



Inanna Temple Publication Project

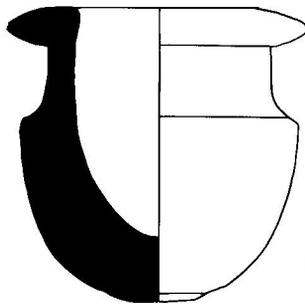
Richard L. Zettler

In 1984–85 work on the publication of the Inanna temple excavations, which were carried out at Nippur from 1951–1963, continued for a second year and an outline of the final report began to take shape. The report, as I currently envision it, will be in two parts. The first part will consist of a discussion of the architecture and stratigraphy, a stratigraphic catalogue of finds, that is, a list of finds arranged by level and within levels by locus, feature, etc., and a chapter on the dating of the levels. The second part of the report will include chapters on the statuary and reliefs, seals and sealings, pottery and stone vessels. A detailed catalogue of tablets and inscribed objects will be published in a future volume, as will various technical reports, for example, analyses of soil samples, botanical and faunal remains, etc.

As of the current time, work on the architectural plans is well advanced and the stratigraphic catalogue of finds is done, if in preliminary form. Over the last few months Professor Donald P. Hansen, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, has been preparing remarks on the dating of the lower levels of the temple and on the statuary and reliefs. Karen Wilson, who just defended her Ph.D. dissertation at the Institute of Fine Arts, has been working on the pottery from the excavations. In addition to working on the plans and catalogue, I have spent a good part of my own time during the last year on the seals and sealings and the stone vessels from the excavations.

Although the stone vessels from the Inanna temple excavations may seem at first thought to be a less enticing object of study than the seals and sealings, their consideration has proved to be of no little interest. Nearly two hundred seventy-five whole and fragmentary stone vessels were found in the excavations. I had hoped when I first approached the study that those vessels would be distributed randomly through the successive levels of the temple and that their study would shed light on changes over time in shapes and raw materials used. Because the development of stone vessels in the early cultural phases of southern Mesopotamia is at present poorly known, the study of those from the temple of Inanna held out the promise of being important for pinpointing chronological indicators. In addition, because southern Mesopotamia is stone poor and nearly all stone used had to be imported from outside the area, the study also promised to

illuminate such matters as access to stone sources and, by extension, trade routes from one period to the next. As frequently happens in such undertakings, however, initial hopes were not fulfilled. The stone vessels turned out not to be randomly distributed at all but clustered in two levels. Fifteen percent of the total number of stone vessels were recovered from the earliest levels in the temple sequence, that is, from Levels XX-IX or the levels of the Uruk and Jemdet Nasr periods and the first phase of the Early Dynastic period. An overwhelming seventy-two percent of the total number were found in Levels VIII-VII, which date to the late Early Dynastic period. The remaining thirteen percent were found in later levels, and more than half of those in Level IV, which dates to the time of the Third Dynasty of Ur.

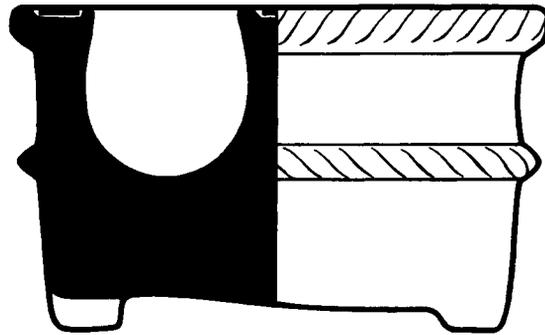
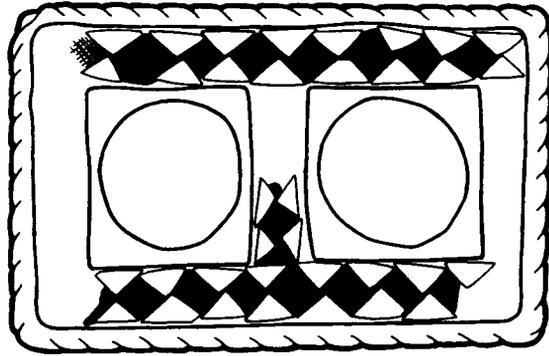


7 N 355. White stone cosmetic jar. Inanna temple Level VIII.

7 N 177. White stone double cosmetic jar supported by two pairs of recumbent bulls. Inanna temple Level VII.



If the stone vessels found in the excavations of the temple do not yield information on changes over time in shapes and raw materials, they do at least provide a large and important corpus of the late Early Dynastic period. That corpus has its strongest parallels with the late Early Dynastic finds from Fara (ancient Shuruppak), a site located some sixty kilometers south of Nippur and excavated by a German expedition in 1902–03 and by Erich Schmidt on behalf of the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, in 1931. Most of the vessels from Levels VIII-VII are open forms with straight



7 N 13. White stone cosmetic vessel with mother-of-pearl inlay.
Inanna temple Level VII.

sides, beakers, cups, bowls and plates or trays. Open forms with incurving, flaring, convex or bell-shaped sides also occur, but are considerably less common than those with straight sides. Closed forms, miniature and standard-sized jars, do not make up as large a percentage of the total number of stone vessels as do open forms, but are, nevertheless, numerous. Among the jars are two of particular interest. Both are biconoid in shape and have high ring bases. One has crisscrossed bands cut into the body of the vessel and cut decoration on the base; the other has three rows of zig-zag lines carved in relief on the body of the vessel and cut decoration on the base. The two vessels have a close parallel in a pottery jar from Fara. The German excavators suggested that the decoration on that jar was in imitation of a net or wickerwork which perhaps served to prevent the vessel from

cracking or which held a cracked vessel together. I would think that such a net or wickerwork might also have been used for suspending the vessel.

A particularly interesting feature of the corpus of stone vessels from Levels VIII-VII is the number of cosmetic vessels which it contains. Roughly twenty-two percent of the vessels are cosmetic containers. Roughly half are small, shallow jars with a rounded or flattened base, semi-circular body, carinated shoulder, frequently with rope pattern decoration at the point of carination, and club rim. A typical example is shown in figure 1. A number of these jars are supported by recumbent animals such as geese or bulls. Figure 2 shows a double vessel supported by two pairs of recumbent bulls whose heads are broken off. At each end a hero stands with arms around the necks of the bulls. A second group of cosmetic vessels consists of vessels rectangular or sub-rectangular in shape. The vessels frequently have two holes in the top for pigments, but not infrequently four or five holes. A few of the more elaborate vessels, for example, that shown in figure 3, have inlaid decoration around the edges of the flat top surface and/or scenes carved in relief on their sides.

Only one of the cosmetic vessels from the temple that I have seen has traces of the pigment which it contained and that pigment is white in color. The range of colors used in late Early Dynastic Mesopotamia is known, however, from finds in the Royal Cemetery of Ur. Sir Leonard Woolley, who excavated the Royal Cemetery, reported that the grave of nearly every woman contained a shell or shells with pigments and that the colors included white, red, yellow, blue, green and black; green and black being most common.

That so many cosmetic vessels were found in the temple of Inanna is perhaps not surprising. Most of the stone vessels found in the temple, as inscriptions on them occasionally indicate, were gifts to Inanna from her devotees. Inanna, as goddess of love, was renowned for her beauty and sexual allure. A cosmetic container either with or without pigments would seem to be an appropriate gift for the goddess.

The Inanna temple publication project is not and was never intended to be one of the Oriental Institute's long-term projects. This year I am happy to report that while the project is still going at full-speed, the light at the end of the tunnel is clear. I should be able to report next June that the final report has gone to press. In closing, I must express thanks to Janet Johnson, Director of the Oriental Institute, for her continued support and to Robert D. Biggs, Miguel Civil, McGuire Gibson, Donald P. Hansen and Karen Wilson for their advice and aid, as well as for the work which they have put into the publication of the Inanna temple excavations.