

NIPPUR

McGuire Gibson

Although we cannot yet return to Nippur to excavate, we are digging into the old records of previous seasons, including those I directed, in order to publish the final reports. The Nippur Publication Project, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, is in its third year and is making steady progress. Although we are focusing first on the Inanna Temple, we are also addressing other areas of past excavation.

The Inanna Temple portion is the concern of Richard L. Zettler, from the University of Pennsylvania, who is currently working out the detailed stratigraphy below the Ur III level, which was the subject of his brilliant 1970s doctoral dissertation and subsequent book (fig. 1). Karen Wilson is dealing with the lowest part of that sequence, which she used as the basis for her 1985 dissertation. Jean Evans, an expert on Early Dynastic art, is working with them on the description and analysis of several classes of artifacts. Being the last student of Donald P. Hansen, who excavated much of the Inanna Temple, she brings to the work not only a fine analytical mind and a discerning eye, but also special insights derived from him. We expect to have in hand a manuscript on the entire Inanna Sequence within a year.

Since the project began, Jeremy Walker has been scanning thousands of records, drawings, photographs, and negatives from the Nippur excavations to give all the collaborators on the project, whether in Chicago, Pennsylvania, or Toronto, access to all the available data. More recently, we have had the good fortune to be joined by Karen Terras, who brings to the project an extraordinarily orderly mind and years of experience in handling a very similarly structured archaeological database on the Diyala Project. She is especially adept at enhancing the not-so-good-looking photographs in Photoshop.

Edward J. Keall in Toronto has started work, once again, on the Parthian remains at Nippur, which include the Parthian version of the Inanna Temple and the massive Fortress that sits upon and around the ancient ziggurat. Ed was brought onto the Nippur staff in 1966 because he was a specialist in Parthian and Sasanian periods, having worked for some years in Iran. He used the Parthian Nippur materials for his dissertation at the University of Michigan and then took on the responsibility for publishing the final reports. Like all of us, he subsequently took on other fieldwork, teaching, and curatorial responsibilities, and the Nippur book had to be put off. The project has hired a student at the University of Toronto to digitally re-draw the plans of those complex buildings, which will make them easier for analysis and description. We have also begun a computerized catalog of the objects from the seasons involved with the Parthian Fortress, a building that I know well, since it was the focus



Figure 1. Inanna Temple VIIA, late Early Dynastic III (ca. 2500 BC), with man standing in sanctuary, bathroom in foreground, 1958



Figure 2. Expert Sherqati pickman defining plasters on an altar of the Inanna Temple, 1961

Figure 3. Parthian-period bone handle showing nude female. Parthian level of the Inanna Temple, AD 100. Photo taken in 1958



Figure 5. View of north corner of Nippur E-kur ziggurat enclosed by very large mudbricks of the Parthian fortress; Pennsylvania dig house built of ancient baked bricks on top in the late 1890s. Photo taken in 1958



Figure 4. Plaque from doorjamb of Inanna Temple showing the "Master of Animals" motif. Early part of the Early Dynastic Period (ca. 2900–2800 BC). Photo taken in 1961

NIPPUR

of my first field experience in Iraq as a student in 1964–65. For several months, I was usually the only person at the excavation supervising ninety workmen, as we removed a great mound of dirt that the University of Pennsylvania expedition had extracted from in front of the ziggurat and piled over part of the Parthian Fortress. That was a great introduction for someone new to Mesopotamian archaeology. From the dump we recovered more than a hundred artifacts that had been missed by the old expedition, and finally reached the Parthian building. Excavating Parthian structures is labor intensive, since they are so huge, but the articulating of the mudbricks is easy, since they are huge (20 × 40 × 20 cm) and are easy to see and define. I was alone on the mound because the then director, Jim Knudsted, was completing a new expedition house and Bob Biggs and Selma al-Radi were busy baking and otherwise conserving the hundred or so tablets that had been found earlier in the season at Abu Salabikh. Diane Taylor was also detained creating the object register for all the other artifacts that had been found at Abu Salabikh. From about January onwards, Jim and Diane were on the mound fairly often, but I still supervised much of the work, created the object catalog, cleaned and recorded about 200 coins that the workmen and our house steward, Abdullah Sultan, would find on the surface of the mound. I also did the photography of artifacts that year. The dig went on until June, and I stayed in Baghdad until July 14 photographing the Abu Salabikh tablets. Since I had gotten into Baghdad in September, it meant that I had an opportunity to witness all four seasons in the country, from unbelievable heat in September to balmy late October and early November to icy winter mornings and then to a short flower-filled spring, and yet another scorching summer.

While the rest of the current project team works on the seasons that had been dug under Carl Haines and Knudsted, I occasionally find time to deal with various aspects of the project, especially the WA and WG areas. WA is the location of the Gula Temple, or rather a stack of temples dedicated to that goddess of healing through at least a thousand years of Mesopotamian history. WG is situated at the highest point on the mound at Nippur, just to the west of WA, where we looked for and found a sequence of levels from the Parthian through the Sasanian to the Islamic period. The WG report should have been out several years ago, but we had problems with the way the pottery had been organized and we have to re-analyze and lay it out differently. That would take about two weeks to finish, and I am going to fit it into my schedule. I am also prodding Judith Franck to finish her report on the Old Babylonian houses at WB and James Armstrong to complete the revision of his study of Nippur from the time of the Kassites to the Chaldeans (ca. 1400–539 BC). Theirs were brilliant dissertations, which reflected incisive re-thinking of previously set schemes of thinking, and their work will not be well enough appreciated until the final reports appear.



Figure 6. Donald Hansen, on left, supervising the taking out of one of the statues of King Shulgi from a foundation deposit under the Ur III version of the Inanna Temple. James Knudsted, architect, on right. Photo taken 1958