

NIPPUR

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The past year has been a tragic one for the Nippur Expedition. Our years of involvement with Iraq and its people, as well as its thousands of years of culture, made the Gulf Crisis a very personal event. I was convinced that there would be no shooting war since it was not in anyone's interest to let it go that far. It was, therefore, all the more devastating when the bombing began.

Those of us who know Iraq well did not share in the euphoria created by our whiz-bang technology, because we knew hundreds of people who were on the receiving end. When we were shown the ruins of the central telephone exchange in Baghdad and were told that it was the first target hit in the war, I thought about the two women I knew who worked there. When we saw on TV the precision bombing of the Air Force headquarters, we saw not only the direct hit, but also the debris flying out from the sides of the building. We thought about the houses which are beside that building and wondered if anyone we knew had been killed or wounded by the debris or the windows that were broken by the blast effect. When TV showed the ruins of Diwaniya, I remembered the numerous times the Nippur staff had made the eighteen mile journey from the site to the telephone building there to make long-distance calls home. We knew intimately the shops, hotels, and restaurants all around it, because we bought supplies there each week. We were also aware that this was the quarter where most of Diwaniya's doctors and dentists had their offices. It was easy to spot the wreckage of a shop where I often sat for long conversations in English and Arabic with the owner, who supplied me not only with nails and other hardware, but also with tea and philosophy.

The war was even more personal when I thought of the dozens of men and boys who had worked for us at Nippur and had then been called into the army. The rare glimpses of the real war behind the sanitized reporting, showing burnt bodies of Iraqi soldiers caught retreating from Kuwait, made me wonder if any of these had been people I knew. Every time some starched general mentioned "killing tanks," I thought about Abdulla, the son of Nur, our former guard at Nippur, who had served in tanks throughout the Iran-Iraq War; when released in 1988, he expressed his joy of being through with war so that he could get on with his life. Doubtless he had been called back to service. Months after the war ended, I learned that he did survive. Whether he and his mother or any of the

other people I know around Nippur will survive the famine and disease that are the aftermath of the war is not at all clear.

Had this been an ordinary year, we would have been digging from January through March of 1991. As it was, I spent most of that time on the telephone talking to reporters. All during the previous fall, up until the war began, there had been no media interest in what I or others who really knew Iraq had to say. We tried a number of times to get across the message that Iraqis were human beings and should not be made into monsters. The news media were full of distortions and misinformation, usually just the result of ignorance, but no one wanted to hear corrections when offered. Once the war started, however, there was an interest because it dawned on the media that Iraq was not just a desert but was ancient Mesopotamia, where civilization began and which had biblical connections. So, several of the archaeologists who work in Iraq, including me, were asked to comment on radio and to appear on TV. I don't know if it did any good. After almost a year of intense scrutiny of Iraq, I still get calls from representatives of major U.S. news magazines who think that the capital of Iraq is Teheran and who do not know how to spell Ur or Basra. I also heard on one of the major network news shows that the Kurds are Nordic, and this later was changed to Norwegian.

Media interest died out in April and I was happy to be at the end of my "fifteen minutes" of fame. Then, I began to make efforts to return to some kind of normal, even while making a few appearances at events to raise funds for medical and other humanitarian aid to Iraq.

All last summer and into the fall, the Nippur staff had been working on publication manuscripts. I completed a substantial preliminary report on the Nineteenth Season, focusing on the Gula Temple but also detailing the important Early Dynastic-Akkadian material from Area WF. This article has been submitted to the journal *Mesopotamia* (Turin). The entire staff spent a great deal of time and effort on a volume about the Kassite buildings in Area WC, dug in 1973-75. Richard L. Zettler wrote the core of this book, but the entire volume is a joint effort of the staff. While working on that book, Augusta McMahon and I were also putting together the catalogue, working up drawings, and assembling photographs for the monograph on Umm al-Hafriyat. This site, which we dug in 1977, is an important pottery-making town in the desert about seventeen miles east of Nippur. Even while I was busy with the media, Augusta and John and Peggy Sanders continued to produce plans and illustrations. When I was able to resume concentrated work in April, I began to write up the descriptive and analytical parts of the Umm al-Hafriyat volume. At the same time, I set the others to work on Area WG, the Sasanian-Islamic trench at Nippur that we had excavated in the Eighteenth Season, 1989. I intend to have both these reports finished within the next year.

While we were working on these volumes, James A. Armstrong has been revising his important doctoral dissertation on Nippur during the time from about 1200 to 600 B. C. He has also been working on the pottery of the entire second millennium B.C. for a corpus of ceramics that our expedition is creating in cooperation with the Belgian, German, and French expeditions to Iraq. Jim and I went to Ghent, Belgium, in early January to attend a meeting related to another joint project, aimed at the reconstruction of the ancient Mesopotamian environ-

ment and land-use patterns. This project, which has been in existence for some years, is now taking more concrete form. We are beginning to combine previously-done environmental studies with the analysis of satellite images. Using these images, created from computer data transmitted by space satellites, we will be able to map ancient river courses, canals, sites, and even field patterns, resulting in an atlas presented period by period. Even if we are unable to carry out further investigations on the ground in Iraq for some time to come, we will still be able to do significant new research here at home. The technology involved in this attempt to reconstruct the land-use history of ancient Mesopotamia is a simplified version of the methods used to pinpoint targets during the war. Our project, then, is a form of turning swords into plowshares.

I am often asked two questions these days. Firstly, how many sites or museums in Iraq were damaged? Until archaeologists do a thorough survey, we won't know the answer. We know that some major sites sustained damage (e.g., Ur), but most of the well-known sites, including Nippur, were spared. What we cannot gauge is the loss of small, low, insignificant-appearing sites in the neighborhood of factories and other targets, where non-smart bombs were used. We know that the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad was slightly damaged, but very little direct harm came to the objects. Many of the regional museums were looted during the uprisings at the end of the war. We also know that some foreign expedition houses have been looted, and I assume that the Nippur house may be one of them. I just hope that the house itself has not been damaged.

Secondly, when do I expect to go back to work in Iraq? I have no way of knowing. If there is no drastic change in government, we could be back in a year or two. Given the total destruction of the bridges, roads, factories, the electricity grid, and the water-treatment facilities in the south of Iraq, where Nippur lies, it may not be possible to resume work for a long time to come. Whether Americans will ever be welcome back in Iraq is another question. As the Iraqi people become aware of the extent of their human loss from war and its aftermath and realize how deliberate was the destruction of non-military targets like the sugar factory, the flour factory, the paper factory, the textile factories, brick plants, and all the other facilities that were built in the past twenty years and resulted in a better life for them, they may find it increasingly harder to maintain the pro-American feelings that they have always had and still express.

In the past, the Iraqi government and people have made a distinction between scholarship and politics, and we have been able to work even when there was no American diplomatic presence in the country. I am confident that the good feeling that existed between individual Americans and Iraqis will allow a reconciliation on a person-to-person basis. The shared regard for the ancient Mesopotamian past may be a vehicle for more formal reconciliation. Perhaps we can revive someday the U. S. tour of a major exhibition of Mesopotamian antiquities that had been planned for 1993-94.

I see as an optimistic sign the fact that even with Iraq in shambles, children are still going to school and the universities are still open. Besides a high regard for education, the Iraqis have a genius for compromise and for making do. They will find a way through the present situation. I hope that the Nippur Expedition will be allowed to play a role in the post-war reconstruction.