

# THE NIPPUR EXPEDITION

McGuire Gibson

The Oriental Institute Nippur Expedition carried out its thirteenth season of excavation in the autumn of 1975. We have been working since 1972 on the West Mound, a part of the city that had not been investigated since the University of Pennsylvania halted its operations here in 1900. Previous Oriental Institute work, between 1948 and 1967, was concentrated on the eastern, sacred, half of the city. We turned to the West Mound in the hope of exposing private houses and administrative buildings of the second and third millennia B.C. In one area, WA, we discovered not private houses or administrative buildings, but a series of temples built one upon another and dating from at least the Ur III Period (ca. 2100-2000 B.C.) until the Neo-Babylonian (ca. 625-539 B.C.). In another area farther south, WB, we did find houses of the Old Babylonian Period (18th century B.C.) under the badly destroyed remnants of a Kassite palace (13th century B.C.).

Our objectives in the thirteenth season were to continue exposing the temples, the palace, and houses while opening a new area, WC, on the lowest part of the site about 800 meters to the southwest. The expansion into three areas, far distant from one another, put a strain on the architect, John Sanders, but he performed at his usual high level of competence. The Iraqi Representatives, Abdul Hadi Hassan and Abdul Salaam Siman, also took our far-flung operating style in stride and were a great help to us.

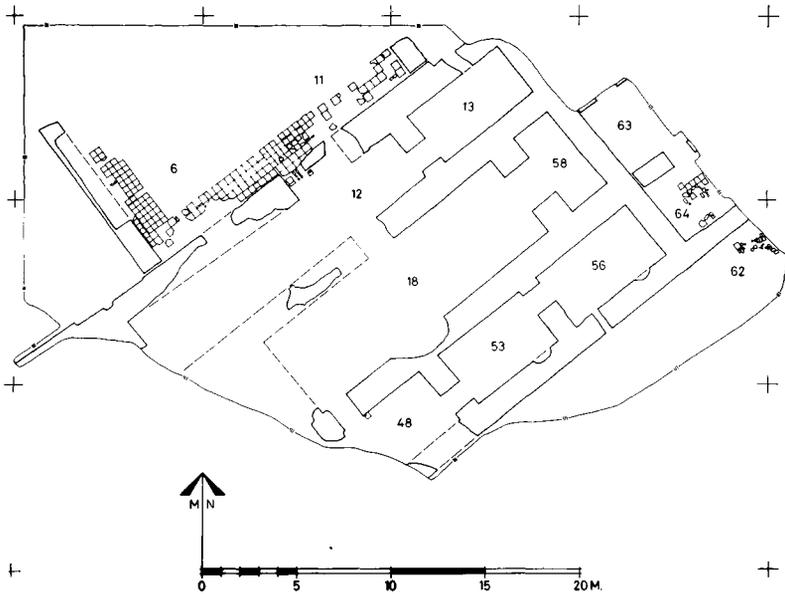
The work at the temple area, WA, was on a smaller scale than during the two previous seasons. Because a huge sand dune lies to the west, directly above a good part of the temples, and there is a large dump left by Pennsylvania on another part of the buildings to the south, we are limited in our operation unless we bring in power equipment. Due to the heavy demands of developmental projects in Iraq, such equipment was not available to us. With our railroad cars and shovels we could move much of the dune, but in a short time sand would return and cover our work. The Pennsylvania dump, however, could be removed, and we thought the investment in time and energy would allow us to expose thirty to forty additional meters of one wall of the Neo-Babylonian temple, perhaps giving us a doorway or a corner of the building. While unskilled men were removing the dump, we began with trained pickmen to dig a trench along the northwestern



*The extensive trench in WA, showing the hole (on top of the stub of wall in the center of the picture) from which the spectacular seal illustrated on the cover was excavated. Photograph by McGuire Gibson.*

face of the Neo-Babylonian building. In the previous seasons we had found that the temples of the Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian Periods were somewhat larger than the Kassite and Neo-Babylonian versions that rested upon them. This trench would expose parts of rooms of the earlier levels, and probably the outer wall. Besides information on levels, we found many objects in this trench, including one extraordinary cylinder seal. This is the seal of a scribe in the service of Sharkalisharri, "son of the king." We interpret this to mean that the man served Sharkalisharri, the future Akkadian king (ca. 2217-2193 B.C.), while his father, Naram-Sin, was still living. This superbly executed seal depicts a bald human being, probably the seal owner, facing a nude hero, the water god Ea, and the two-faced god Usmu. Details of the faces and musculature are especially well done.

Other work in WA included the complete clearing of a room that we are convinced is the Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian sanctuary. Here, Richard Zettler found a large brick platform, several cylinder seals, and some cuneiform tablets. At the end of the season, after the Pennsylvania dump had been removed, we were able to trace the



*The thirteenth-century B.C. Kassite palace in WB. Drawing by John Sanders.*

outer wall of the Neo-Babylonian temple, but we did not encounter a doorway or corner. Clearly, we are dealing with a very large building and the part we have exposed is only about one-eighth of the total size. Future seasons and power equipment are needed for full excavation and identification of this important series of sacred buildings.

In Area WB this season a large expanse was cleared. This entailed the excavation and recording of debris from the Kassite (ca. 1250 B.C.) to the Parthian (ca. 100 A.D.) Periods. The area had been severely cut up in ancient times for brick-making, grave digging, and construction of foundations. It had also been trenched by the old Pennsylvania excavators. The disturbances, coupled with erosion, have left a very difficult excavation problem, with only patches of good stratification between later pits. The careful work of Judith A. Franke, the expedition's assistant director, has allowed us to work out the sequence in the area and to form a very useful set of pottery time-indicators even though we cannot give a very coherent plan of buildings in the post-Kassite levels. For the 13th-century Kassite palace, already partly exposed in the two previous seasons, we can now present a plan of one

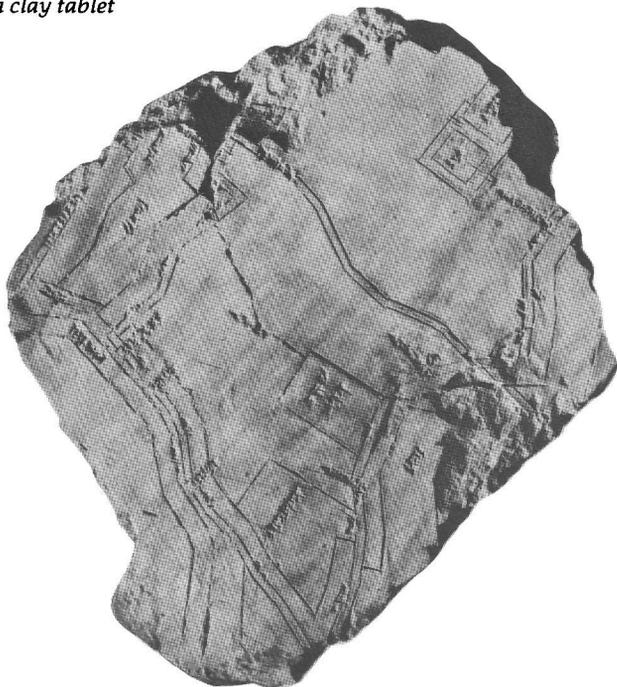
major unit that follows fairly closely the design of units in the only other known Kassite palace, at Dur-Kurigalzu (Aqar-Quf, west of Baghdad).

Administrative tablets found in our palace date it to the reigns of three specific kings of the Kassite dynasty. Other tablets, which are student exercises, would be taken for evidence of a school if we did not already know that the building is a palace. "School" tablets have also come from the temple area, WA, and from houses in other parts of the site. Clearly, our notions about ancient Mesopotamian schools must be revised in favor of an apprenticeship system, in which boys worked in various institutions or businesses as assistants to scribes, learning to write as time permitted, and finally after some years becoming scribes. Other tablets found in WB this season included several badly decayed fragments that help to restore a section of the Gilgamesh Epic. These fragments and all other tablets were baked, cleaned, repaired, and catalogued by Raymond Tindel, who acted as epigrapher and restorer.

Under the Kassite palace there was some earlier Kassite pottery, just above the remains of a house of the Old Babylonian Period. This house was built beside the bakers' houses discovered in previous seasons. The Old Babylonian level was not investigated to a great extent this season; but now that a fairly extensive exposure has been made down to this level, future seasons should allow us to say a great deal about life in this part of the city.

The new area of work, WC, is the first step in a projected program of exploration in the outer limits of the city. Ever since the University of Pennsylvania's excavations, we have had at our disposal a clay tablet with a map of the city of Nippur. Usually, this map has been interpreted as a plan of only the eastern half of the city. A few scholars have argued that the map represents the entire city. Miguel Civil, the expedition's epigrapher, has worked with this map and by computation of the distances given has concluded that the tablet does in fact represent the entire city. Knowing this, and having an air photograph of the site, we began to look for proof. On the air photograph there is at the southwest edge of the site a dark line that forms a corner like the lower left corner of the ancient plan. We found that a ridge corresponded with the dark line, and Elizabeth Stone and Paul Zimansky put in two trenches, WC 1 and 2. At the same time Stephen Lintner, a geomorphologist from Johns Hopkins University, made several pits to the west in order to determine if there was evidence of the ancient bed of the Euphrates, which should have been there ac-

*The ancient map of  
Nippur on a clay tablet*

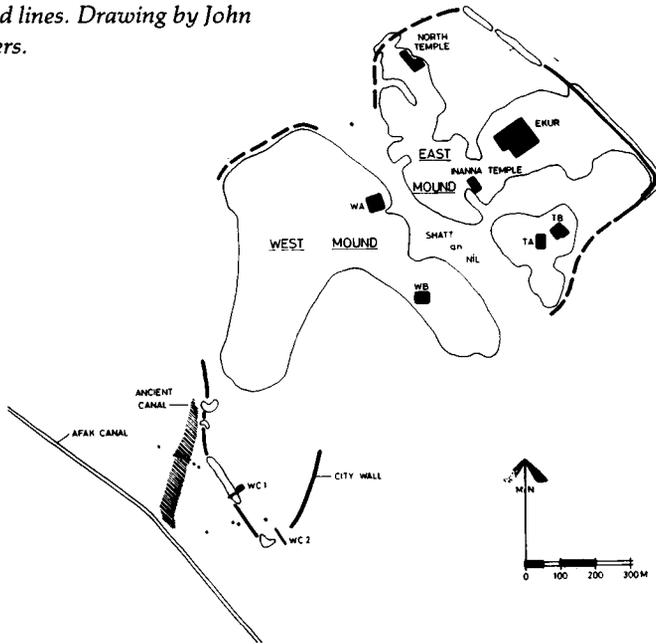


According to the plan. The results in WC were gratifying, intriguing, and a spur to further research. In Trench WC-1, we found an enormous city wall, 17.5 meters thick, with a buttress of 4 additional meters. The wall has a baked brick foundation with a mud brick superstructure. We did not reach the bottom of the foundations because we reached ground water. The wall dates to at least the Old Babylonian Period. Next to the wall, inside, we exposed a fairly well-preserved Kassite house, dating from before the 13th century B.C., in other words before the palace in WB. The pottery from this house is the earliest Kassite material we have found as yet. On an early floor we found an Indus Valley stamp seal, one of the few examples of such seals in Mesopotamia.

In Trench WC-2 we have not touched, thus far, the city wall. We may be in either a breach or a gateway. We have found several levels of houses dating from the Akkadian Period (ca 2300 B.C.) to the time of the Assyrian Empire (ca. 700 B.C.)

Lintner's work, outside the wall, yielded many hints of fascinating

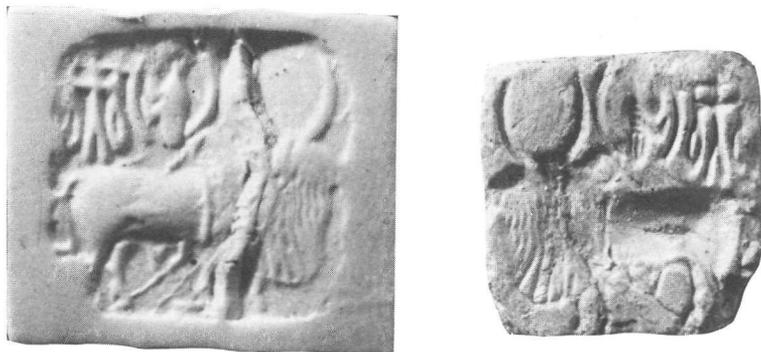
*The excavations of the Nippur expedition, with visible portions of the city wall indicated by solid heavy lines and supposed portions indicated by dashed lines. Drawing by John Sanders.*



results. In every pit there were indications of water-laid clays, but Lintner is not yet ready to state that they were borne by a river rather than a canal. He needs much larger exposures and laboratory analyses before he can make a definite judgment. He will return with us in the autumn of 1976 to carry on his investigations.

At the moment we seem to have established that the ancient city plan is to be taken as a map of the entire city, and we intend to trace the wall with small pits and larger trenches around the city in the next seasons. We think we can locate at least two or three city gates and hope to excavate them.

The WC area is due for much more work. In low-level air photographs there are traces of several other very large houses, surrounded by walls, probably of the same type and date as the house in WC-1. There is no sand on this part of the site, nor is there any later debris. We expect to concentrate our efforts in this corner for the next season or two. We will probably leave WA for a season or two and hope the wind takes the dune away.



*A stamp seal from the Indus Valley found just inside the wall at Nippur. Photograph by Paul Zimansky.*

On the home front, the long-awaited field report on our eleventh season (1972/3) was finally published this winter as "Oriental Institute Communications," No. 22. The twelfth season (1973/4) has been written up, and the report awaits final editing.

We in the field continue to be supported through the generosity and interest of Friends of Nippur. Activities in Chicago were curtailed somewhat, since I returned from Nippur in December only to go to Saudi Arabia in late January to participate in a survey. The Steering Committee, however, reproduced newsletters and sent them out, recruited new members, and helped in dozens of ways to plan new events.

While at Nippur we received word of the death of Mr. Glen A. Lloyd, one of our founding members.

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