

ligious center of the city, the Ekur, with its ziggurat and temple of Enlil; they investigated the "business quarter" and in one place uncovered the fortifications of the city. In that part of the city now called the scribal quarter they found thousands of cuneiform tablets, not only business contracts but literary compositions as well. Although the importance of the pottery and objects cannot be overlooked, it is the cuneiform tablets with their wealth of information that has given Nippur a unique place among the excavated cities of Mesopotamia.

In 1948 an expedition from the Oriental Institute and the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania returned to Nippur and resumed the excavations. In the first three seasons (1948-52) the digging was concentrated on the temple of Enlil in the Ekur and in a stratigraphic study of the scribal quarter. The temple, which lay on the northeast side of the ziggurat, was located and identified, but not excavated, by the earlier Pennsylvania expedition. The temple and courtyard walls as we know them from excavation were built during the Third Dynasty of Ur (*ca.* 2000 B.C.). They were repaired and restored but little changed through the Babylonian and Assyrian periods. Later, in the first century of the Christian era, the Parthians built a huge fortress on the site. Both the temple and the fortress contributed materially to our knowledge of architectural planning and building practices and procedures.

The excavations in the scribal quarter uncovered many layers of private house remains dating from the Akkadian to the Achaemenian periods. Much can be learned by tracing any group of artifacts, especially pottery, over such a long time, but the excavations were particularly valuable in the quantity of stratified cuneiform tablets which were added to the impressive number found by the earlier Pennsylvania expedition.

From 1953 to 1963 the Oriental Institute continued the excavation at Nippur for an additional five seasons in joint sponsorship with the Baghdad School of the American Schools of Oriental Research. The 1953/54 season was

## *Excavations at Nippur*

IN CHARGE: JAMES E. KNUDSTAD, RESEARCH  
ASSOCIATE, FIELD ARCHITECT

Nippur has long been known as one of the important cities of Mesopotamia. It was the holy city of the Sumerians and its special character continued into Babylonian and Assyrian times.

In 1888 the first American archeological expedition to the Near East went out from the University of Pennsylvania to excavate the ruins systematically. In twelve years of intermittent digging the excavators located the re-

spent in the excavation of a small temple in the northwest part of the religious quarter. The earliest excavated temple dated to Early Dynastic I, the latest preserved one was built in the Akkadian period. During the Third Dynasty of Ur the temple area was enclosed by a baked brick revetment so that a platform was created. Unfortunately the top of the platform and any temples that were built upon it were destroyed by the erosion of the mound.

For the next four seasons the expedition concentrated its digging on the excavation of another temple, dedicated to the goddess Inanna. Its ten major rebuildings provided the opportunity to trace the development of a Mesopotamian temple over a period of almost three thousand years. The earliest temple, which measured 22 feet wide and 40 feet long, dates to the early part of the Early Dynastic period (ca. 3100–2900 B.C.) and the latest version, 205 feet wide and 315 feet long, to the Parthian period (ca. 171 B.C.–A.D. 240). Below the earliest temple the excavation was continued through layers of private houses of the Protoliterate period (ca. 3400–3100 B.C.) to sterile soil, a little more than 60 feet below the present surface of the mound and about four feet below the present water table.

In 1964/65 the expedition, sponsored by the Oriental Institute alone, continued excavations at Nippur. It was decided to make a complete investigation of the Ekur, the religious center of the city. The ziggurat and part of the Ekur courtyard had been cleared by the earlier Pennsylvania expedition, and in 1957/58 additional excavations located the west corner and the southwest wall of the courtyard. However, sizable areas, still not dug, needed to be added to the previous excavations so that a comprehensive study of the whole area could be made.

Before this could be done the Parthian fortress covering the Ekur had to be re-examined. In some places the earlier Pennsylvania expedition had excavated the deeply-founded Parthian walls to their bases; in other places it had merely traced the top courses of the walls. Work on the fortress occupied the expedition during its ninth and tenth seasons (1964–67).



*Bronze statuettes of Urnammu, builder of the Nippur ziggurat, foundation beneath south gate of the Ekur.*

It was learned that the construction of the fortress was carried out in three phases, each scheme more ambitious than the previous one. The debris in the hitherto unexcavated rooms gave an excellent stratification of the fortress and yielded objects and pottery necessary for a study of the period.

A long-range program for Nippur would not be difficult to formulate, for much is still to be excavated and learned. The western mound, the so-called business quarter of the city, has not been touched since 1900; the fortification walls are no more than incised lines on an ancient clay tablet showing the plan of the city; and the course of the Euphrates River is no more than a depression in the surface of the mound. After ten seasons of digging, it is clearer than ever just how long the program must be to give any understanding and appreciation of Nippur, the holy city of the Sumerians.