

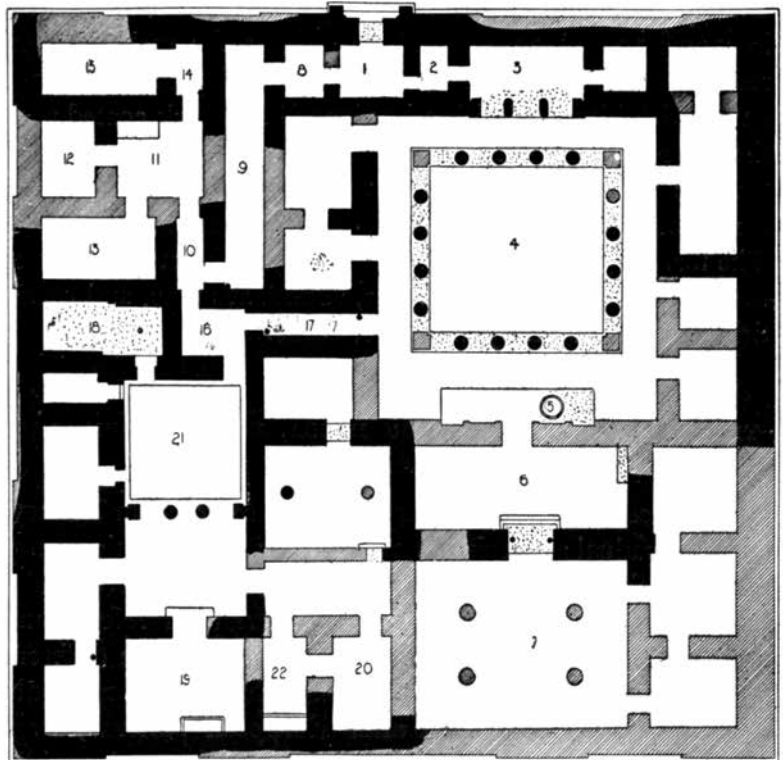
NIPPUR

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Well, we have gathered a team and are planning to resume research at Nippur in the fall of 2018. The effort is not just a simple matter of going there and laying out squares and beginning to dig holes. Our last season at Nippur was in 1990, and our ten-year plan to open up a large exposure around the Gula Temple in Area WA, did not get started because of the Kuwait Crisis and the Gulf War, followed by ten years of sanctions that made it impossible for us to work. Then, of course, 2003 and ISIS kept us away. The result has been that, although the site has not been damaged extensively by looting, most or all of our survey markers have been dislocated, partly by boys having fun, but probably mostly from the natural processes of wind and water erosion that eat away at the mound. This erosion has made it difficult to recognize some of the areas we worked in before 1990. One of the first things we will have to do is to position ourselves on the site plan, using GIS and more traditional equipment.

This coming season we will start on a modest basis, probably working in an area that, we hope, will make it possible to investigate the earliest occupation of the site (the Ubaid period, ca. 6000 BC). We know from potsherds that we find on the surface that the site was occupied in this period but neither the Pennsylvania expedition of the 1890s nor the Oriental Institute since 1948 has succeeded in reaching this level. We also may open a new trench in Tablet Hill, an area of houses near the ziggurat that has yielded thousands of cuneiform tablets in the past. Of course, the situation when we get to Nippur may require adjustments in our plan, but we have always been flexible where plans are concerned.

I had the dig house extensively repaired a couple of years ago, and the fabric of that unbaked brick structure (built by Jim Knudstad in 1964) is now sound, but there are a few things that need to be done. For instance, although the most important parts of



ABOVE: Nippur Villa with Court of Columns plan.



the plumbing system were installed, there are additional pipes that need to be connected and a few sinks to be bought and installed. We will also have to buy a new generator, since electricity is reliable for only four hours a day. We also need to buy new kitchen equipment, which, even if it had not disappeared, would not be usable today. Other items that have disappeared are wooden tables and chairs, built especially for the house in 1964. I see a lot of plastic in our future. Things like sheets, pillowcases, and towels have deteriorated, even though they have been in storage in Baghdad. Much of the digging equipment (picks, shovels, wheelbarrows, etc.) have walked away from the house and will have to be replaced. Except for the generator and kitchen equipment, most items mentioned here are fairly easily bought today, even in the nearby town of Afak. In the past, we would have to go to the provincial capital Diwaniyah, or even Baghdad, to find much of this equipment, although some would be in the market in Afak. But the situation is different now. Afak that we knew until 1990, with about 3,000 people and a one-street market, has grown into a town of 50,000 people. And costs have gone up greatly, and I am sure that I will be shocked and chagrined often in shops. The cost of labor has certainly increased dramatically, which is another factor that has to be entered into our season as it unfolds.

One of the changes that has occurred on the mound is the departure of almost all of the sand dunes that nearly completely covered the site in the 1950s and even when they gradually diminished in the 1970s and 80s, they still perversely lasted exactly on places where we wished to work. In the late 1980s, when we decided to open Area WG on the highest part of the West Mound, to the west of



FAR LEFT: WA with dune looming over it and hiding a villa. 1974, taken from northeast. MIDDLE: Nippur Villa with a Court of Columns high up above Area WA, 1992, from southeast. Much of the dune has dropped into Area WA, where the Gula Temple lies. ABOVE: Removing sand from WA.

WA, I was surprised to see that the blowing away of the great dune that hung over Area WA had left exposed the rounded baked-brick pillars of the “court of columns,” which was a feature of a huge Parthian villa that Penn had dug in the 1890s. I had seen these columns when I was first at Nippur as a student archaeologist in 1964. I did not take a photo of them at that time, and when I took over direction of Nippur in 1972 and opened Area WA, the dune had completely hidden them. Because I knew that the court was in this area, I mistakenly thought that a small area with a few baked bricks, which was located to the northeast and about 6 m lower in the mound, was all that was left of the court.

Besides opening excavations on the site, we will begin a new surface survey of the area around Nippur, especially to the east. Our former students, Carrie Hritz (University of Maryland) and Clemens Reichel (Toronto) will carry out the survey, along with Carrie’s former student Zaid Ibrahim. It will not be as easy to do survey as it used to be because much that had lain as desert since about AD 1300 has now been brought under cultivation. But they will be able to bring new remote-sensing techniques to the work to get a better record of ancient occupations at sites just because many of them have been looted and a much greater sample of sherds from the different levels of the site are now on the surface. They will also be able to gauge the damage done in the area by the looting.

One last thing: I can report that the Inanna Temple publication, much anticipated since the 1960s, continues to make progress in the editorial office and I hope that the efforts of Richard Zettler, Karen Wilson, and Jean Evans will finally be manifest within about a year.