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Nippur: City of Enlil and Ninurta

Introduction: Location as Advantage

Nippur flourished for over five thousand years, well into the Early Islamic period (until about AD 1000), something documented by the establishment of Nippur/Niffer as the seat of a bishop. In this way, it was a city of religious importance for nearly four thousand years. Also, the preservation of the name of the city, with only a slight shift of the middle consonants, attests to the longevity of this settlement.

The importance of Nippur may be explained by its strategic position at the borders of North and South Babylonia or, earlier, between Akkad and Sumer. Additionally, the favourable conditions for agriculture facilitated by natural levees might have provided an early push for the settlement.¹ Furthermore, Nippur is also situated at the crossroads of the main trade routes from west to east in the direction of Susa (Persia) as well as north to south leading up via Assur to Anatolia and along the Euphrates down to Uruk and the Persian Gulf with Dilmun/Bahrain and Magan/Oman as its next trade hubs. Trade could have been the reason for an early connection between Nippur and Dēr, BÂD.AN.KI (Sum.), “bolt of heaven and earth” on the border region towards Elam in the east, possibly already at the beginning of the 3rd Millennium BC. The writing of the city name seems to be an allusion to DUR.AN.KI (Sum.), “bond of heaven and earth” in the eastern part of the city, known from the inscriptions of Šulgi at the Inana Temple (Mound VI).²

The name Nippur was written logographically as EN.LÍL^{KI}, meaning literally “place of Enlil”. This could lead us to the conclusion that this “place of Enlil” existed before a venerable city surrounded it. Besides other questions, this hypothesis will be tested archaeologically in this paper.³

A comparable case exists with the god Aššur in his city (akk.) Aš-šur^{KI} (sum. AN-SĀR^{KI}). First, there was the rock rising above the Tigris river as a sacred place, then the city followed. It even developed in such a way that Wilfred Lambert stated, “. . .

1 Wilkinson/Jotheri 2021, 243–255.

2 Later, the Babylonian chronicles use this term, seemingly, for Nippur as a whole.

3 During the conference in Toulouse, the paper benefitted from the comments of Nicola Laneri and Rocio da Riva. An advanced version of this paper was given at a Zoom-talk organised by Abather Sadoon, Al-Muthanna University, Iraq. Some of the arguments given in this article benefitted from the discussion with Jana Matuszak during this talk. Numerous discussions with Aage Westenholz (“Nippur Digitized”) concerning the excavations on the “Westmound” inspired quite a few points I raise here. Therefore, I extend my thanks to him. Everything discussed in this paper is under the sole responsibility of the author. Hans Neumann, Heather Baker, and Janine Wende provided me which otherwise would have remained inaccessible to me.

that the god Aššur is the deified city.”⁴ It is interesting that the immediate surroundings of both cities were occupied up until the Ilkhanid period (AD 1258–1410) and the mounds continued to be used as graveyards until modern times.⁵

History of Research

Nippur has been explored since the mid-19th century by several British expeditions, although it was the French-German Assyriologist Jules Oppert who identified the ruins of Niffer with Nippur.⁶ Up until 1948, the University of Pennsylvania had conducted the largest scale excavations at the site, but since 1948, the size of the University of Chicago’s excavations has surpassed those of the Pennsylvania excavations. From the early 1970s, McGuire Gibson, as director of the Nippur excavations, conducted several studies concerning the urban layout of Nippur in various historical periods.⁷ Most recently, Hans Neumann dedicated a study to the earlier history of Nippur up until the beginning of the 2nd Millennium BC.⁸ The aim of this paper is to add some new information concerning the build-up of the mounds in Nippur through an integrated approach including archaeological and epigraphic sources without repeating all the main conclusions these most recent studies provide.

Archaeological Evidence

The mounds composing the ruins of Nippur/Niffer began to accumulate from Ubaid times in the 5th Millennium BC (in the Hajji Muhammed phase, c. 5000–4300 BC: Ubaid 2). The town must have already been considerable when the influence of the Uruk expansion, a phenomenon of widespread urbanization, reached the site during the second half of the 4th Millennium BC. Later, following the Jemdet Nasr and Early Dynastic I period, from about 3100 BC onwards, Nippur was home to a sanctuary related to the god Enlil. This is suggested as the city name of Nippur itself was already written with the name of the god Enlil.

⁴ Lambert 1983, 83.

⁵ Gibson 1992; Schneider 2018a.

⁶ Oppert 1863, 270–271.

⁷ See for example, Gibson 1992; Gibson 1993; Gibson/Hansen/Zettler 2001.

⁸ Neumann 2018. I want to thank Hans Neumann for providing me with a copy of this paper. For further bibliographic references and a broader consideration of Southern Mesopotamian urbanism during the 2nd and 1st Millennium BC see now also Baker 2022.

The Build-Up of the “Temple Mound” (Mound III)

The earliest settlement can be dated to the Hajji Muhammad phase (Ubaid 2) of the Ubaid period, generally set around the beginning of the 5th Millennium BC (more recently, 5400–5200).⁹ At this depth, the excavators could barely distinguish between structures and the surrounding clay because of the dampness of the material close to the water level. This was at least partly the result of the raising of the ground water level in the region by the local Ottoman government in around 1900, documented by the early excavators. There are some sherds published by Dougherty in the 1920s after his survey through Southern Mesopotamia, which were found in the then still open trenches at the East Mound of Nippur (“Temple Mound”, No. III on Fig. 1; see also Fig. 2).¹⁰ The post-World War II soundings made towards the northwest of this mound could trace Ubaid sherds from a depth of 78.95 m.¹¹ It is therefore believed that it was from this area that the Parthians extracted the material

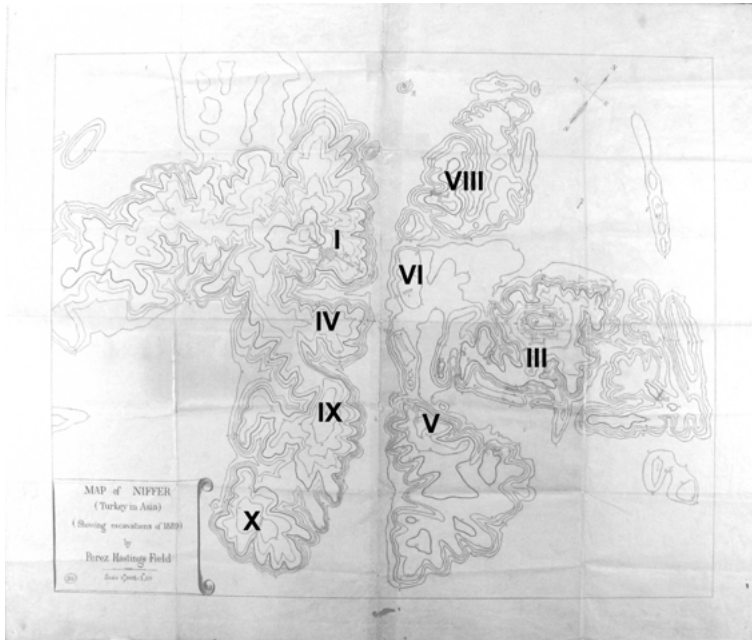


Fig. 1: The mounds of Nippur as surveyed by Perez Hastings Field, architect of the expedition of 1889 with the numbers of the mounds mentioned in the text. University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (© B. Schneider).

⁹ Aurenche *et al.* 2001. See the section published by Fisher 1905/06, Pl. 17.

¹⁰ Dougherty 1926, Fig. 30.

¹¹ McCown/Haines 1967, 156–157.

for the later “Parthian Fortress” on “Temple Mound.” According to one of the excavators, the higher bricks showed tentatively earlier material than the lower ones in this massive construction project.¹²

Not surprisingly, it is in the Ubaid time that Hans Neumann, in his recent assessment of the early history of Nippur, searched for the roots of Nippur as a cultic site. By the Late Uruk period, Nippur was still a small town of about 25 hectares, much smaller than more southern sites, such as Eridu with 40 hectares and, naturally, Uruk with up to 100 hectares. To some extent, this might be a reason for the great amount of overlay which accumulated at Nippur in the following four thousand years and onwards. Additionally, painted clay cones made in the mud brick material were spread during the heavy construction work during the Parthian period (until about AD 150). That Nippur was part of a “Network of Southern Mesopotamian Cities” becomes clear later with the mention in the “City Seals” of the Jemdet Nasr/Early Dynastic I period from 3100 until about 2700 BC.

Neumann also mentions the place for the river ordeal, known from the Early Dynastic texts, which could have been another reason for the importance of Nippur.¹³ Still in the Ur III times, the ordeal god Ilurugu, together with Allatum, received sacrifices on the 7th day of the Inana festival of the 6th month of the year.¹⁴

“Clean/Holy Mound”, *du₆.kug* (Sum.) as Venerated Artificial Hill (Tell)?

It is in the Ubaid/Uruk time when the first artificial Tell started to accumulate at East-Nippur (No. III on Fig. 1).¹⁵ From then on, it must have been one of the most prominent places and therefore was chosen to eventually house the main temple of the city.

During Ur III times (c. 2100–2000 BC), the king himself took part in a festival dedicated to the “Clean/Holy Mound” *dukug* (Sum.) on the 7th month of the year.¹⁶ For example, a text from the 46th year of the reign of Šulgi, around 2000 BC, mentions the “Clean/Holy Mound” *dukug* (Sum.) inside the Ekur complex, although without referring to the exact location.¹⁷ Other times, this so far not physically located feature seems to be set somewhere else, outside of the temple, following the

¹² Personal communication with Edward J. Keall (Toronto).

¹³ Neumann 2018, 42.

¹⁴ Sallaberger 1993, 128–129.

¹⁵ Fisher 1905–06, Pl. 17.

¹⁶ Sallaberger 1993, 130.

¹⁷ Pitts 2015, 29.

lists with sacrifices.¹⁸ This suggests that we should identify dukug with the Tell of the “Temple Mound” (No. III on Fig. 1), pre-existing before the foundation of Ur-amma in Ur III times, probably already before the foundation of Narām-Sîn and Šarkališarri.¹⁹

Mythological Evidence of Foundation

According to the myth, “The creation of the pickaxe/Song of the hoe” (see below), Nippur was built by a hoe at the place, which was still known to be located at the site during the 1st Millennium BC, where a temple dedicated to the goddess Inana stood from about 2900 BC onwards, at the latest. This might be no coincidence as, from a perspective dominated by the Uruk-ideology – with Inana as the main goddess -, this made sense and found its way into the literary tradition, right up until the 2nd and 1st Millennium BC.

Political Instrumentalization of the Sanctuary: An Overview

As the main Southern Mesopotamian sanctuary, sometimes referred to as the Mesopotamian Vatican, instrumentalization was omnipresent at the Ekur (Fig. 1: Mound III). Lugalzagesi, the Early Dynastic ruler of Umma, celebrated an enormous banquet here during the 24th century BC, the scale of which can only be estimated through hundreds of preserved fragments of stone bowls with a votive inscription commemorating his supremacy from the upper sea until the lower sea.²⁰ This was a short-lived success, as only a few years later he was brought to the gate of the very same temple, this time in fetters and a neckstock as a clear sign of submission, after being defeated by Sargon of Akkad.²¹ The Akkad period (see below) saw the rise of Enlil besides Ištar to the head of the pantheon of the Early Empire of

¹⁸ Such-Gutierrez 2003, 88. For Old Babylonian times, see Richter 2004, 41–51.

¹⁹ Concerning the materiality of the foundation of the Ekur at Nippur during Ur III times, see Schneider (forthcoming) 2022a.

²⁰ They were found spread all over the remains of the sanctuary but the main accumulation appeared in a layer containing fragments of stone vessels with votive inscriptions mainly dating to Early Dynastic IIIB (c 2450–2350 BC). Another early example is the stone fragments of votive vessels from Lugal-kiginne-dudu.

²¹ Sallaberger 1997.

Akkad.²² During this time, it even seems that Enil was succeeded by his son, Ninurta, who went on to be identified as the city god of Nippur.²³

The Ekur temple construction project of Urnamma, the founder of the Third Dynasty of Ur, seemingly designed to surpass the earlier Akkadian foundation, is another case where Nippur, with its main sanctuary, served as the religious centre of the state, politically centred at Ur.²⁴ Although at first glance it seems that Urnamma wanted to wipe out any knowledge of the legacy of Akkad with this new gigantic building project, a closer look at the materiality of this foundation shows that there was continuity via an intermediate stratum which, besides the earlier brick stamps made of terracotta, even incorporated the older temple archive.²⁵ Furthermore, an installation which cannot be connected with any other level of construction seems to have served as some sort of building ritual.

Later, during the Middle Babylonian period, beginning with the 14th century BC, rulers of foreign, Kassite origin, best described as outsiders in the centuries before, revitalised the Enlil cult in Nippur²⁶ and dedicated a newly built residence in Dur-Kurigalzu, modern ‘Aqar Quf, on the growing outskirts of modern Baghdad, to the same god. Here, the choice of Enlil as a main god may have been favoured by the similarity of his qualities to those of the Kassite god Ḫarbe.²⁷ But, more importantly, with Enlil’s cult at Nippur there was a religious and ideological counterprogram with the ability to oppose the Babylon-centred cult of Marduk, which was firmly established by the Hammurabi Dynasty during the first half of the 2nd Millennium BC.

However, the sacking of Babylon by the Hittites in 16th century BC (1595/1499), as current knowledge seems to reveal, with the help of Hanaeans (situated around the Middle Euphrates in Syria), as well as Kassites, and the exile of the Marduk statue at Hana in the aftermath, opened the way for the newcomers.²⁸

Even when it seemed that religious realities may finally have changed in favour of a full domination of the Babylonian cult of Marduk at the end of the 2nd

²² Hansen 2002; for the pottery (excavated 1948–50) from the Akkad period until Kassite times from the “Enlil Temple” to the northeast of the ziggurat, see Scazzosi 2014/15. Concerning the archaeological evidence of the whole Ekur, see Schneider 2018b.

²³ Sallaberger 1997.

²⁴ Sallaberger 1993.

²⁵ See Schneider (forthcoming) 2022. For the content of this archive, see Westenholz 1987. The foundation laid during the Akkad period was comparably cut into earlier layers as the Ur III foundation did. See Schneider 2018b.

²⁶ For the Kassite Ekur, see Schneider 2015; Schneider 2016; Schneider 2020a; Schneider 2020b. For the political history, see Paulus 2014b.

²⁷ Balkan 1954, 101–106; Balkan 1954, 219.

²⁸ Paulus 2014b.

Millennium BC, Nebuchadnezzar I (c. 1121–1100 BC) still introduced official documents drafted at Nippur with a hymn to Enlil as the supreme god, and not Marduk!²⁹ And even in the 1st Millennium BC, during the Assyrian domination of Mesopotamia, it is still Enlil who is venerated at Nippur, although building inscriptions appear with the more pragmatic writing of the god's name as DINGIR 50, which interchangeably stands for Enlil as well as Aššur. In Neo-Babylonian times, the same designation could stand for Marduk, although there are nearly no royal inscriptions extant from Nippur later than the Neo-Assyrian period, with a single brick containing the inscription of Aššur-eṭel-ilāni commemorating construction work at the Ekur temple as the most recent one.³⁰ The stamped bricks of Nebuchadnezzar II which were found *in situ* in the “Enlil Temple” of the Ekur, to the northeast of the ziggurat, regrettably add no further information concerning the exact construction work executed. A six-line standard inscription mentions the king as caretaker of Esangil and Ezida.³¹ At least two additional examples of unpublished, fragmentary bricks, found in later layers, were documented by the excavators.³² Further bricks with the same inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II were found during several archaeological surveys conducted in the broader surroundings of Nippur. They seem to attest at least a modest amount of public construction work also during this period and suggest that from this time onward this rural area became more developed than ever before.³³

29 Paulus 2014a, 491–502 (Nbk I 1). In the introductory dedication of this document, Enlil is clearly presented as the highest god. For this study, it is interesting that this document (Akk. *kudurru*) was called “Ninurta and Nusku are the ones who set the *kudurru* for posterity” (o. I–II). Furthermore, Nebuchadnezzar I is given the title “the one who awaits Enlil and Ninurta fearsomely” (II 11). For the Post-Kassite evidence at the Ekur, see Schneider 2017. The fragmentary inscription on a *kudurru* of Nebuchadnezzar I which recently found its way back to Iraq (2019) via the British Museum seems to also concern Enlil and not Marduk. I am indebted to Jon Taylor (British Museum) for providing me with his unpublished work concerning the content of this object (e-mail of 26 March 2020).

30 When I was able to copy this brick inscription in the Hilprecht Collection (Jena), access kindly provided by Manfred Krebernik, it was interesting to see that its edges were cut to the size of the inscription. A paper squeeze preserved in the Nippur archive at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology made it apparent that it was cut into such a format (broken) in antiquity. See Schneider 2018b.

31 See Schneider 2018a; Schneider 2022.

32 According to the list of finds with inscriptions (1948–50) preserved at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Nippur archive.

33 To study the rural area nearby Nippur mainly during the 1st Millennium BC is the aim of a project currently developed by the author. Concerning the Neo-Babylonian/Achaemenid transition and the archaeological evidence of the Arad-Gula dossier of the “Ekur-archive” see Schneider (forthcoming) 2022b. On the analysis of a burial type from the Late Achaemenid/Seleucid period see Schneider (forthcoming) 2022c.

The Administrative Structure at Nippur during the Akkad-Period

Following the study of Old Sumerian and Old Akkadian texts conducted by Aage Westenholz, the Ekur was headed traditionally by a sanga (Sum.), with a literal meaning of “head”, which was now also supervised by a šagina (Sum.), who was designated by and had to report to the leaders of the Empire of Akkad.³⁴ In 1987, Westenholz coined the term “Mesopotamian Vatican” for the Old Akkadian Ekur, with which he primarily meant the organisational level, as an independent unit within the city of Nippur. Despite its original intentions, during the 3rd Millennium BC, as the Southern Mesopotamian religious centre, Ekur was indeed comparable to the current centre of Catholicism in terms of its cultic importance as well as its layout with a main forecourt that housed several divine statues instead of statues of saints.³⁵

The administration under the ensi (Sum.), the “city ruler” of Nippur, concentrated on the part dominated by the Ninurta temple, called Ešumeša. He was also the head of this temple. The ensi had to make regular trips to Akkad, which is documented in the “Onion Archive” from the north-western part of the “Westmound” of Nippur (Mound I, Fig. 1), published by Westenholz in the same volume in 1987.³⁶

Later on in the Ur III period, Ninurta was already accumulating some of Ningirsu’s qualities. This might have been a reversed assimilation as, even earlier, the Lagaš-dominated pantheon headed by Ningirsu was incorporating Enlil as the father of the god, at one point even with the construction of his own temple called È.AD.DA (Sum.), “house/temple of the father” while the king of Lagaš even included the title “obedient shepherd of Enlil”.³⁷

Localizing the Temple of Ninurta

If we look at the layout of the ruins of Nippur, two parts appear prominent (Fig. 1). They consist of main parts that can be simplified as the “Westmound” and “East Nippur” with a relation of roughly 3:2. Several finds lead different researchers to favour either the “Westmound” or “East Nippur” as the location of the Ninurta temple. In the following two sections, the main arguments will be summarised with additional evidence.

³⁴ Westenholz 1987; Westenholz 1999. I am very thankful that I was able to discuss some of this with Inger Jentoft and Aage Westenholz in person when they invited me, with my wife and child, to their house in Denmark in September 2017.

³⁵ Another comparison with a more local Christian main sanctuary such as, for example, the Stephansdom in Vienna, would be the possibility of setting up of measuring equipment within the perimeter of the building. See Schneider 2020a, 162.

³⁶ Westenholz 1987.

³⁷ For a summary of the evidence, see Selz 1992.

The Evidence for Ninurta on the “Westmound”

Regrettably, the Ninurta temple was not found, despite about 170 years of archaeological exploration at Nippur. Furthermore, it was not even added to the Middle-Babylonian city map of Nippur.³⁸ This can be explained by the fact that this was a strategic plan, concerning the defence of the city. Hence, only strategically important structures like the city walls, moats and water ways were indicated on this map. This also makes it clear that the Ekur temple of Enlil, with the adjacent temple of his divine consort Ninlil, could have been used as a fortress in times of crisis. This might have been the case several times in the long history of Nippur.

On his schematic plan of Nippur, Westenholz indicated the reconstructed approximate findspot of the tablets from where the aforementioned “Onion archive” of the city ruler of Nippur was excavated: Here, at the south-east slope of the north-western part of the “Westmound”, designated by the early excavators as Mound I or “Camp Hill” (see Fig. 1).³⁹

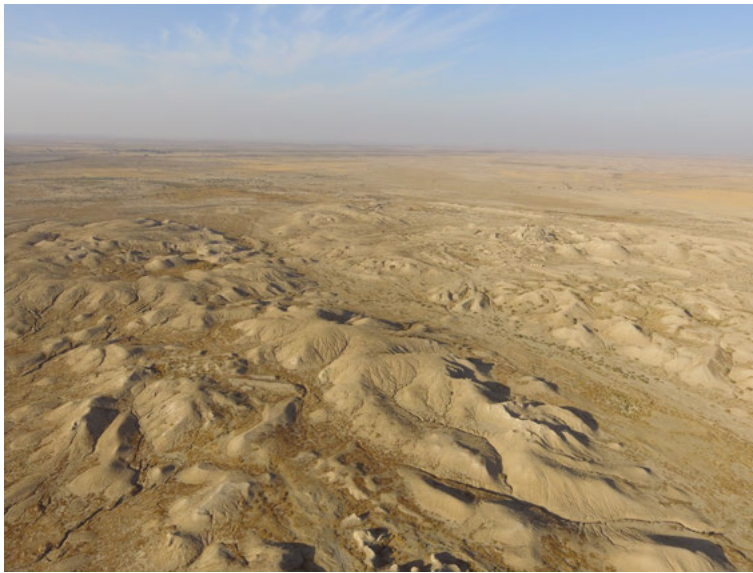


Fig. 2: Drone image over the “Westmound” (Mound X, with Mound IV and Mound I above) towards East Nippur (Mound III). (© K. Mohammadkhani / Oriental Institute, University of Chicago).

³⁸ See Oelsner/Stein 2011.

³⁹ Westenholz 1987, 94. For the approximate location of the Onion Archive, see *ibid.* 88: Fig. 2. Westenholz added several convincing finds to the main arguments that the Ninurta Temple is to be found at the “Westmound”.

After 1990, when Gibson identified the WA temple (Mound I, Fig. 1) as Gula's temple, it was considered that the temple of her consort Ninurta could also be found nearby.⁴⁰ In my opinion, this seems to be highly likely if we keep in mind that the equally unexcavated Ninlil Temple was also indicated on the Nippur city map bordering the Enlil Temple on its northeast side.⁴¹ The latter evidence is also strengthened by the fact that a door socket containing a dedication to Ninlil by a Kurigalzu I/II was found along the line of the north-eastern wall of the ziggurat courtyard.⁴²

One of the finds which points towards an identification of the excavated structure as the Gula/Ninisina temple as well as the Ninurta temple would be the fragmentary part (5.7 x 4.9 x 2.3 cm) of a green stone axe⁴³ with an inscription "property of ^dNIN . . ." which should be reconstructed as ^dNIN.EZEN.NA as suggested by Miguel Civil according to the traces left on the published photograph.⁴⁴ This writing of Ninisina was in use during the time of Adad-apla-iddina (1069–1048 BC) and his inscriptions from Isin can be found on brick.⁴⁵

Further to the southeast in WB (Mound IX, Fig. 1), a list concerning regular offerings, *satukku* (Akk.), was found. It is of a type postdating the *satukku* lists discussed by Sigrist. The latter contain dates preserved until Rim-Sin of Larsa, (c. 1822–1763 BC).⁴⁶

In an even more south-eastern part of the "Westmound" (Mound X, Fig. 1) two contracts were found among a burial mention *naditus* of Ninurta from "Place of the lukur-priestesses", ki-lukur-ra (Sum.). From another burial came a pink diorite (IOB) cylinder seal which belonged to a "lukur of Ninurta". Additionally, a jug with the Old Akkadian inscription of Urdu, the chief potter of Ninurta, was found. It derives from a disturbed context on the foot of the northeast slope of Mound X, besides other votive offerings which were described by Haynes in his reports of early 1895, during the 3rd campaign, as being eroded down from the mound.

Also pointing in the same direction is the name for the "gate of the cultically impure women", abul mu-us-sú-ka-tim (Akk.) which is known from the Middle Babylonian city map and has to be located on the north-western part of the "Westmound". The name of this gate alludes, according to Andrew George, to a "procession of these ladies" during a festival, when Ninurta returns to his temple Ešumeša on the 15th day in Ayyaru (April/May).⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Gibson 1990; Stone 1991, 235–236.

⁴¹ Stein 2017, Fig. 14.

⁴² Concerning the evidence of the findspot, see now Schneider 2020a. For a reconstruction see Scazzosi 2014/15, 11–12: Fig. 3.

⁴³ Gibson 1975, 38, 45, Pl. 28: 3a-b.

⁴⁴ Gibson 1972, 134–135.

⁴⁵ Hrouda *et al.* 1977, 89–90 (IB 148ab 38 x 38 x 6,5 cm). It was found within the Level IV temple WA 12, Room 2, Floor 12; Hrouda *et al.* 1977, 38.

⁴⁶ Westenholz 1987; Sigrist 1984. The date given is following the Middle Chronology.

⁴⁷ George 1990, 157–158.

Some Evidence for Ninurta at “East Nippur”

The main argument for Zettler’s (1992, n. 41) location of Ninurta’s Temple near to the Inana Temple was that, within the later Parthian platform of the Inana Temple, “*Vaughn Crawford noted that tablets from the archive of the Ninurta temple were in the fill of the northwestern part of the platform, whereas tablets from the archive of the Inanna temple were in fill of its center and southeastern sectors (Crawford, Nippur, the Holy City, 77–78).*”

To this, we should add the bricks dedicated by Išme-Dagān of Isin (c MC 1953–1935 BC) for the socket of Ninurta’s 50-headed mace excavated by Peters in 1890 near to the Ekur.⁴⁸ It is not really surprising that Ninurta had a socket for his mace near to this temple as he was considered to be the “hero of the Ekur”.

There might still be a chance to find this temple to some degree intact as Zettler rightly added that “*since the Ninurta temple tablets date to the Isin-Larsa period, the Parthian builders probably did not disturb earlier levels of that temple.*”⁴⁹

Conclusions Concerning the Site of the Temple of Ninurta

Both Mound I and Mound III rise far over the rest of the mounds of Nippur which would indicate a somewhat similar general accumulation process of both mounds.⁵⁰ So far, a localization of the Ninurta temple on the northern “Westmound”, possibly on Mound I, should be preferred. The overwhelming evidence concerning Ninurta on the “Westmound” leads me to prefer a location of the Ninurta temple on this part of Nippur.

With Mound I as the likely site of the Ninurta temple Ešumeša, one could deduce that the tablets from the temple archive found their way into the northwestern part of the Parthian foundation of the Inana temple (Sounding B) via mud bricks and filling material which originally came via the “canal in the mid of the city”. This would also explain the big wadi, separating Mound I to the north and Mound IV to the south of it (see Fig. 1).

⁴⁸ Peters 1897.

⁴⁹ Zettler 1992.

⁵⁰ This should rather be seen as an approximation, but with a history of more than 5000 years of both mounds a generalization is more trustworthy than at a mound with just a few periods of occupation.

The Archaeological and Textual Evidence of Ekur (Mound III)

The stratigraphy from the site of the Ekur temple of the main god Enlil clearly shows structures of a temple from about 2200 BC onwards. Before this time, one has to speculate whether the earlier sanctuary was being buried under the still standing ziggurat, founded in the 21st century BC. Early Dynastic stone vase fragments with votive inscriptions were buried below a much later floor, datable to about 1000 BC and provide the only information. At least there is some scanty evidence about 80 m further to the southwest at the site of the Inana temple from about 2800 BC onwards. The sanga priest of Enlil must have been interrelated with the same position at the neighbouring Inana temple (Mound VI, Fig. 1). This could be the reason why, for example, the fragment of a statue of a sanga of Enlil was found there (IT VIIIB).⁵¹ According to the mythology *Enlil and the creation of the pickaxe* (or *Song of the hoe*), the site of the Inana temple, the uzu-mú-a (Sum.), “(place) where flesh sprouted forth”, is the place where Enlil drove his pickaxe into the ground and mankind emerged.⁵² Still, in a much later foundation cylinder for Inana’s temple dedicated by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon (683–669 BC), Inana is called “great mistress of Nippur, ruler of uzu-mú-a (Sum.)”.⁵³ The same mythological text tells us:

*“The Ekur, the temple of Enlil, was founded by the hoe (Sum. al). By day it was building (sum.) and by night it caused the temple to grow (Sum. al-mu-mu).”*⁵⁴

Both the temple of Enlil and that of Inana are still mentioned in the last dated documents from Nippur, in the reign of Demetrios I. from 154 and 152 BC concerning baker’s prebends of the temples.⁵⁵ So, the general structure of East Nippur still prevailed until the very end of the Seleucid period. What also becomes apparent from these two latest documents is that, besides Enlil, Ninurta is still equally prominent within personal names. On one occasion, even his divine consort Gula appears within one name. It could be possible that, at this time, the old pantheon was kept together within one multi-purpose building called, just like nearly 2000 years earlier, É DUR.AN.KI (Sum.), which was preserved until about 150 CE (Sounding B),

⁵¹ Evans 2012, 193–194, fig. 69.

⁵² Jacobsen 1946.

⁵³ Gibson/Hansen/Zettler 2001, 522.

⁵⁴ Translation from: <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=t.5.5.4#> (accessed 10th October, 2021).

⁵⁵ Van der Spek 1992, 235–260. For the Neo- and Post-Assyrian constructions at the Ekur proper, see Schneider 2018a; Schneider 2022.

still in the traditional Babylonian style and on the original site of the Ur III Inana Temple to the southwest of the so-called “Parthian Fortress”.⁵⁶ Near to the site of the Inana Temple (Mound VI), the early excavators of the University of Pennsylvania found a Sasanian “Fire temple” at the end of the 19th century.⁵⁷

What happened on the “Westmound” we can only infer from the meagre evidence of well documented excavations in this part of the city. In Achaemenid times, there still existed a small shrine of which only the last two to three layers of bricks were preserved.⁵⁸ This building functioned until the later Seleucid period during the second century BC, at least. Although we don’t know who was venerated there at this time, it is possible that a later version of Ninurta was still venerated at West Nippur.

The Localization of a Procession Street from Mound III to Mound V at Nippur

A fragment of a baked tablet (20N 3139) which was recently (2019) found by Abbas Alizadeh, Director of the Chicago Nippur expedition, and read by Susanne Paulus, contained a real estate sale with an indication that the property was situated on the “broad street, walkway of the god[s and king . . .]”.⁵⁹ The findspot of this tablet on the surface of the north slope of “Tablet Hill” (Mound V, Fig. 1) is situated on the backfill of the excavations which began in February 1889,⁶⁰ presumably not too far from its original place of deposition. This prominent spot of “Tablet Hill” originally had a view to the central stairway, still visible nowadays at the ziggurat on the “Temple Mound” (Mound III, Fig. 1).⁶¹ Therefore, for the first time, an approximation of a ceremonial procession street can be made while connecting the ziggurat and the findspot, approximately the spot where III and V are written on Fig. 1.

Interpretation and Some Further Remarks

The greater bulk of the two main parts of Nippur, with about two thirds to the southwest and approximately one third towards the northeast, separated by the current

⁵⁶ Zettler 1992. For traces of cultic function of the “Parthian Fortress”, see Schneider 2018b.

⁵⁷ This identification was confirmed to me by Edward J. Keall (personal communication).

⁵⁸ Gibson 1975.

⁵⁹ Paulus 2021; Concerning street designations see Baker 2022 with further bibliographic references. See also the contribution by Da Riva in this volume.

⁶⁰ After personal examination of this slope of the “Tablet Hill”.

⁶¹ Personal communication with Abbas Alizadeh, e-mail of 24 December 2020 and during the 21st Season of the Oriental Institute, Chicago at Nippur in 2021. Concerning the dating of the central staircase, see Schneider 2016; Schneider 2020a.

wadi of the Shatt en-Nil, the ancient *Canal in the heart of the city* from the Kassite city map, seems to have been settled around the two main sanctuaries of the city: the Enlil Temple towards the northeast and the so-far unlocated temple of Ninurta, Enlil's son,⁶² which seems to lie buried in the mounds towards the southwest.

So, the ancient sanctuaries and not an ancient canal could have been the reason for the main setup of two main bulks of mounds at Nippur. Here, definitely, sanctuaries shaped the outline of the whole ancient city of Nippur, still visible in the remains of the ruins preserved today. This seems to be a pattern which is also visible at other Southern Mesopotamian sites, such as ancient Kiš and Uruk.

During the 1st millennium BC, we have an example of an intersection between space and language with the Akkadian word for temple *ekurru* deriving from the Sumerian name of Enlil's temple Ekur at Nippur. This coincides with an apparent decrease of the supraregional importance of Nippur in favour of Babylon. Despite the loss of its status as the main sanctuary of Babylonia around the end of the 2nd Millennium BC with the rise of Marduk of Babylon, the importance of Nippur would not diminish. In the time of domination by the Isin II Dynasty, within the names of the city walls of Nippur and Babylon the gods were switched, with Enlil appearing in the names of the city walls of Babylon (Imgur-Enlil and Nimit-Enlil) and Marduk at Nippur (Imgur-Marduk and Nimit-Marduk). Additionally, the sanctuary of Marduk was modelled, at least ideologically, on the Ekur of Nippur.

Still in Hellenistic times, knowledge from temple scribes of Nippur was preserved in the form of cuneiform tablets which could be transferred to Uruk. Furthermore, the revived cult of Anu at Uruk was also modelled on the cult of Enlil at Nippur, probably via transmission from Babylon or even Assur.⁶³

Although the status of public work at Nippur seems to be diminished compared to earlier periods, in the second quarter of the 1st millennium BC the Chaldean Dynasty was actively intensifying agriculture in the hinterland of Nippur with the help of deported people. In this way, they were continuing the policy of Assyria, which has been recently documented, for example, in the "Erbil Plain" survey by Jason Ur as well as the "Land of Niniveh" survey by Daniele Morandi Bonacossi in the current Kurdistan Region of Northern Iraq. This trend also continued during the following Achaemenid period⁶⁴ and is best documented there in the Murašû archive, excavated at Nippur.⁶⁵

⁶² Tummal, the cultic place of his wife Ninlil lies about 22 km to the southeast of Nippur. Beside Puzriš-Dagan (Drehem) it will be the focus of excavations led by Abbas Alizadeh during the next couple of years.

⁶³ Beaulieu 1997.

⁶⁴ These periods are the focus of a project recently started by the author with the aim to identify sites known through the texts only in the Nippur region for the first time archaeologically.

⁶⁵ See for example Stolper 1985.

Conclusions concerning the Basic Layout of the City

The earliest settlement developed to the west and the east more or less simultaneously around two cores with the “sacred hill”, dukug (Sum.) is the Tell of the Temple Mound (Mound III). If we have to search for Ninurta’s temple at the “Westmound” (Mound I?), and most of the indications point towards a location on Mound I, then this part of Nippur should be seen as “Ninurta’s city (quarter)” whereas “Enlil’s city (quarter)”, Duranki, “the bond between heaven and earth”, is found at East Nippur (Mound III). The consequence of this two-partite city, separated by the wadi of the Shatt en-Nil (Arab.), would also be that we would expect to find the “City council” at the “Westmound” while the “Divine assembly” resided in Ekur. Hence, the city administration would also have to be expected on the west side. This would in turn be an indirect hint to a probable findspot (Mound X?) for the scribal school, called “Tablet House”, Edubba (Sum.), according to the Old Babylonian literature and founded by Šulgi, the son of Urnamma of the Third Dynasty of Ur. The temple scribes would have mainly lived in “East Nippur” which would explain why school tablets, so far, were found only in private contexts at Tablet Hill (Mound V).

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