

NIPPUR AND THE DIYALA RIVER BASIN

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It has been five years since the Nippur Expedition carried out its nineteenth season of excavation. Each year, we have hoped that the embargo on Iraq would be lifted and we could resume work. From friends in Iraq, we have been kept apprised of conditions in the country and at the site. The economic embargo is resulting in great suffering and there is, consequently, an increase in crime, including the illegal excavation of antiquities. Many sites, including major ones such as Ur, have been subjected to massive illegal digging, and there is much smuggling of stolen antiquities out of Iraq. For four years after the Gulf War, Nippur and the expedition house were untouched, in sharp distinction to the other foreign expedition houses that had all been looted or damaged. Now, however, we know that, although the mound seems to be still intact, the expedition house is not. Sometime in November 1994, someone set fire to the house, burning about a third of its roof. The house seems to have been an innocent bystander in the middle of a tribal feud. I heard that there was much looting after the fire, and that when we return, although we will have rooms to sleep in and eat in, we will have to reroof all the workrooms and reequip the entire house with electricity. If nothing more happens, we will at least have more than some other expeditions to start with.

While waiting for a chance to begin again in Iraq, we have continued to do a great deal of work that will lead to publication of results. Continuation of the work has been aided by a few Friends of Nippur who earmark their yearly contributions for this purpose. We must thank them for their generosity. The pace of the work, however, is slow. If we were still digging actively in Iraq, there would be much more enthusiasm for the painstaking analysis and writing up that are necessary. We have lost the active participation of a set of students who now go for fieldwork to Syria and Turkey. We have also had the bad and good fortune of having staff members who, when they receive their doctorates, find employment. Thus, reworking of doctoral dissertations for publication in the Oriental Institute Publications series must be fitted in between new teaching or curatorial duties. But there are some tangible results. *Nippur IV*, a study by Steven Cole of a group of tablets found in 1973, should be published within the coming year. James Armstrong's extraordinary study of the

periods from the Kassite to the sixth century B.C. at Nippur is still being revised, and it may also be in press this year. Augusta McMahon, who received her doctorate in 1993, was revising her manuscript when she was offered a chance to teach at Copenhagen University for a half a year. She was then chosen to fill an important archaeological position at the University of Cambridge in England. Luckily for Nippur, she now has even more reason to get her book out.

It was partly because of the perceived availability of Dr. McMahon that I initiated yet another publication program during the past year. I knew that Dr. McMahon would be the perfect person to complete the analysis and publication of one of the most important bodies of information ever excavated in Mesopotamia, namely the *Miscellaneous Objects from the Diyala Region*.

Located to the east of Baghdad, on a tributary of the Tigris, the Diyala River Basin combined elements from both southern and northern Mesopotamia and from Iran. The artifacts found at the sites reflect that heterogeneity and influences from even farther afield, with items derived from Syria, the Persian Gulf, and the Indus Valley.

The Oriental Institute's Iraq Expedition, under the leadership of Henri Frankfort, conducted excavations in four sites in the Diyala Region during the 1930s. The staff was superb, the excavations were the best of their time, and the publications (nine volumes thus far) still form the basis for much of the interpretation of Mesopotamian life in early historical periods. The expedition's ambitious publishing program for the Diyala envisioned a series of volumes, some devoted to stratigraphy and architecture, others on pottery, statuary, and cylinder seals. All of these volumes have appeared. Only a volume on the miscellaneous objects and one that was viewed as a final, interpretative essay on the four towns in the region, have not been written.

The volume on objects has been eagerly awaited for more than fifty years. A few items published in articles or displayed in the Oriental Institute Museum and the National Museum in Baghdad whetted the appetites of archaeologists and art historians alike. Most intriguing and frustrating has been the list of objects appended to the reports on stratigraphy and architecture in the published Diyala volumes. Someone doing a doctorate on amulets in Mesopotamia, for instance, could see that there were hundreds of amulets from excavated context but usually could not gain access to the material itself and could not even see a photograph. Because the more than ten thousand objects found in the Diyala are from excavation rather than from the international antiquities market, they have extraordinary importance for detailing the introduction and history of kinds of items, the life of a "style," and the function of artifacts.

In order to make this invaluable body of material available to the scholarly and general public, I submitted a proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities and was awarded a grant in the spring of 1995 to pay the major costs of analysis and interpretation. Envisioned as a three-year effort, the Diyala Objects Project will have paid staff consisting of a coordinator (originally Dr. Augusta McMahon, succeeded by Dr. Claudia Suter) and two or three graduate-student assistants.

Important work on the project has already been done. Over the past three years, students and research assistants have been entering the information from the old Diyala records onto a computer. The computer record will make it easier to retrieve information on an item, or a group of items, sort and index, and even do statistical

calculations. We will include in the computerized catalog not only the description, findspot, etc., but also a drawing or photograph of each object. These illustrations, scanned into the computer program, will allow any user of the catalog to see a rendering of each object.

Each category of objects will be analyzed and interpreted, and the resulting conclusions will form the basis for written chapters. We will present such analyses and conclusions on paper, in one or two volumes with standard printed illustrations of types and significant individual pieces, but we will present the basic catalog with its computerized images on a compact disc (CD) or in some other electronic medium. If the buyer does not want a CD, we will print out the catalog and send it with the paper volumes. But anyone who buys the disc will be able to print out the catalog and will be able to reorganize and reanalyze the material in ways that we have not envisioned. This will, I think, be the first time such Near Eastern archaeological material has been made available in this form.

The official start of the National Endowment for the Humanities-funded part of the project began in the late spring of 1995. We still must raise some matching funds from foundations and/or individuals in order to receive the full award from National Endowment for the Humanities. But we are confident that the project is so important for the fields of Mesopotamian archaeology and Near Eastern art history that we will be able to gain the necessary support.
