

NIPPUR

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Work continues on manuscripts of Nippur reports, even though much of the staff are holding teaching and research positions far from Chicago. Graduate students are employed to work on parts of this material, especially in drawing objects and putting basic information into databases for easier reference when we work on manuscripts. In addition, during the year, a volunteer has been sorting and laying out photographs for inclusion in two of the manuscripts. David Reese has continued to prepare chapters on animal bones and shells for two volumes. And I find time occasionally to work on descriptions of objects and analysis or stratigraphy. The best news is that Augusta McMahon's report on the Early Dynastic/Akkadian Transition has its plates completely "pasted up," the final draft has been proofread, and the book is definitely going to be submitted to the editorial office this year. Since it is presenting a crucial revision of an important part of Mesopotamian history, this book is a complex one and takes extra care and effort to produce.

The site of Nippur itself lies neglected and un-worked but, as far as I know, to date the mound itself remains undamaged. (You may remember that the dig house was set afire several years ago, as part of a tribal dispute.) Many other sites in Iraq, especially those in the desert area between the two rivers in the south of the country, are being systematically looted by gangs of men using earth-moving equipment. The objects are then smuggled over the border and on to Europe, where they are given faked certificates of provenience and offered on the antiquities market. The number of objects being smuggled out of Iraq each year is in the thousands. Although the trade is centered in London, many of the objects find their way to dealers in New York and even Chicago. The enormous damage being done to archaeological sites will continue as long as there is an embargo on Iraq. The Iraqi Directorate General of Antiquities has recently begun to dig at three of the most damaged sites, but the looters will just move off to more remote mounds. Although the embargo is not supposed to relate to cultural matters, it does in fact do so. There are some signs that this cultural embargo is finally beginning to crack. Several European archaeological teams are about to resume work in Iraq. Thus, we can hope that eventually the United States government will allow us to resume work. Meanwhile, we continue to teach Mesopotamian archaeology and prepare publications in order to keep the field alive.

I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Friends of Nippur, who have continued to support our work even in this phase of writing-up, which may not be very exciting to the public, but is actually one of the most exhilarating parts of archaeological research. Often, things that did not seem important turn out to be crucial to understanding a problem, and very often in the writing of a report, things just fall into place and make wonderful sense.
