

NIPPUR

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Once again, I have to report that Nippur remains a far-off, unworkable site that is, as far as I know, not damaged by illicit digging. While other sites, especially those out in the desert and far from government control, are being looted, sometimes with earthmoving machines, Nippur remains intact. There was a report of Nippur-type Kassite period tablets (ca. thirteenth century BC) on the international antiquities market, but inspection by an Iraqi who keeps an eye on the site showed that there were no new holes on the site. Perhaps some small Kassite mound in the vicinity of Nippur has been looted, but there is no way of finding out for sure.

Meanwhile, here in Chicago we continue to move ahead on preparing manuscripts for publication. And, as usual, I can not point to any books coming out right away, but there is real progress. During the past year, Augusta McMahon has been revising her dissertation on the Early Dynastic-Akkadian transition (ca. 2300 BC). Since she has a sabbatical from Cambridge this coming fall, she expects to finish and to submit it for publication in January 1999. She and I published a report based on her work in *Iraq* (1995), calling for a new understanding of the criteria on which we create archaeological periods. In the following year, a British scholar, Donald Matthews, published in the same journal an article challenging our conclusions and we were given the opportunity to answer him and make clarifications. This past year, in conjunction with James A. Armstrong and McMahon, I completed a long report on the findings of our seventeenth season (1987), a campaign in which we excavated a small Islamic site east of the ziggurat and also worked out the sequence of constructions of the defensive walls on the east and west sides of Nippur. That article was a drastic revision of one submitted in 1988 to *Sumer*, which is the journal of the Directorate General of Antiquities in Baghdad. Since its activities have been brought almost to a standstill by the current embargo, the Directorate has not been able to publish in a normal fashion. Thus the decision to revise the article for *Iraq*.

Jim Armstrong and Judith Franke are still working on their volumes, but both have museum positions and cannot devote as much time as they would wish to Nippur. Armstrong, along with another ex-Nippur staff member Steve Cole, were two of the four co-authors of a volume called *Dating the Fall of Babylon*, which is a co-production of the University of Ghent and the Oriental Institute. This book grew out of a joint pottery project of the Nippur Expedition and the Belgian Expedition. It uses pottery, stratigraphy, historical texts, and astronomical data to reach a conclusion that Mesopotamian chronology has been misunderstood and must be shortened in the second millennium by about a hundred years. Armstrong and Hermann Gasche are continuing to finalize the pottery corpus, which will include all the well-dug sites in Iraq (and one in Iran) that have pottery from the second millennium. The book, which depends on Nippur pottery for about a third of its examples, should go to press in a few months. It will stand as a definitive statement on second millennium ceramics for some time to come.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Jason Ur, a graduate student, has been working with me on the excavations at Umm al-Hafriyat, which were carried out by the Nippur Expedition in 1977. Ur is entering the data into a computer and promises that when he is finished, I will have a very easy time writing the final report on that site. As reported previously, this site is an extraordinary one in that it has more than 400 pottery kilns on and around it. We were planning to do a second season on the site in 1991, but the Gulf War intervened. Given the fact that prior to our excavations many illicit holes had been cut into the site, there is every reason to suppose that it is being looted at present. In addition to that potential damage, there is an even more drastic threat. Recent satellite images of the area show new irrigated fields very close to the site, and since it is relatively low, parts of it may soon be bulldozed to create new fields. Even if the main mounds remain intact, the majority of the kilns, which are not on the mounds but in the surrounding plain, will be destroyed. But we cannot begrudge the Iraqi people food that these new fields represent.

The same images that allow us to see new irrigation in a desert that has not been cultivated since the fourteenth century may also give us a way to map the complex of water courses on which the kilns of Umm al-Hafriyat sat in antiquity. In 1989, we were able to observe there an entire network of ancient canals running off a major branch of the Euphrates. All these features, visible as dark lines of water-retaining clay running through lighter-colored, dryer ground, might also appear on a satellite image. We have the cooperation of remote sensing specialists at the University of Minnesota at St. Cloud for this work, and we have already seen some promising images.

Related to our remote sensing work around Umm al-Hafriyat is a new project that has just been funded by a Collaborative Grant from the University of Chicago and Argonne National Laboratories. This project, to be carried out by Tony Wilkinson and me from the Oriental Institute and John Christensen from Argonne, will attempt to recreate the ancient environment and landscape of ancient Mesopotamia, working in factors such as population shifts, deforestation, possible weather changes, and salinization that may be the result of natural or human action.

As we continue to work on such analyses and publications, we maintain the hope that we may be allowed to work in Iraq once again. The Directorate of Antiquities keeps sending signals that our presence would be welcome at any time.

Once again, I would like to end this report with an expression of gratitude to those Friends of Nippur who still support our work. I look forward to rewarding their contributions with reports on happier news in future.
