



# archeological newsletter

*Issued confidentially to members and friends  
 Not for publication*

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Dear Friends,

The 12th Nippur season is over. We stopped actual digging on the 15th, took down and stored the railroad and other equipment on the 16th and 17th, and finished work in the house by the 20th.

Those of you who have followed our progress through the last campaign and this know that we are concentrating our efforts in two locations, WA and WB, on the West Mound at Nippur. Last season (1972-73) at WA, in looking for the building that would have housed a major archive of Kassite administrative tablets, we came upon the outer wall of a major niched and buttressed structure. Being hampered by a huge sand dune, we were unable to investigate much of the building last year, but did recover from part of a room several excellent cylinder seals and an inscribed stone axe dedicated to a deity whose name began with Nin-x. On the basis of this find, we concluded that the building, or rather the series of rebuildings dating from pre-Kassite to Neo-Babylonian times (c. 1800-500 B.C.), was a temple. The findspot of the Kassite archive, reported as lying farther to the west by the University of Pennsylvania Expedition of 1889, was not reached.

Area WB, some 200 meters south of WA, yielded Old Babylonian private houses, several interesting economic tablets, and a good series of pottery.

This season, beginning in late September, we resumed work at WA, clearing as much of the sand dune from above the temple as we could. When we arrived we could barely see the outer wall of the temple. Road construction in the district made it impossible to rent earth moving equipment, so we had to proceed with hand-powered railroad cars and the steady, enduring labor of Afak workmen. By the end of the season, we had exposed an area more than 20 meters by 20 meters. An idea of the height of the dune at this point can be gotten from the fact that a small shrub high up on the dune turned out to be growing on top of a Seleucid wall that rested on our Neo-Babylonian temple and was over ten meters high.

In the area cleared of dune, we exposed eight rooms of the uppermost (Neo-Babylonian) building. Careful excavation made it plain that there had been two major fires and rebuildings of this space. On the plaster floors, we found almost no objects and very few sherds. Even after the fires, evidenced by charred roof beams six feet long, all objects had apparently been removed.

We thought we had reached the sanctuary of the temple when we discovered black and white striped paint on the walls of one room. However, the expected sanctuary plan and installations did not materialize and we found yet another room with similar painting. It is clear from the plan thus far known that the building is very large and that we have exposed perhaps one fourth or less of it. We still do not have an outside door. The general communication lines tend to suggest a focus farther under the dune, of course.

A meter below the Neo-Babylonian temple we found evidence of a version of the temple that was to have been built some time after Kassite and before Neo-Babylonian times but was never finished. We cannot be more precise in dating this non-building because there was no floor, no foundation deposit, no distinctive pottery, and not even walls. What we have is a mud brick platform laid down inside an older, assuredly Kassite temple. At the time the platform was laid down, the walls of the Kassite building were cut back about a foot to allow the new builders to lay in a new face and plaster it over. But that is as far as the project went.

The Kassite temple (c. 1400-1300 B.C.) was a well laid-out building, but again we found little from it because the later builders had cut away or disturbed the floors.

Under the Kassite temple was a thick layer of ashy debris, in places a meter deep. In these ashes we found numerous fragments of school tablets. Miguel Civil dates these to Kassite times. The pottery found with them, however, looks like Old Babylonian (c. 1800 B.C.). We may have a very early Kassite level, going back to say 1600 B.C., with pottery that is transitional from Old Babylonian. If this dating is true, it is extremely important. Very early Kassite material is rare and almost unknown.

Under the ash levels there is an earlier version of the temple on a very different plan

from those above. It was at this level that we found the seals and stone axe last season. Clearing more of the room in which those objects had originated, we found four more cylinder seals, several copper crescents, beads, a bronze dog figurine, and the head of a stone statue. The pottery associated with these finds fits best in the Isin-Larsa period. The room in which these finds were made is a long rectangular chamber. The doorway leading into the room is doubly recessed, an indication of special importance for a room. Outside the chamber there is a courtyard paved around at least two edges with baked bricks. We were not able to expose much of this court, but in the debris we found a fragment of a baked clay human foot, more than lifesize.

In another room of this phase we found a cache of beads, jewelry, copper ornaments, crescents, and cylinder seals thrust down into a door socket as if hurriedly concealed. The doorpost, of wood, was found charred inside the doorsocket with the objects around it.

The burning of the doorpost is associated with a fire that left burned debris on a floor in two other rooms of this building. Among charcoal remains of roofbeams and reed mats were whole pots and dozens of stone, shell, and gold beads, strewn at random as if dropped or fallen. Also, and more important, were a bronze dagger, a superb cylinder seal, and a fragment of stone vase dedicated to the god Nin-Shubur. Our hope of naming the god to whom the temple was dedicated is not, however, realized in this find. The deity Nin-x from last year cannot be Nin-Shubur. It may be that this temple is dedicated to more than one deity, or that these bits of stone were collected from earlier temples for recutting and reuse in a more important god's temple. The finding of more than eight crescents in various levels might suggest that we have the temple of the moon god, but this evidence is too slim to work with. We looked for foundation deposits, inscribed pivot stones, and the like, but none were found. When we return and find the main entrance and the sanctuary, the name of the deity should be clear. What is evident is that the Isin-Larsa level is extraordinarily productive, and that if we can get permission to remove the later walls, which the Department of Antiquities has an idea of restoring for the tourist trade, we may obtain information of a quantity and quality gotten from only a few sacred structures such as the Early Dynastic levels of the Inanna Temple.

In our other working area, WB, fine results were obtained. Here we more than tripled the horizontal exposure done last season in order to get down to Old Babylonian houses. In clearing the upper levels, badly cut by Pennsylvania in the last century, we made the single most spectacular find, the hoard of more than a hundred letters and other tablets placed around a jar burial. Consensus among the cuneiform people at Chicago seems to put them at about 700 B.C. In further clearance, hundreds of fragments of other cuneiform tablets were found, mostly from Pennsylvania backfill, that is, dirt tossed aside as they worked. These fragments are certainly Kassite, bearing dates of the kings Kudur-Enlil (1264-1256 B.C.) and Shagarakti-Shuriash (1255-1243 B.C.) and are records of commodities held or disbursed from central stores. Judi Franke, working closely with John Sanders, our architect, was able to reconstruct from the bits of wall left by Pennsylvania part of a very large Kassite building, of which we have touched only a small portion. Looking at knolls of the tell close by, it is possible to suggest that this building may have been as much as 80 meters along one side. Surely we are dealing with a major Kassite administrative building; not the one we expect to find at WA, but another, maybe more important one, too badly destroyed to understand fully.

Judi, whose area this was, completely exposed one unusually large Old Babylonian house, with several courtyards, many bread ovens, and a complicated history of use. Doors were blocked and unblocked, rooms changed through time. The functions of individual rooms may, hopefully, be reconstructed by a careful study of such changes in the architecture itself, plus analyses of pottery and sherds found in the rooms. Many soil samples were collected from various floors and rooms, and these will be analyzed to give some clue as to use. They will also furnish evidence of environmental conditions and changes. In WB, and also in WA, latrine samples were taken and will be analyzed to give indications of ancient diet and disease.

It is our hope to return to Nippur next year to continue our work on these areas, and also on other locations. A lot is still to be learned about the history of settlement at the city, the location of the city wall, functions of various areas within the city, and so on. But this will take years and a concerted program. Your continued support makes planning of such a project possible. This last season, being notified suddenly that we could return to Nippur in September and being short of funds, we made a special request for emergency aid from some members of the Institute. That aid was generous and allowed us to work. As mentioned in my last newsletter, we designated specific days for these particular donors. The days and work are as follows:

Oct. 4 Anonymous Donor. Moved a lot of sand, began to get into two rooms of the Neo-Babylonian Temple in WA, found a burial in WB. Temperature over 120°Fahrenheit.

Oct. 7 Mr. and Mrs. Gaylord Donnelley. This is the day we were in Baghdad being told we had

48 hours to leave Iraq. At Nippur we had left the men under the foremen to move Pennsylvania dump. During lunch, one of the workmen touched the side of the trench we made last year and dozens of tablet fragments fell into his lap. This was the beginning of our find of more than a hundred letters and other documents dating to about 700 B.C.

- Oct. 17 Mrs. G. Corson Ellis. Still more sand removed. Uncovered an ancient Achaemenid trash pit in WA, from which came whole pots, beads, and a superb unbaked clay plaque of a woman holding a basket of dates (?). Certainly Egyptian in origin.
- Oct. 22 Anonymous Donor. In WA, while removing Achaemenid debris, found two Seleucid burials, one in the shape of an elongated baked clay bathtub with a cover. Several whole vessels. Next day, near this burial, found inscribed stone vessel with Greek inscription. In WB, still trying to understand the mess above the Old Babylonian level.
- Nov. 5 Mr. and Mrs. Theodore D. Tieken. Still moving sand. In WA, removed most of debris from above the Kassite level in two rooms. Found yet another latrine drain. Discovered two snakes, which the men insisted are examples of the snake with two heads. They are blue and fat and about 10 inches long. In WB, found about a dozen fragments of Kassite administrative tablets, which had begun to appear a day or so before.
- Nov. 11 Anonymous Donor. Sand moving almost done. In WA, working in ash levels below Kassite temple, found tablet fragments and whole pots.
- Nov. 14 Mr. and Mrs. Gaylord Donnelley. In WA, clearing fill from below Neo-Babylonian level, going to Kassite. In one room, just clearing to floor of Neo-Babylonian, found some glass and a few beads. In WB, removing Kassite walls from above Old Babylonian house. In all, not the greatest day.
- Nov. 15 Mrs. G. Corson Ellis. In WA, a lot of sand fell into one of the rooms next to the dune and had to be removed. In one place, excavating ash layers under Kassite temple, few tablet fragments. In WB, a copper vessel found in an Achaemenid drain cutting through earlier levels.
- Nov. 17-22 Anonymous Donor. A very good week, especially for WA. Here, in Neo-Babylonian temple rooms, found many stone, metal, and other beads and ornaments, including crescents. In a Kassite level, found an object of cast iron, very early for appearance of iron. In Isin-Larsa level, found dozens of stone, gold, silver, bronze beads and ornaments on a burned floor. In WB, still preparing to investigate the Old Babylonian level, removing some of upper levels. Some tablet fragments.
- Nov. 26 Mrs. G. Corson Ellis. In WA, well into Isin-Larsa temple level in one or two rooms. Found a very fine Akkadian cylinder seal impression, a very odd stone statuette, many beads. In WB, more Kassite tablet fragments along with whole vessels.
- Nov. 27 Mr. and Mrs. Glen A. Lloyd. In WA, working in four or five rooms on Neo-Babylonian, Kassite, and pre-Kassite levels simultaneously. Few beads, one gold. In WB, several Kassite tablet fragments, some Old Babylonian fragments from inside the house, which is now being dug, finally. Small baked clay statuette of mother and child, one of finest pieces for the season.
- Dec. 1 Mr. and Mrs. Daggett Harvey. In WA, working in levels below and above Kassite. In a doorway of the Kassite temple, found a very unusual cylinder seal impression in Kassite style. Some tablet fragments from below the temple. In WB, finding whole vessels in place where left on floors, alongside walls.
- Dec. 3 Mr. and Mrs. Solomon Byron Smith. Work going very well in both areas. In WA, working three rooms of Isin-Larsa temple, find cylinder seal of Early Dynastic date. Good charcoal samples for Carbon 14 dating. In one room of Neo-Babylonian level, found figurine of dog nursing pups. Found Seleucid bathtub-type burial in upper levels. In WB, work continues inside OB houses. Beginning to understand circulation patterns, blocking of doors, etc. Keep finding small bowls buried alongside walls under floors, some sort of foundation offering or incantation?
- Dec. 5 Mr. and Mrs. Harvey W. Branigar, Jr. A very good day, although temperature below freezing in morning. In WA, work continues in Neo-Babylonian levels on edges of area, and in Isin-Larsa temple. Find in one room, on a burned floor, bronze dagger, superb Akkadian cylinder seal, fragment of stone vessel dedicated for Ibbi Sin, 24 beads. In a Seleucid pit, high up, find glazed frit lion pendant. In WB, work continues on OB house, with many whole vessels, two seal impressions.
- Dec. 8 Dr. and Mrs. C. Phillip Miller. In Isin-Larsa temple, WA, found doorsocket with cache of bronze, stone, and other jewelry, plus two cylinder seals, one being Akkadian, the other Isin-Larsa. In WB house, continue to take down floor by floor, still finding groups of bowls and other pots on floor. Fireplaces, ovens, etc.
- Dec. 9 Mr. and Mrs. Theodore D. Tieken. Very cold day. In WA, working in Neo-Babylonian levels

as well as in Isin-Larsa. In sanctuary of Isin-Larsa building, a whole Early Dynastic seal. Outside the temple proper, in a Seleucid cut, found two Hellenistic seal impressions and an Egyptian frit eye. In WB, more whole vessels on floors along with ovens, and other fixtures.

- Dec. 13 Mr. and Mrs. Chester D. Tripp. Working against a deadline knowing we are at burned level in sanctuary of Isin-Larsa temple in WA. Find a fragmentary copper and gold star-shaped ornament, fragments of stone vessels, four bronze crescent ornaments, two Early Dynastic cylinder seals, one stamp seal dating to about 3500 B.C., baked clay figurines, bronze dog statuette, and a head of a stone statue. All from the burned floor of the sanctuary. In WB, finishing up work in OB house, finding yet more whole pottery vessels.
- Dec. 15 Anonymous Donor. Last day of digging. Little to report; WB was closed down on the 13th and in WA, we're just finishing up loose ends. Did find a curious stone paving in the lowest floor of the Isin-Larsa sanctuary and in the courtyard, the baked clay foot.

You may have noticed some skewing in the distribution of these dates. They do tend to clump at the end of the season. This was a result of the fact that the break in the season, when we almost had to leave Iraq, caused us to reassign several days.

I hope you can all join us for a lecture I'll be giving at the Institute some time after the New Year. The slides should make clear how the finds fit into the general layout of levels. I still have to turn over objects to the museum and ship out soil and carbon samples, along with the bones, so I don't know when I'll leave Baghdad.

The city is undergoing a winter chill, colder than Nippur, and the stores have Christmas decorations, cards, etc. The Kurds are wearing their long, black sheep-skin coats, and the suq is full of activity. We've got invitations from American, British, Austrian, and Czech people for various festivities. It's not a bad place to spend the holidays.

McGuire Gibson

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