

## NIPPUR

MCGUIRE GIBSON

For the Nippur Expedition, this was a year devoted to analysis and publication of findings. Since 1972, our program has been a multi-faceted one, seeking the answer to a number of archaeological, historical, and environmental questions not only for the site of Nippur but also for a much broader area. Barred from field work by the current embargo on Iraq, the staff spent the year preparing or revising manuscripts and drawings and doing page-layout for two volumes that are in preparation. More importantly, we brought another volume through the editorial process and most of the way to publication.

Richard Zettler's monograph on the Kassite buildings in Area WC-1, which will appear in 1993 as *Nippur III*, was submitted last year, was sent out for scholarly review, and then was returned to Zettler for minor revisions. With Zettler's agreement, as editor of the series I made some decisions that would improve the book but would delay its appearance by a few months. For instance, we included photographs of all the cuneiform tablets to supplement the descriptive catalogue. Such photographs of tablets are relatively rare in archaeological reports, but these are good enough to convey information readily.

This book, based on excavation of Area WC-1, carried out by Zettler and Elizabeth Stone, records an unusually large private house, perhaps owned by merchants, which was built some time in the thirteenth century B.C. and was then altered and rebuilt and finally was abandoned. Above the Kassite levels was a very badly eroded building dated to the seventh century B.C. when the Assyrians ruled Babylonia. Although the original Kassite house was unusually well preserved, with walls standing more than a meter and a half high, the amount of material found in it was disappointing. The occupants of the house had been relatively neat, and before each renovation there had been a general cleaning out of the building. However, there were enough pottery and other artifacts to help solidify our notion of the Kassite assemblage. The chapter on the pottery contributed to this volume by James A. Armstrong is, as of now, the definitive statement on the later part of the Kassite period, incorporating, as it does, important earlier work by Judith Franke in Area WB. Armstrong's discussion is significant not only for Nippur but also for Babylonia in general.

We have made considerable progress in finishing our report on Area WG, the operation at the top of the West Mound that was designed to investigate

the transition between the Sasanian and the Islamic periods. In fact, in that operation we reached Parthian levels (ca. A.D. 100), so that we have a very good sequence from this period through the early part of the Abbasid period (ca. A.D. 800). The transition from Sasanian to Islamic has not been detailed in excavations in Iraq, and thus we have no demonstrable material evidence of this most important civilizational transition. We have hypothesized that artifacts did not immediately reflect the political, economic, and religious changes that Mesopotamia underwent at important junctures in its history, even one as profound as the Islamic conquest. We assumed that there must have been a delay in the adoption of symbols of the new regime and religion. We expected that pottery would change more slowly than other items that are more linked with politics, for instance, the coinage or other items directly linked with the governmental administration. Thus far, analysis of the artifacts proves that there were different rates of change in these different classes of artifacts. An early assumption, that we might see a shift in the kinds of animal bones as we entered the Islamic levels (consumption of pigs is forbidden for Muslims), apparently does not hold, according to preliminary study of the material. Perhaps we were digging in a Christian area of the town.

James A. Armstrong and I are writing the main text of the WF operation, while John and Peggy Sanders work on the plans and illustrations of objects. We have received several analyses of the finds: The pottery was analyzed by Edward J. Keall and C. Ciuk of the Royal Ontario Museum, Erica Hunter analyzed the Aramaic incantation bowls found buried upside down under floors of a house in the Early Islamic level, and David Reese analyzed the animal bones and shells. We will receive shortly the technical reports on glazed pottery from Pamela Vandiver of the Smithsonian Conservation Analytical Laboratory. We hope to have this manuscript ready for the editors in 1993.

On another front, James A. Armstrong has been revising and expanding his doctoral dissertation, which was based on his work in Areas WC-2 and TC. This important piece of research has resulted in the first clear idea of the sequence from the Kassite through the Achaemenid period at Nippur. And once again, as with his work on the Kassite pottery, his analysis of this material is critical for giving a sound underpinning to southern Mesopotamian archaeology from the twelfth century through the sixth century B.C. It was in excavating Trench TC that we became aware of a major environmental crisis at Nippur that occurred in the latter half of the second millennium, which led to an abandonment of all or most of the city and was comparable to an earlier disaster that we had demonstrated for the Old Babylonian period (eighteenth century B.C.). In TC, we exposed evidence of dunes and abandonment in the archaeological strata, marking both these abandonments below and above of

the Kassite levels. Tying this archaeological evidence with the environmental findings that we have been making on and around the site since 1972, we have been able to build up a picture of the ancient Mesopotamian environment as a fragile one, greatly affected by human action, resulting in sometimes catastrophic events for humans.

The archaeological information derived from the work in Area TC can be correlated somewhat with data derived from a group of tablets found in Area WB in 1973. Steven Cole, a former Chicago student and a member of the Nippur Expedition, completed a doctoral dissertation based on that set of tablets. Now, when his teaching duties at Harvard allow him the time, he is preparing a publication that uses these documents to lay out an economic and social history of the early first millennium, when Aramaeans and Chaldeans made up a major component of the Babylonian population and Arabs were just beginning to settle among them. These texts from Nippur, in fact, give the earliest mention of Arabs in Babylonia, about 750 B.C. Cole's book will be published eventually by the Oriental Institute. It will be an appropriate companion volume to Armstrong's important study, which will be completed in 1993 and will appear as *Nippur IV*.

As she has for several years, Augusta McMahon has worked as my assistant for the past year, while also completing a part of her own Ph.D. dissertation. McMahon's dissertation, based on excavation she supervised at Area WF in the eighteenth and nineteenth seasons (1989-90), is devoted to a study of the Akkadian period (ca. 2350-2200 B.C.), when the world's first truly effective empire was created. Despite the fact that very important social, political, economic, religious, linguistic, artistic, and other changes accompanied the rise of the Akkadian empire, this period is still only vaguely known. In particular, McMahon is interested in the transition from the Early Dynastic to the Akkadian because earlier excavations that encountered material of this time were misinterpreted and confusion has resulted. McMahon has been awarded a Whiting Fellowship, a rare honor, to complete her dissertation in the 1992-93 academic year. Her dissertation will also be published, eventually, in the Nippur series.

In a related research activity, the Nippur Expedition has turned to the skies for data on the ancient landscape around the site. One of the results of the Gulf War has been a tremendous increase in satellite imagery for southern Iraq. The satellite technology that underlay the United States' war effort can be employed for peaceful purposes. Tapes from satellites can be purchased not only from the United States' government but also from European and even Russian sources. Before the war, such images for the area around Nippur were not available, unless one paid an extra amount to have the satellite focus on the area. Nippur was of strategic interest, apparently. In the wake of the Gulf

War, the available coverage is tremendous. Every inch of the country has been recorded thousands of times. Presumably, the images that are available commercially are nowhere as precise as some of those used by the military, but they are more than adequate to use for the mapping of ancient sites, ancient canal systems, and abandoned fields, and they can be enhanced through computer technology to show buried features, such as walls, water courses, and ancient river levees. With the environmental specialist, Tony Wilkinson, now on the Oriental Institute's staff, and with John Sanders in his new role as computer specialist, we are able to make great strides in the use of such technology to carry out analyses of ancient landscape even while sitting in Chicago. In this aspect of our program, we are continuing a fruitful collaboration that we have had for years with the Belgian Expedition to Iraq.

In January 1992, James Armstrong and I went to Ghent for a meeting with our Belgian colleagues to consult on the production of a general corpus of second millennium pottery that we are creating jointly. James is doing most of the work on the Nippur side of this effort. We have arranged for him to stay in Ghent for a month during the summer of 1992 and to work on the manuscript. The corpus should appear in 1993.

In summary, this past year has been very productive for the Nippur Expedition, even though we could not go digging. We miss the field work and wonder, occasionally, whether our Iraqi friends and colleagues are well.

Amazingly, although the destruction in Iraq was tremendous, and although the bombardment of the army at the front was unprecedented, military casualties were relatively light. The civilian casualties were enormous and, because of disease and deprivation, have now reached something between 150,000 and 200,000 deaths. The lack of electricity during the war led to the spoilage of medicines, of blood plasma, and of insulin, resulting in the death of thousands of people on maintenance drugs. Medicines, such as antibiotics, soon ran out. The loss of electricity also resulted in the halting of dialysis machines, iron lungs, and even lights in operating theaters of Iraq's very modern hospitals. Generators eventually ran out of fuel because the refineries had also been destroyed. More importantly, without electricity, the water supply could not be maintained, sewage treatment came to a halt, and tons of raw sewage were dumped into the Tigris, spreading infection downstream.

In light of this human tragedy, it seems inappropriate to write about the loss of material things, but the ancient culture of Iraq is precious in itself, and when destroyed it cannot be renewed. I had no thought that Nippur would be damaged during the war, since it is far from anything militarily important. The site and the expedition house came through the war unscathed. There was no damage from the war, and even the post-war looting of archaeological expedition houses that occurred at a number of other sites did not happen at

Nippur. Our guard heard that people were coming to rob the house in March 1991. He sent his son to get brothers and cousins who surrounded the house with Kalishnikov machine guns. When the mob came, the guard said that anything that happened would start a tribal feud, which stopped the event in its tracks.

For anyone who wishes to know about damage to the archaeological sites in Iraq, I can state that there was some, but that we will not know how much until a group of professional archaeologists is allowed to form a fact-finding commission and visit all parts of the country. We know that there are 400 new holes in the ziggurat of Ur, caused by one strafing run by a jet. There are also four large bomb craters in the sacred area near the ziggurat. There is documented damage to one other site near Ur, where a unit of troops from the United States dug in with bulldozers and left behind a mass of rocket tubes and ration containers. The hundreds of other sites in the battle zone have not been visited, as far as I know. There was damage to historic structures in Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, and other cities, as well as to the Arch at Ctesiphon. Most of the damage seems to have been caused by the shaking of the ground from nearby bombing. One year after the war, January 1992, most of the surface evidence of structural damage (cracks, some shrapnel holes) had been completely patched in these buildings. It is not clear if there is deeper structural damage that will show up later.

At present, it looks as if the loss to important archaeological sites may have been minor. The same cannot be said of Iraq's regional museums. In nine of the provinces in the south and in the north, the local museums were entered, vandalized, and looted by people taking part in the insurrections that followed the end of the war. More than 4,000 artifacts were stolen or destroyed, and many are already appearing in the antiquities market of Europe and the United States. Included in the number of missing objects are important sculptures and cuneiform tablets from Nippur, as well as from other sites dug by the Oriental Institute. In case anyone may think that Iraq has not taken care of its artifacts and any that now come to the United States are better off, let me assure you that the Iraqi Department of Antiquities has had an exemplary record of protecting sites and artifacts since 1923, when it was founded. There has been virtually no traffic in illicit antiquities for many years. Probably no other country in the Near East has as good a record. Knowing that to be the case, reports that the Iraqis had built air bases right next to sites to deter attack or were placing missiles and planes at archaeological sites during the war were not credible to any of us who have experience in the country. We knew, for instance, that some of the military bases being mentioned by the media were already there in Ottoman Turkish times (before 1918) or were established under the British in the 1920s and 1930s. The air base at Ur, much discussed

during the war, was founded by the British shortly after its entry into Iraq in the First World War. Anything can happen in war, but as far as I can find out, none of the accusations that Iraq was deliberately endangering ancient monuments was true.

Any notion that objects are better off outside Iraq because the Iraqis are negligent can be countered by the statement that the Directorate of Antiquities in Iraq is more professional than most others in the Near East. The National Museum in Baghdad is one of the great depositories of Mesopotamian antiquities, and its displays, before the war, were well done. Modern conservation laboratories and equipment were installed in the 1970s, and staff was sent to Europe for training. The effort made to educate the populace by building museums in all provinces and stocking them with first-class antiquities has led, unfortunately, to the loss of thousands of items in the insurrection. In a letter, the Director of the National Museum, who received his Ph.D. under my supervision here in 1988, says that he is working to assess the losses from the thefts, as well as damage done by the shaking of the ground to the thousands of objects in the storerooms of the main museum in Baghdad.

Some media figures have implied that the loss of Iraq's artifacts is just recompense for the treatment that Kuwait's museum received. But the Directorate General's handling of the artifacts from the Kuwait Museum was in fact exemplary, in keeping with international agreements. In the fall of 1990, the Director of Antiquities, in conformance with the Hague Agreement, informed the United Nations that he was going to remove the objects and records from the Kuwait Museum to safeguard them from damage in the impending war. The staff of the Iraq Museum went to Kuwait, found the museum intact and guarded, worked with some employees of the Kuwait Museum to pack and load the antiquities, and took them by truck to Baghdad. The crates of antiquities and records were deposited in the storerooms of the Iraq Museum and remained there, unopened, throughout the war. Shortly after the war ended, the Iraqi authorities, again following the international agreements, informed the United Nations that it was ready to return the objects to the Kuwait Museum. The Kuwait Museum sent two Europeans to represent them and these persons worked with the personnel of the Iraq Museum, under supervision of the United Nations, for several weeks to open the crates, examine the objects and records, catalogue them, and hand them over. Kuwait's representatives had come to Baghdad with a list of 2,500 items. The Iraqis turned over more than 25,000 items, completing the entire procedure by October 1991.

I have received letters from the Director of Antiquities and it is clear that we are welcome to come back to resume our work at any time. I look forward to the lifting of the embargo.

---