probably on Area WG, in the editorial office by the end of the summer.

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