



Nippur. The Ziggurat.

Nippur. Excavations in progress.



Plate I

**NIPPUR: THE HOLY CITY**

When I first saw Nippur on a bright fall day in November, 1948, I was overwhelmed by its size, the dunes of sand covering the ruins, and the air of desolateness. My reaction was that of its former excavators. Layard, famous for his work in Assyria, had been overcome by it almost a hundred years ago and had concluded that nothing important would ever be found. Thirty-eight years later, in 1889, the staff of the University of Pennsylvania Expedition was forcibly struck by the magnitude of the task they had undertaken. It is not surprising that I, too, worried about what we might achieve.

Our first full season has been concluded with fine success. Our findings give us a feeling of accomplishment. They have come from three small areas, covering in all not more than a third of a city block—a microscopic section of the 180-acre city. But this fact alone, that we can learn so much from such a small section of a vast site, is one of the exhilarating results of the five months of digging which ended last March.

I could not report these results were it not for the staff comprising the Joint Expedition to Nippur. Coming from both the University Museum and the Oriental Institute, there were Mr. R. C. Haines, Acting Field Director and archaeological architect, to whose excellent direction throughout much of the season the successful results are due; Dr. Francis Steele, able epigrapher; and Mr. Frank Hildebrandt, physical anthropologist—both of whom also helped supervise the excavations; Seyyid Mohammed Ali Mustefa, representative of the Directorate General of Antiquities of Iraq, whose surveying and intimate knowledge of Mesopotamian archaeology were of great value; Mrs. Steele, always busy photographing the excavations or objects; and Mrs. Haines, struggling to keep abreast of the recording of the daily finds as we brought them in noon and evening. Prof. Thorkild Jacobsen saw the season under way while I was still recuperating from an illness which prevented me from reaching Nippur before early February. The Expedition was fortunate in having with it, for the first month of work, Seyyid Fuad Safar, distinguished archaeologist of the Directorate General of Antiquities. The scholarly staff of the same



Directorate General was an ever ready source of help, especially Dr. Najj al-Asil, Director General, whose understanding of our task and appreciation of our efforts made coöperation between us a pleasure.

When the sun shines and the air is still, being out on the dig is a delight; the daily work is filled with zest. Forgotten are the minor discomforts of camping in village houses in Afak, where living and working quarters are cramped, and the bumpy five mile ride between Afak and Nippur. Yet the same drive for accomplishment was present on less pleasant days when dust storms blew down on the ruins, filling the air with the rustle of blowing sand as it drove into the excavations, our eyes and faces. Pleasant days or not, the staff always pushed ahead with the work to achieve as much as possible and make this the fine season we have had.

The best teamwork and most congenial staff cannot manufacture results. Here Nippur did not fail us. It has so much to offer, that it, itself, is a goad to our activities.

To me, the reason we excavate is to recover the story of man's cultural and particularly social evolution. This story is not an end in itself, regardless of the appeal it has for us as our background and heritage. If it were, our goal at Nippur and in archaeology generally would be one of minor value. Its greater significance is apparent when we realize that problems existed in the past which still worry us now.

For example, we are all affected by present political philosophies whose major interest is to bring economic security to all. Security from cradle to the grave, social security, old age pensions—all these are steps taken to give men adequate shelter and enough food each day, to ensure him the basic physical security necessary to decent life. Most peoples of the world are still hungry. They have never been sure of their next meal. We Americans are better fed than any other people. We have a greater promise of security than we have ever known in the past. Yet we, too, do not feel safe. The hunger and despair of the depression is not forgotten. It is still so vivid that social security and the promise of pensions do not exorcise our fears of future want. No wonder man everywhere cries for freedom from want above all else.

Yet other men are equally positive that this is not all man desires from life. Those with a more sure livelihood affirm that man must be individual wants to exercise initiative, requires freedom within the rules im-

posed by government as the formal regulating mechanism of society. When governments regulate men's lives to give them economic security at the expense of an indefinitely greater loss of personal freedom, are they not ignoring an equally basic need for freedom in men?

Whatever your own answer to this question is, for most of us it is based solely on our own immediate experience with human nature in our own lifetime. This is too short and limited a perspective to decide such a question, one so fundamental that few will be self-centered enough to desire only a short-term solution, an answer satisfactory only to themselves in their own generation. Indeed, the study of man tells us that there is only one possibility of finding a sure answer, an answer as certain as that which pure science gives about the atom, the makeup of the physical world around us. This will come from knowing how—in other cultures in the past, as well as now—man has always reacted to the conflict between his desire for that security which rules and authority bring, and his need for freedom and initiative. Therefore it is essential to learn more about man, more about ourselves, in order to find surer answers to the multitudinous problems of the disturbed period in which we live. We cannot understand ourselves from the present alone. We must go to the past to test, to confirm or disprove, what we believe we know about ourselves and our fellow men, to give scientific proof to what sociologists and psychologists believe. It is in terms of understanding man in the past, and all that it can mean to us in the present, that our season at Nippur was particularly successful.

One of our main objectives was the Temple of Enlil. Now any temple is an important monument. It also reflects the religious feelings of ancient man, just as the cathedrals of Europe and our own churches do for the present day. But there was reason to hope that this particular temple would tell us more than the many so far excavated, because of the character of Enlil himself.

Enlil was second in rank among the gods of Sumer, but first as an active force affecting men's lives. He it was who symbolized legitimate power, who pronounced which ruler should be king of Sumer. He it was who came closer to being a national god than any other in the varied Sumerian pantheon, who made Nippur more nearly a national center than any other town. Our capital, Washington, is no ordinary city, because it is the home of our president and national government. Here history is made for our whole country. Here decisions are taken and orders given which affect



**Plate II**

Dunes of sand and flat unbroken landscape form the background to this scene of excavations into early levels of the Scribal Quarter.





**Plate III**

A worshipper and a goddess appear on a clay plaque 3700 years old. The goddess seems to grasp the man's hand none too gently. But man felt himself a servant of the gods, who, to be sure, would look after him if it pleased them.



every one of us. Nippur, too, was no usual city. Around it revolved the history of the land in which it lay. Here Enlil decided the fates of kings and peoples, and gave commands which affected every man in the country whose divine head he was. As the seat of Enlil, Nippur was a religious capital, an ecclesiastic Rome or a Delphi. Enlil's house should have all the importance of the head of a state. It should exceed in significance that of any mortal ruler. Kings rise and fall. Enlil was permanent and enduring.

His temple did not disappoint our expectations. Standing in the inner, most sacred courtyard, even with the ziggurat and walls around now in ruins, I myself have experienced some of the awe and pride that the kings who fashioned this must have felt. The temple is a massive building lying close under the temple tower or ziggurat in the inner court of the sacred precincts. It is not tremendous in size, but the walls are so thick that the sanctuaries and inner rooms comprise only half its area. We have not found all the temples built for Enlil. The earliest are still to be located. But in the particular spot excavated this season we have discovered five, built by rulers to gladden the heart of Enlil and to ensure their position as kings and the welfare of their country. Five temples built in the course of 1600 years, the earliest founded around 2200 B.C., the last with its floor some twenty feet higher. Five temples, built one above the other on exactly the same plan, the last alone varying somewhat, since Enlil was then a very ancient god and the reverence and respect felt for him was beginning to decline.

But what is the significance of this fine building, what is the meaning of this unchanging plan? The White House is the home of our president. Its size and architecture are commensurate with the importance of the democratic head of our great country. Its furnishings and the gifts sent there reflect far more the American's respect toward the position of the presidency than his liking for the individual president. You may have disliked Hoover or Truman, but you did not think one should live better than the other. We expect them both to live as befits a president. The White House is only a building, but it is a tangible reflection of our feelings toward the chief office of leadership over us. Just so the temple of Enlil shows the feelings of ancient men toward the god who commanded them. Its unusual massiveness signifies that Enlil's house was to have permanence even if tradition did not allow it great size. Gifts dedicated in



The Temple of Enlil, as important in Sumer and Babylonia as the White House is in America. It lies below and alongside Enlil's temple tower, whose broken and weathered side is at the extreme left.



**Plate IV**

Massiveness and solidity are the keynote of Enlil's temple. Here you look the length of the temple, the men in the far background against the wall surrounding the inner court in which lay temple and temple tower. This is the heart, the religious center of Nippur.





Scribes' houses in that center of culture, the Scribal Quarter. Wall stumps, all that remain of the original dwellings, produce the impression of a model: a model city to be imbued with life from what was found in it.

*(Photograph courtesy of Photo Antran, Baghdad)*

### Plate V



The round discs lying in the dirt are schoolboys' practice tablets of 3800 years ago. Here they lie, discarded by the boys on the floor of a schoolroom when the hard day's work was finished.

the temple, by kings and the great, show the awe and reverence felt toward this all-powerful god.

The White House remains unchanged due to tradition and because we like its appearance. Were any president to propose an entirely new structure, there would be an outcry against destroying an historic treasure. In contrast, Enlil's temple remained unchanged for far deeper motives. A god's house, like any other, required repair and eventual rebuilding. Yet no mortal, not even the king of the land, dared rebuild it on his own whim. The god must give the command. The god must signify that the plans pleased him. The god brought poverty and misfortune to all, if the completed structure did not fill his heart with joy. Building a temple was a responsibility fraught with danger to all whom the temple served. Yet other temples changed over the course of centuries. Only the House of Enlil retained its original plan, becoming ever more unusual in contrast to the new styles of temple architecture. Enlil's character alone can provide the explanation.

A city god, if displeased with his temple, would punish the governor and people of his own city. Despite this severe threat, the risk was taken; new types of temples were built for such gods. In contrast, Enlil's displeasure brought misery to the whole land. His wrath was vented not on one city but on all. This was why no ruler ever varied the plan of Enlil's house. What king would risk his throne and the prosperity of his country to make innovations in this temple? Here is an explanation why Enlil's temple is uniquely unchanged.

Then why is this not true of the temples of other gods? To be sure, when angered, these gods did not menace the welfare of the whole country. But that was no consolation to the people of a city who were poor and hungry because of the anger of their local god. New and different temples were built for gods, other than Enlil, because man felt he could "get away with it," risky as this might be. His own god was closer, possibly more compassionate, too interested in the welfare of his own city to be excessively severe.

It was by far safest to do nothing to anger any god. Yet practice varied from this ideal when the risk was not too great. In the past, as now, man did not practice what he knew to be safe and good. Performance varied from wise precept. To know why man, then as now, failed to live up to his ideals will solve this age-long riddle, will tell us why we perpetually accept and set for ourselves ideals by which so few of us actually live.





An attractive fluted silver or bronze bowl of the seventh century B.C. Such vessels represent the Wedgwood or Lennox of their day.

Our other main objective lay south of the sacred precincts, across a canal now dry and sand-filled for centuries. Tablet Hill it was named by the former expedition and was ultimately assumed to be the site of the Temple Library because of the many literary tablets found there. Actuality has proved more interesting than former theory. Now we know the somewhat extensive mound to comprise the residential quarter of the scribes. Henceforth we shall call it the Scribal Quarter.

This spot was a center of culture. Here the oldest recorded literature in the world was written down in cuneiform on clay tablets. It was already old when copied 3800 years ago by the scribes to preserve it for their posterity. From many centuries before, these poetic compositions had been transmitted from one generation of story-tellers or priests to another before they were given permanence on clay tablets. But this literature is not remarkable for its age alone. Its own excellence places it in the forefront of the creations of ancient man, makes it rank with the Hebrew and Greek masterpieces, gives it a significant position in the creative work of man of all ages. These compositions are a monument to the creative activity of the Sumerians. From them shine forth the wisdom of the past, man's philosophy, his feelings toward his gods, his attitudes on the stage of life. Both this literature and the learning of the scribes made their

quarter the center of culture in Nippur, and, so far as we know, the major cultural center of all Babylonia.

The scribes were something of a guild, for most people were illiterate. They formed an indispensable part of society in temple, administration, and business. One of our tablet finds this season describes the advantages of the scribal profession and how necessary it is to others. Some scribes were involved in commerce, their houses containing many business documents. Others spent their time teaching groups of young boys in a room in their house. We found the boys' practice tablets inside the schoolroom or not far from it, each representing a hard day's work spent mastering the elaborate signs of the Sumerian and Babylonian languages. Here they had tossed them at the end of the day, just as pupils today throw their themes and homework into the wastepaper basket when they are corrected and class is over. In the teachers' houses were also their reference works, lexical lists, mathematical texts and problems. The libraries of other scribes contained literary texts which give us invaluable glimpses into the spiritual attitudes of ancient man.

In this one quarter they had lived for generations, one city level rising upon another as the centuries passed. The lowest city reached this season dates to 2000 B.C., the topmost to the fifth century B.C. Just as professors today inhabit modest homes and live like other citizens, so these learned men lived like the other citizens of Nippur. In this span of 1500 years, some were richer and held higher positions than others. We find this reflected in the quality and size of their houses and household furnishings. They left behind much to tell us what they used and how they met everyday life; their household gods, their jewellery, their weights and seals, vessels and utensils. Of these we have an excellent collection from this long range of time. These are the finds which provide the day-to-day excitement for the archaeologist as they appear in the ground and as they form the season's "haul," accumulating on the shelves in our workroom.

Yet stimulating as it is to find these objects, pleasant as it is to have them, and interesting as they are in terms of the development of culture, they could be found in any residential area in Nippur or other ancient cities. As I have emphasized, it is as a center of culture, and particularly literature, that the Scribal Quarter is exceptional. Digging in it is much like excavating a great national library, that of the British Museum, the Bibliothèque Nationale or our own Library of Congress. Here, however,



the richness of literature and learning is an accumulation of wisdom from the private libraries of individual scribes.

Finding a tablet does not bring the thrill of seeing a statue appear as the pickman lifts a lump of earth. Many of you have doubtless had the same feeling while turning away from a case of tablets in our museums. The tablet itself is never more than a formed lump of clay, usually unbaked, mud-colored and unlovely. It is what it says that can make it more important than the most attractive statue. It cannot "speak" until laboriously studied by the few experts competent in these difficult, dead languages. That it is which prevents us, too, from the immediate thrill of knowledge when we dig up the tablets.

Yet these lumps of clay, crowded with a maze of wedge-shaped marks, bring us closest to our goal: to understand man in the past. Suppose the home of Albert Einstein were thrown open to inspection and you visited it, knowing nothing of Einstein. As a careful observer you would note the furnishings, the size and upkeep of the house and conclude that this was the home of a successful man; from musical instruments and many books you would decide this man was cultured. But from the material objects you saw, what would you actually know of the man? Only that he was cultured, with scholarly inclinations, and had gained moderate success in life. You could tell nothing of his contributions to physics, nothing of the broad understanding of life which his grasp of the universe has given him. You must read his scientific books to know that Einstein has brought a larger order into the universe, has shown that basic physical laws are not disparate but are diverse examples of still more fundamental principles in which they are implicit. You must read his autobiography to see how this exceptional individual feels about life as a whole. This example demonstrates how little material objects reveal about man. It shows that man's recorded thought alone—however strangely or obscurely written—gives us his deeper knowledge, his feelings about life. It is through this only that we see man in all his breadth as an intelligent and spiritual human being. The spiritual world of man revealed in these tablets from the Scribal Quarter is what we must know to understand social evolution, and why we, as they, act as we do.

This knowledge is not achieved from the tablets found this season alone. A complete tablet is a rare find. Most are in fragments, broken or old or split and cracked from the soakings of a thousand winter rains. But be-

cause they are from the libraries of individual scribes, the pieces we find and those discovered fifty years ago supplement, restore and complete each other. It is as if you went through a row of destroyed houses hunting for all the fragments of damaged books. You find a page here, a scrap there, and finally from all these a complete book is recovered. In just this way the text of an ancient literary composition is restored.

Once they are complete and made to speak, they have so much to tell. Firstly, of daily life in the past: the advantages to himself and others which a scribe finds in his profession, or the agricultural practices of that ancient time in a farmer's advice to his son. It is interesting to see how others lived. We are all curious about the lives of other men. But especially is it essential to know the mode of life of man in the past if we are to understand how he felt and why he thought as he did. To understand



A cache of tablets, mud-colored and unlovely. Yet these lumps of clay tell more of ancient man than anything else we find.



ancient man, to help ourselves by his mistakes or successes, we must know all about him that our evidence permits.

Other tablets express social attitudes then prevalent. In a hymn to a goddess, Nanshe, we recognize her as the earliest goddess of justice, the prototype of our own symbol. In this hymn we find the earliest detailed example of divine interest in justice tempered by mercy, a feeling for human beings. Divinely sanctioned conventions are developing so that the less fortunate will not be hurt by the stronger. The widow must not be oppressed by the strong or rich, because she no longer has a husband to provide for or protect her. Man knew the obligations of social justice in 2000 B.C. Yet this concept has developed with tortoise-like slowness. What is there in man's nature that has hampered his progress in this field compared to scientific development?

Another unusual tablet described in Dr. Kramer's article in this *Bulletin*, told of a murder-trial and the judgment brought by the assembly of Nippur. This interesting human story illustrates the stage when murder was becoming a public rather than private affair, a stage not yet passed in some of our Kentucky mountains, and one to which we still revert when lynch law holds sway.

Even the lowly business documents have much of interest. They seem less important to us than other tablets when we find them, because singly they contribute little more than a date, the cost of a house rental, or perhaps the price of onions. Yet they and administrative documents provide evidence on that important problem mentioned earlier, the conflicting desire for economic security and freedom and initiative.

At an early period in Sumer, the political trend turned to centralization and concentration of power. Government became as authoritarian as any we have seen in Germany or Russia, but differed from these because of its religious background. That a newly complex society should show this tendency is no surprise. Centralized power meant security from foreign attack. Over 4000 years ago it was as necessary for the government to have unusual powers to fight a war as it is now. Unified management meant an efficient irrigation system, so vital to crops and life in this arid country of little rain. Nevertheless, government control fluctuated despite such advantages. It became less complete particularly in the Isin period represented in the Scribal Quarter. One cannot help speculating why this was so. To be sure, such fluctuations in control correlate with the degree of

power the rulers could exercise. But when central authority diminished or broke down, the cities could have applied similar controls over a more limited area if people actively wanted this. Was lack of control due to a breakdown of the mechanics of control or the result of people's desire for freedom with less security? To answer this question, in this instance and others from antiquity, will be no mean accomplishment. Then real progress will be achieved toward scientific knowledge—not just guessing or hoping—that man needs both economic security and individual freedom; that the problem is not security or freedom but the right proportion of both.

A full season is past. The next task is upon us—to publish the results of the first two seasons. It will be a new type of archaeological book, not, as in the past, one written by specialists for other specialists. It will give the story of man's growth at Nippur so that all may look into the past to understand the present better.

Beyond this lies the season of 1951-52, when Nippur will once more offer up its treasures of spirit and wisdom. Digging will continue in the Scribal Quarter to find more of its literature and to penetrate back into the third millennium to see how the scribes fared at this early time. In the sacred precincts the early temples of Enlil must be sought. Perhaps instead we shall find the temple of his wife, shrines to other gods connected with him, or the administrative quarters of the city—all of which await discovery. Any building connected with Enlil or the administration of his city will bring significant results.

The future is, of course, unpredictable. Careful digging makes the work expensive and there are financial uncertainties ahead. But these practical difficulties will be met. I have this confidence because we are willing to give so much to the work at Nippur and Nippur has so much to give to us and all mankind.

D. McC.