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THE EARLY PHASES OF THE TEMPLE OF ENLIL AT NIPPUR: A REANALYSIS OF THE EVIDENCE

Giulia Scazzosi

The site of Nippur (central Iraq) has been investigated between 1880 and 1990, with some breaks. The excavations documented an almost uninterrupted occupation for the city. This paper aims at revising the archaeological evidence for the Ekur, the main religious area of Nippur, dedicated to the supreme god Enlil. A diachronic analysis of the area, spanning from the Akkadian to the Parthian period, is proposed here by means of correlating the building phases of the main architectural structures. These phases are also compared, whenever possible, with other areas investigated at Nippur, mostly on the basis of the pottery assemblages and the written evidence. The main focus of this paper, also based on unpublished documentation and materials stored in the museums of Philadelphia and Chicago, is the Akkadian phase of the Ekur, which yielded a large amount of archaeological, as well as epigraphical data.

Introduction¹

The imposing visible remains of Nippur in Southern Mesopotamia have stimulated the curiosity of archaeologists and scholars since the middle of the 19th century. Although briefly investigated by A.H. Layard in 1851 (Layard 1853; Crawford 1959: 75), the first systematic archaeo-

logical researches at the site were undertaken only between 1880 and 1900, by the University of Pennsylvania. During the following century Nippur remained an American concern, with several academic institutions like the University of Pennsylvania, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (which worked jointly with the former between 1948 and 1952 and then only the latter from 1964 to 1990) and the American Schools of Oriental Research (between 1953 and 1963, in collaboration with the Oriental Institute) conducting researches for decades. These explorations provided an important laboratory for the study of the ancient Mesopotamian history.

Thanks to the continuous archaeological investigation together with epigraphic analyses, the general topography and the history of the site are rather well-known. The occupation of the city was almost uninterrupted, spanning for more than five thousand years, from the early Ubaid period (5000 BC ca.) until the Islamic era (about AD 800)². Nevertheless, despite a century of almost

¹ This work was conducted under the guidance and support of my MA supervisors Nicolò Marchetti (Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna) and Gianni Marchesi (Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna), to whom I wish to express all my gratitude. Part of this research has been funded through a grant for the completion of the thesis abroad, provided by the Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, which I used to undertake a one month period of research at two US museums. I am particularly grateful to Prof. McGuire Gibson and Karen Wilson (University of Chicago), Helen McDonald (Senior Registrar) and John Larson (Archivist) of the Oriental Institute Museum of Chicago, for their permission to study and publish the original materials from Nippur and for their assistance and help. I must also thank Katherine Blanchard (Keeper of the Near Eastern Section) and Alessandro Pezzati (Archivist) of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Philadelphia), for the warm welcome and the help during my research at their institution. A special thanks is also due to Prof. Aage Westenholz, who kindly read this paper and gave me many precious advices. Finally, I want to thank Federico Zaina (Sapienza – University of Rome), who helped me with the drawing of plans and pottery and always gives me suggestions and support.

² This long-lasting occupation was due to two main reasons. First, the strategic geographical position along the Euphrates river, in the centre of the Mesopotamian alluvium, made this city a natural cross-road between the land of Sumer and Akkad. Furthermore, as the location of the temple of Enlil, the most important deity in the Sumerian pantheon, the city was one of the major cul-

uninterrupted excavations, there are still many questions open.

In this paper I will aim at critically revising the archaeological evidence of the Ekur (the main religious area of Nippur) from the Akkadian until the Parthian period. I will propose a concise diachronic picture of the area, by means of correlating the building phases of the entire complex. This will be done through the analysis of the unpublished stratigraphical and architectural data as well as the stratified finds kept in the Oriental Institute Museum of Chicago and the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Philadelphia). Among the latter, of particular interest for the reconstruction of the Ekur phases are the epigraphic finds which often provided precise reference to sovereigns involved in the building or restoration of the complex.

House of the Supreme God: the Ekur of Enlil through Time

The Topography of the Area

Ancient Nippur was divided into two almost equal parts by a deep depression, that is the dried canal-bed of the Shatt en-Nil (meaning river Nil), which ran through the mounds from north-west to south-east (fig. 1). The western part of Nippur was constituted by a series of high mounds and it was the location of the secular and residential sectors of the city. Most of the archaeological works at Nippur over the last century have been carried out in the eastern part of the site (Gibson 1977: 27), which is dominated by two mounds, separated by the dried bed of another watercourse. The southern one is called Tablet Hill or Scribal Quarter, because of the large amount of clay tablets found, while the northern mound is the site of the sacred structures and is thus called Religious Quarter (Zettler 1997: 148). Nippur major temples were located in the centre of this mound and the complex called Ekur³ and dedicated to Enlil, was the most

tural and religious sites of the region. The sacred character of Nippur made it a sort of “neutral” city among the frequent conflicts between other Mesopotamian centres. The city maintained a political role, as the Mesopotamian kings sought the legitimization of their power through the recognition by the god Enlil. The role of Enlil as a supreme judge in the conflicts between different cities contributed to assign to Nippur the essential function of mediation (Zettler 1997: 148-149; Liverani 1988: 155).

³ Except for Ekur, these are all modern names, given by the excavators of the first expeditions.

imposing one. It consists of two main structures, a ziqqurat and another religious building at its base, interpreted as a kitchen-temple and usually called Temple of Enlil⁴. They very likely formed an organic whole, as their main changes during time prove.

In 1899 Haynes brought to light an essential finding for the general understanding of the topography of the city. This is a rather well preserved clay tablet⁵ (figs. 2-3) dating to the beginning of the Kassite dynasty (Kramer 1961: 327). The incised drawing on the tablet was later recognized by Hilprecht to be the reproduction of the city-plan of Nippur itself (*ibidem*: 323). The tablet represents the profile of the walls, the city gates, each one marked by its name and the watercourses running outside and across the city. Two enclosures and the ziqqurat with two courtyards are also indicated (Gibson 1977: 35). These courts are named respectively Ekur, the inner one, and Ekiur, the outer one⁶ (Oelsner, Stein 2011: 110). However, according to this interpretation, Ekur would have been the name of the court only, and not of the entire complex of the temple (Fisher 1905: 14).

There is still disagreement about the correct interpretation of the map, whether it shows the whole city or only part of it. The excavators supposed that only the eastern half of the city was represented on this map (Fisher 1905: 12). However, another interpretation was soon proposed: the tablet was rotated 90° left, thus representing the city in its entirety. Some measures taken along the city wall supported this interpretation. Moreover, the excavation of part of the city wall in the southwestern corner of the site and some aerial photographs

⁴ There is no written evidence which clearly explain the purpose of this so-called temple. It is possible to draw some hypotheses based on a comparison with the kitchen-temple located in the ziqqurat enclosure at Ur. They are similar in their plan as well as in their location beside the ziqqurat. Moreover, they have some preserved installations in common, which are supposed to have had the same function. According to the excavators, these lower temples were probably used for the food preparation for the gods worshipped in the temple on the topmost stage of the ziqqurat (McCown et al. 1967: 32-33), although no spaces for storage were recognized.

⁵ The tablet was not complete, with the corners mostly damaged and two sides missing. However, it has been possible to reconstruct its original size (it is about 21 by 18 centimeters) and approximate shape thanks to the other preserved sides (Kramer 1961: 323).

⁶ The names written on the map were a mixture of Akkadian and early Sumerian, although the latter had already been a “dead” language, no longer spoken at that time. Also the name of the city itself, in the middle of the map, was written with its Sumerian ideogram, that is EN.LIL^{ki}, meaning “the place of Enlil” (Kramer 1961: 323-324).

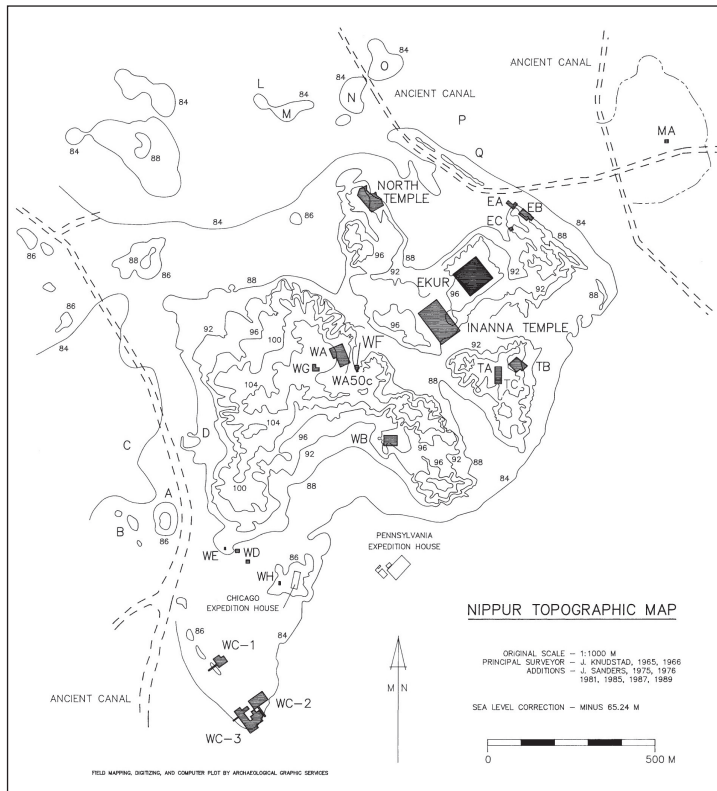


Fig. 1. Topographic map of Nippur (Gibson 1992: 34, fig. 1)

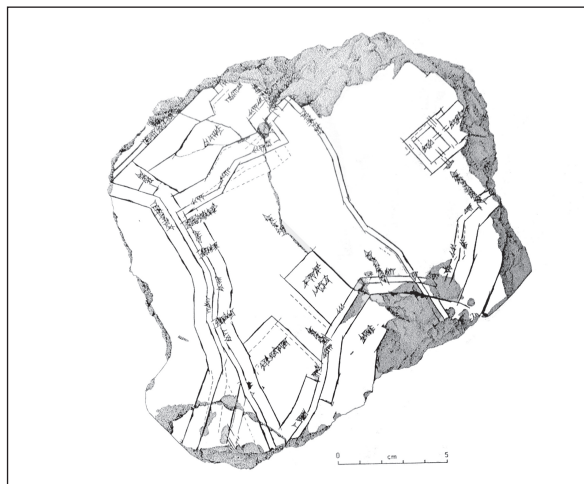


Fig. 2. The Kassite tablet, oriented (Oelsner, Stein 2011: 105)

of the 1950s added a further confirmation of the new orientation of the map (Gibson 1977: 35-36).

The Ekur Courts

The Ekur probably constituted of two main open spaces, which, if we have to judge from the sketch on the tablet, must have been side by side

(fig. 3)⁷. Hilprecht carried out some excavations along the outer face of the south-eastern temenos wall of the main court. The results, although very meagre, led him to assume that «It could no longer be doubted that a second, somewhat smaller court, in which Bur-Sin’s sanctuary stood, adjoined the court of the ziqqurat on the side of its principal entrance» (Hilprecht 1904: 479). In fact, this alleged forecourt depended from the previous orientation of the Kassite tablet, but once this is correctly overlapped with Nippur’s topographical plan, Amar-Zuena’s sanctuary must be interpreted as belonging to a nearby, independent sector than the Ekur itself. The so-called “Bur-Sin⁸ sanctuary” was a building partially exposed by Peters during the first Pennsylvania expeditions. Two rooms, placed on a baked bricks platform, and parts of a third one, wider than the others⁹, have been exposed in 1890¹⁰ (Zettler 1984: 232-234). In conclusion, the interpretation of the side court of the Ekur is actually problematic, because its total extension, size and shape are unknown.

The inner courtyard of the Ekur was more thoroughly investigated. It included at least the ziqqurat and a sacred building at its base, although more structures were probably part of this complex. The pavement of the court consisted of a mudbrick platform 2.4 metres thick, attributed by Peters to the Ur III king Ur-Namma¹¹. Its north-eastern edge was occupied by the

⁷ The precinct of the Ekur was partially excavated and its reconstruction on the plan is thus hypothetical.

⁸ Actually the king Amar-Zuena.

⁹ A reliable reconstruction of the layout of the building is nearly impossible to obtain. The comparisons with other similar structures in Mesopotamia are, in fact, hardly found, because the exact function of this supposed shrine remains unclear (Zettler 1984: 237-238). J. Meyer, who visited the place of this building on the 8th of March 1894, said «Nearly all traces even of its foundations have been destroyed by the excavations. [...] not enough to restore the plan or take measurements» (Meyer’s Journal, 8th August 1894 – Courtesy of the Penn Museum: Fisher Coll. 2).

¹⁰ This space has been interpreted by the excavators as a religious building related to a particular aspect of the cult of Enlil, worshipped in the entire area. The association was mainly due to the epigraphic evidence recovered on two door sockets, found at each entryway. Other inscriptions were found on the baked bricks forming the walls, but they bore only the name of Amar-Zuena, the king of the Ur III dynasty who probably erected the building (Zettler 1992: 13-14).

¹¹ All royal names in the texts are based on Marchesi,

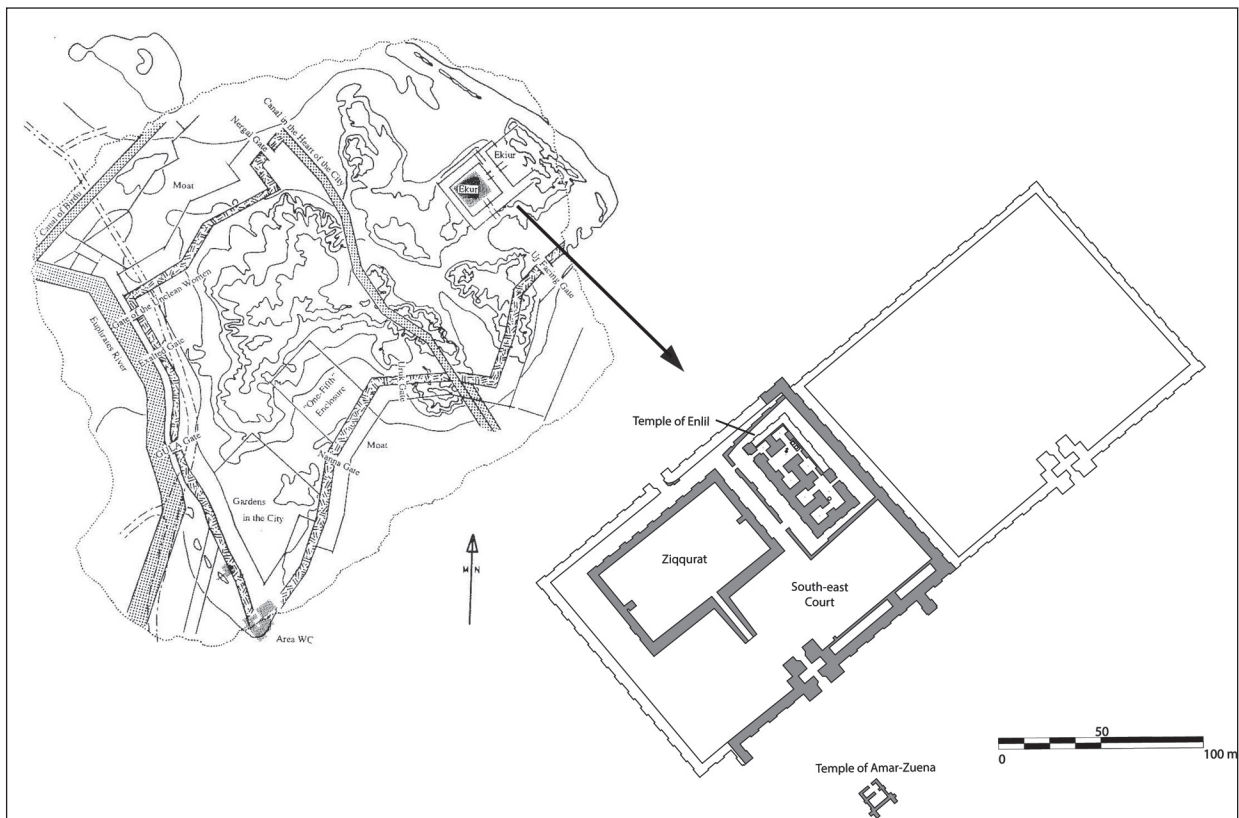


Fig. 3. The Kassite tablet (Gibson et al. 1998-2001: 560, fig. 10) with the schematic reconstruction of the Ekur of Enlil as proposed by the author on the basis of excavated evidence and the match on the tablet

ziqqurat, whereas the south-eastern sector was left as an open court, possibly filled by buildings that did not leave any trace (Peters 1895: 29), or whose structural remains have not been excavated. The open space south-east of the ziqqurat was partly investigated during the first archaeological expeditions. Several levels were recognized by the excavators (fig. 4), each one related to an historical period and even to a precise king. The development of the court could thus be linked to the main modifications occurred to the principle structures of the Ekur (Hilprecht 1904: 375-390).

The Ziqqurat

The most imposing structure within the Ekur was the huge temple tower or ziqqurat (fig. 5). There are few certainties about its development, although the University of Pennsylvania expeditions exposed part of its faces, mostly dated to the

Ur III period, that is probably the time of its first erection (Zettler 1992: 14). All the kings who made changes to the structure usually employed building materials from the previous phases. Therefore, it is hard to identify the chronology of the modifications and to interpret them in the light of the different historical periods. The understanding of the original context of such architectural elements would be helpful to solve this issue. Unfortunately, the excavation techniques and the records of the first archaeological expeditions were often too inaccurate and imprecise to infer the exact position of the materials.

The ziqqurat had a core structure of mud-bricks, coated with a layer of baked bricks probably dated to the Kassite period (McCown et al. 1967: 19-20). On the other side was a foundation made of baked bricks over which other bricks covered with plaster of clay were laid. This coating were often replaced in order to preserve the bricks from the erosion (Peters 1895: 35). In the middle of the north-eastern and south-western sides of the ziqqurat two baked bricks conduits for the water flow were dug. The ziqqurat had probably three stages, even though there is no ar-

Marchetti 2011, or have been kindly revised by Gianni Marchesi.

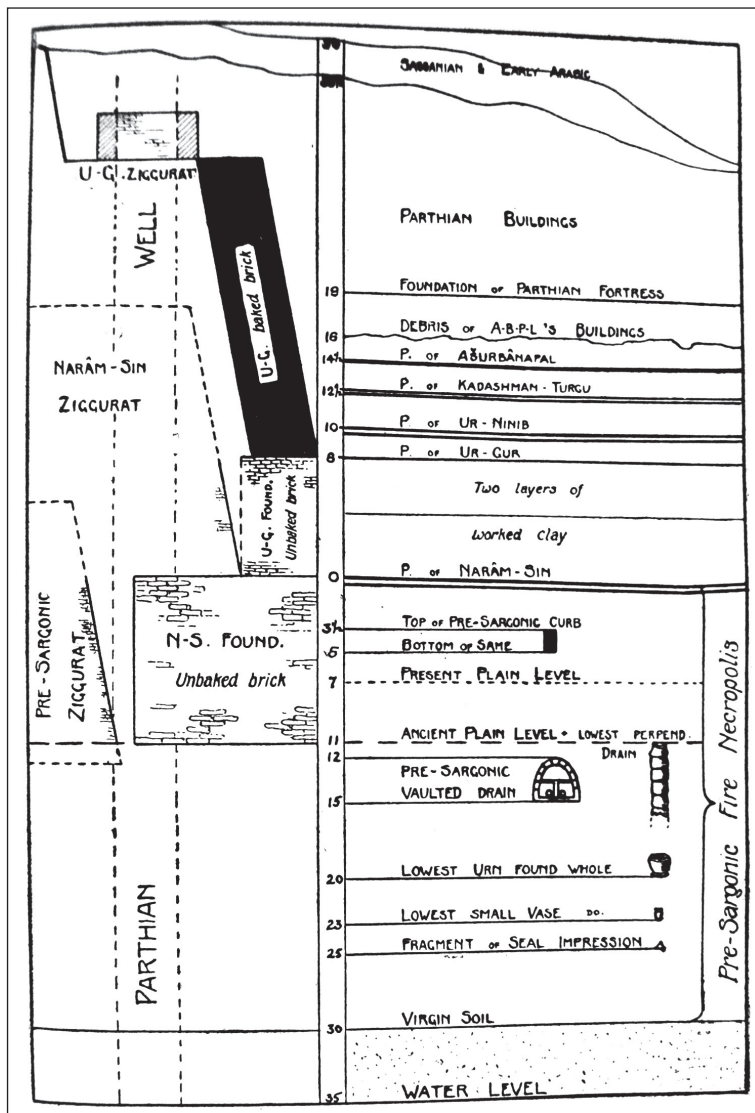


Fig. 4. Section of the ziqqurat and the south-east court, after the first expeditions (Hilprecht 1904: 549)

chaological evidence of the third one¹². There were a baked bricks stairway perpendicular to its facade and two stairs parallel to the facade which ran from the corners of the ziqqurat to the top of the first stage. The staircases should have led to the topmost of the structure, where a temple

¹² The lowest terrace measured 39x58 m and it has rectangular shape. Peters reported an height of about 6.25 m for the first level. He also recounted that the second one was set back about 4 m from the face of the first (Peters 1895: 35). The second stage was actually fairly preserved for about 4 m of height. Haynes had identified few traces of the third stage and its existence was confirmed by a strict comparison with the ziqqurat at Ur, too.

dedicated to the god Enlil was placed, although no archaeological trace is preserved (McCown et al. 1967: 26).

The Temple of Enlil

Looking at the plan of the Ekur it is clear that the ziqqurat is not exactly located at the centre of the complex, but it is slightly shifted toward the western side of the area. Moreover, the causeway to the upper stages of the ziqqurat is not perfectly opposite to the main entrance of the Ekur. These features suggested to the first excavators that another important structure, related to the cult of the same god, must have been placed in the eastern side of the Ekur. During the fourth expedition, Hilprecht began to investigate this sector of the Ekur, but he was soon forced to stop the excavation (Hilprecht 1904: 471). The following expeditions exposed the greatest part of the structure (fig. 6). This was dedicated to the god Enlil, since the inscribed bricks (especially those that date to the king Ur-Namma) call the temple é-*kur* or é-*en-lil*, which mean “house-mountain” (George 1993: 116) and “the house of Enlil”, respectively¹³.

The building had a quite simple plan, at least in the earlier periods. It had rectangular shape and it was constituted by two main long rooms, interpreted as the *cellae* of the temple (13 and 18). They were connected by a rectangular room (10) and they constituted two separate units, one (13) in the north-western part of the build-

¹³ The amount of inscribed bricks strongly suggest that the names could refer to the structure in which they were found. However, it remains unclear to what exactly é-*en-lil* refers. It could refer either to the excavated temple, or to a broader group of buildings and dwellings around the temple and always connected with the cult of the same deity. Ekur was the other name often found on inscribed bricks, mostly attributable to the Assyrian king Assurbanipal. It was used for the entire sacred space around the ziqqurat, though. So it probably concerned both the temple and the structures connected to it, either with or without religious functions (McCown et al. 1967: 29-30). For this reason, it seems more likely that also the designation E-Enlil would have a more generic use, including not only the temple at the base of the ziqqurat, but also the surrounding buildings.



Fig. 5. The ziqqurat (Courtesy of the Penn Museum, image 5613)



Fig. 6. General view of the temple of Enlil (phase V) with the ziqqurat to the left (McCown et al. 1967: pl. 6A)

ing, while the other (18) in the eastern edge. Each *cella* was flanked by subsidiary rooms¹⁴, whose function remained unclear. The two rooms (16 and 17) opened on locus 18 had traces of two circular constructions made of baked bricks built into the pavement. The main entrance of the temple was probably located on the north-western side of the building and it led to a small room (14), which in turn led to the primary *cella* (13). There was also another entryway, located in the eastern sector of the temple and leading directly to the other *cella* (18).

Kings and Bricks: a Phasing of the Ekur

A Comparative Stratigraphy

The analysis of the unpublished data collected in the archives of the museums of Philadelphia and Chicago added information on the development of the Ekur. The combined use of the stratigraphic and the epigraphic data has permitted to propose a comparison between the main structures of the sacred area. The historical datum consists mostly of the evidence provided by the inscribed tablets and the numerous stamped bricks which identify with enough certainty the building activity of a precise king, allowing researchers to connect an architectural restoration or even an entire phase with a specific historical period. Furthermore, the analysis of the materials, in particular of the pottery assemblages, provided useful data. The majority of the vessels and potsherds from the temple of Enlil belongs to the Akkadian (VI6-VI1) and the Kassite phases (IIIc-III f), with some gaps in the documentation for other periods, such as the Third Dynasty of Ur (phase V) or the Assyrian occupation (phase II). These materials will be compared with the pottery from neighboring areas providing reliable archaeological data, such as WC-1, that is a Kassite residential context (Zettler 1993), WF, which included domestic spaces, burials and installations, dating from the Akkadian through the Ur III period (McMahon 2006), and the North Temple (NT and SE), with levels spanning through the end of the 3rd and the 2nd millennium BC (McCown et al. 1978).

¹⁴ Rooms 14, 19, 9 and 10 adjoined *cella* 13, while rooms 16, 17 and 10 were attached to *cella* 18.

The Ekur Phases from the Akkadian to the Parthian Period

A tentative periodization of the Ekur development, compared to the mentioned areas of Nippur, is here presented. This is mostly based on the analysis of the diagnostic materials, among which are the pottery horizon and the epigraphic sources (tab. 1).

The first reconstructed phase of the Ekur dates back to the Akkadian period (phase VI, fig. 7). The analysis of the stratigraphy and the materials allows to identify six overlapping floors within the Temple of Enlil. As for the earliest ones, there is no evidence to attribute them to a precise reign, while from the phase VI4 there are more certainties, owing to the discovery of stamped bricks and tablets. Phases VI4 and VI3 are related to the kingdom of Naram-Sin, while VI2 and VI1 to Šar-kali-šarri (McCown et al. 1967: 3-4). For the ziqqurat there are no evidence of any kind, even though it is probable that a structure preceding the Ur III tower existed¹⁵. The south-east court has instead provided evidence of a floor dated to Naram-Sin (VIa), which can be related to phases VI4-3 of the Temple of Enlil, as well as some hints of an occupational phase belonging to the kingdom of Šar-kali-šarri (VIb), perhaps contemporary with floors VI1-2 of the temple.

The following phase (V) dates back to the Ur III period, when the entire Ekur was rebuilt (fig. 8). The only available archaeological and historical evidence is associated with the king Ur-Namma (Va-Vb), who carried on the most notable changes (McCown et al. 1967: 4-5). His successors Sulgi (Vc) and Amar-Zuena (Vd) undertook some works at the Ekur as well, according to both literary texts and the discovery of stamped bricks (Zettler 1992: 12). The most dramatic innovation was definitely the erection of the first ziqqurat of which we have archaeological traces. There is also some epigraphic evidence, mostly related to the king Ur-Namma, such as many stamped bricks, an inscribed diorite door socket¹⁶ and two

¹⁵ A so-called L-shaped structure, located under the East corner of the ziqqurat, is a possible evidence of the presence of a construction of some kind, dated to the Akkadian period, placed under the Ur III ziqqurat. It was built of good mudbricks having the same dimensions as the mudbricks with Naram-Sin's stamp found in the city wall (Courtesy of Aage Westenholz).

¹⁶ According to Haynes' letters and diary of the third ar-

DATE	EKUR			AREA WC-1	AREA WF	NORTH TEMPLE
	“TEMPLE OF ENLIL”	ZIQQURAT	South-East COURT			
Post-Parthian	Ic					
Parthian	Ib	Ia-c	I			
Neo Babylonian	Ia IIb Nebuchadnezzar II			I		SE III
Neo Assyrian	IIa Assurbanipal	IIa Assurbanipal?	IIa Assurbanipal?			
Post-Kassite	Abandonment?					SE IV
Kassite	IIIg Nebuchadnezzar I					↑ SE V1
	IIIf Mele-šihu			II		
	IIIe Adad-šuma-ušur					↑
	IIId Šaragakti Šuriyaš					SE V2
	IIIc Kudur Enlil					↓
	IIIb IIIa	IIIb Kadašman Enlil II IIIa Kadašman Turgu	III Kadašman Turgu	III		SE V3
Isin-Larsa	IV Ur-Ninurta	IV	IV			
Ur III	Vd Amar-Zuena	Vd Amar-Zuena	Vd Amar-Zuena		VII	
	Vc Sulgi	Vc Sulgi	Vc Sulgi			SE VI
	Vb Ur-Namma	Va-b Ur-Namma	Va-b Ur-Namma		VIII	
	Va Ur-Namma					
Akkadian	VII Šar-kali-šarri		VIIb Šar-kali-šarri		XII-IX	
	VI2 Šar-kali-šarri					
	VI3 Naram-Sin		VIa Naram-Sin		XV-XIIIb	
	VI4 Naram-Sin				↑	NT I
	VI5				XVa	
	VI6				XVIIb	NT II

Table 1. Comparative stratigraphy of the Ekur of Enlil

inscribed bronze figurines representing the king himself retrieved in two foundation deposits. In addition to the construction of the ziqqurat, Ur-

Namma also built the Temple of Enlil (phases Va and Vb)¹⁷. The temple and the enclosure walls of

chaeological expedition, the door socket was found beneath the buttress on the south-eastern side of the ziqqurat. It was located at about 90 cm under the foundations of a wall of Ur-Namma, among some fallen bricks.

¹⁷ According to the excavators, phase V could be divided into two sub-phases, V2 and V1 (here Va and Vb). Phase V2 (Va) was the earlier one and it consisted of an earth floor, perhaps a kind of provisional floor, because neither traces of plaster, nor signs of real use of the rooms were

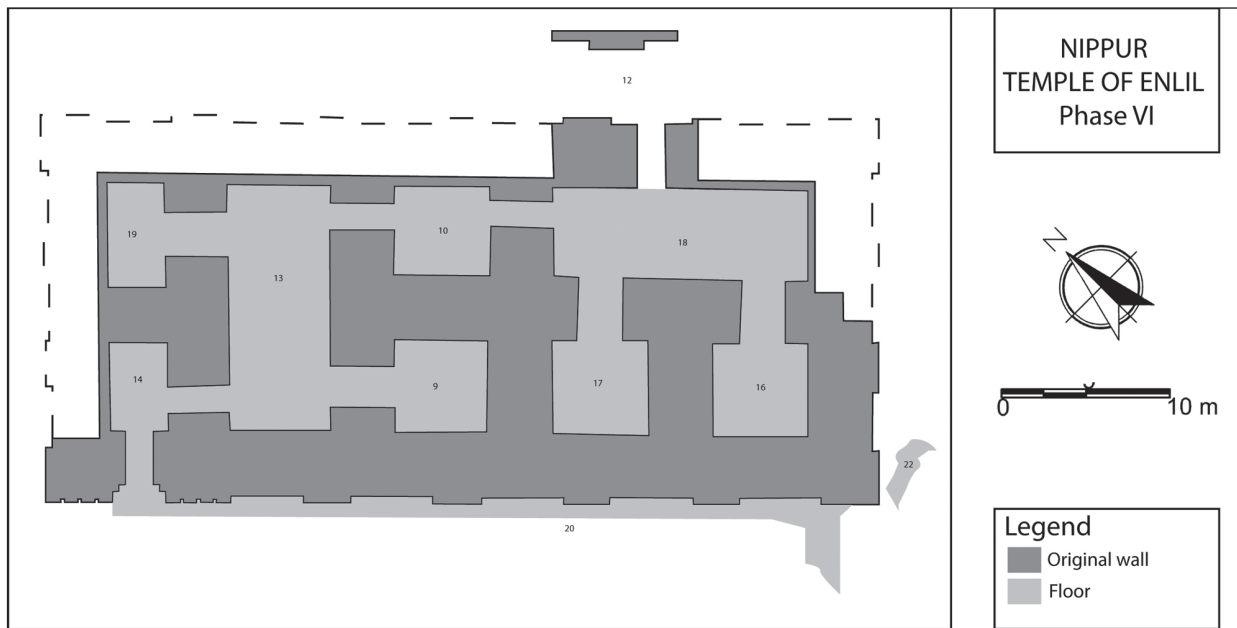


Fig. 7. Temple of Enlil, phase VI. Akkadian period (redrawn after McCown et al. 1967: pl. 15)

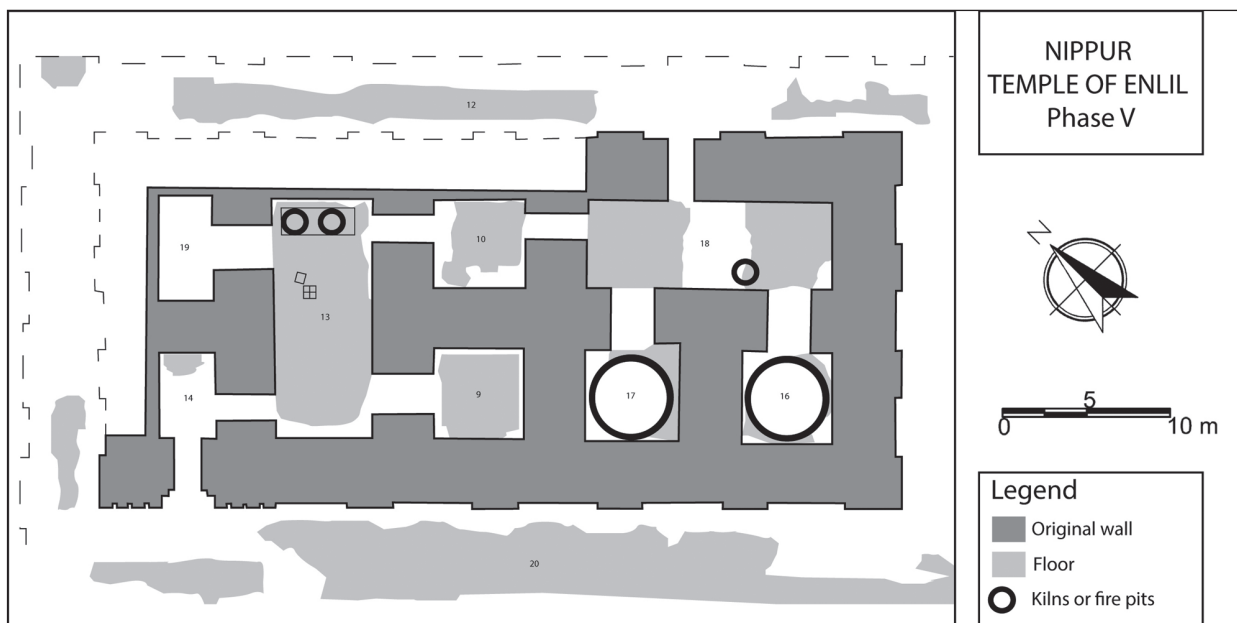


Fig. 8. Temple of Enlil, phase V. Ur III period (redrawn after McCown et al. 1967: pl. 16)

the Ekur were probably erected at about the same time, as their similar construction methods and their elevations suggest (McCown et al. 1967: 5). The Ur III plan of the temple is known only from

traced. Phase VI (Vb) was at about 130 cm above the previous floor and it was the final pavement made of baked bricks, of the Ur III temple (McCown et al. 1967: 6).

its foundations, because the walls have been mostly destroyed in later periods and replaced by new ones. Only little patches of floors and fragments of walls were preserved (McCown et al. 1967: 28).

Very few pottery vessels come from phase V of the Temple of Enlil (fig. 9). Among them are a shallow bowl with band rim and flat base (fig. 9.1), and a large bowl with an out-turned rim (fig. 9.2). Both are comparable with the assemblages

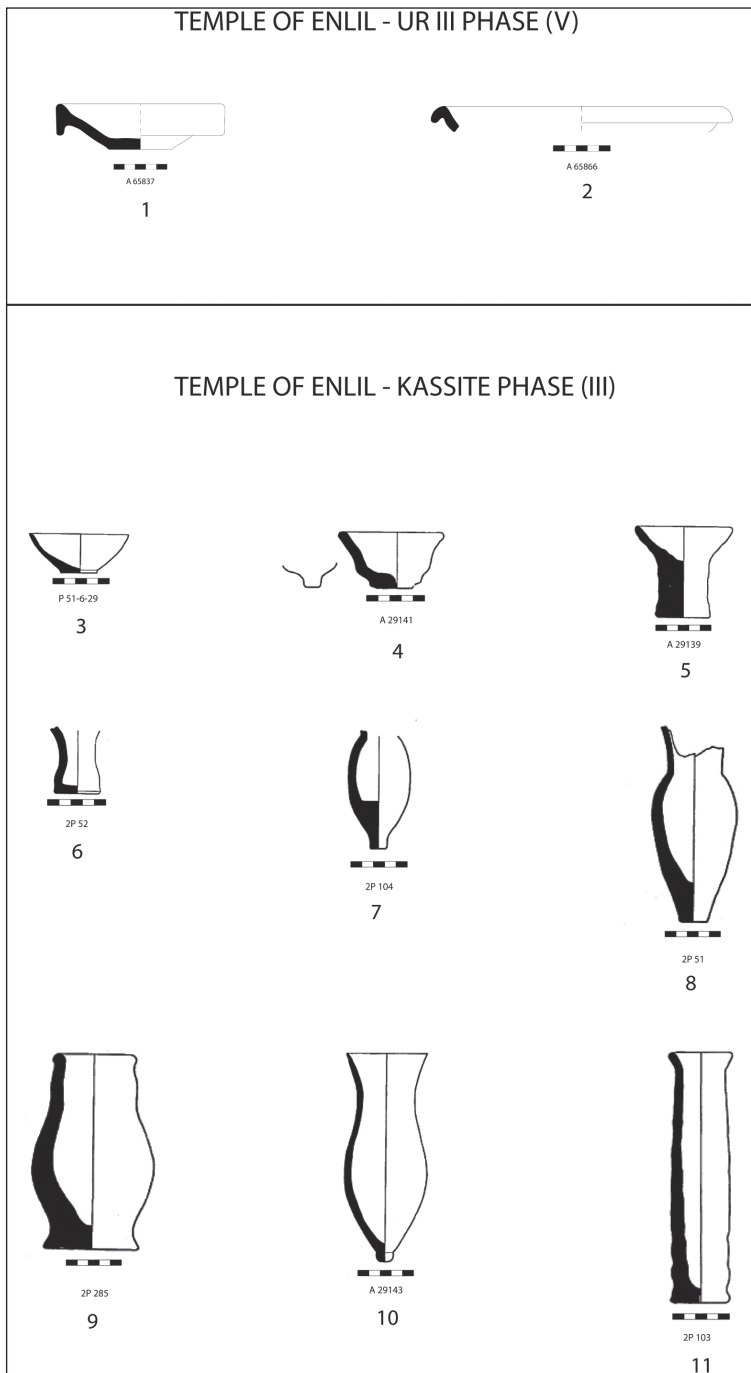


Fig. 9. The pottery assemblage from phases V-III

from levels VIII and VII of area WF at Nippur, dating to the Ur III period (McMahon 2006: pl. 85.7, 94.3-9).

Phase IV, corresponding to the Isin-Larsa period, is characterized by a dramatic paucity of archaeological evidence, with only few scattered remains retrieved in the entire area. Hilprecht

associated a pavement made of large baked bricks in the south-east court, placed upon the Ur III platform, to a king of the Isin Dynasty (Hilprecht 1904: 380). The same king probably made some restorations to the ziqqurat, without changing its shape and main features (Peters 1897: 127). Regarding the Temple of Enlil, some pavements (in the rooms 13, 18 and 10) of the previous phase seemed to be dated to the Isin-Larsa period, instead of Ur III. The only epigraphic evidence is a stamped brick of Ur-Ninurta, found among other bricks of a squared platform at the centre of room 13 (McCown et al. 1967: 8). There is no other dating evidence, as well as no clear traces of restorations surely related to this period. The foundations of the Kassite phase (III) had, in fact, often destroyed the floors and foundations of the previous structure. The walls and pavements found between phase V and III were usually dated by the excavators to the Isin-Larsa period. Furthermore, it is possible that some pavements dated to the earlier phase, actually belonged to phase IV, although there are neither stamped bricks nor other evidence demonstrating it with enough certainty (McCown et al. 1967: 11-12).

The investigation of the Kassite occupation (phase III, fig. 10) revealed a wider amount of data and a more complex sequence. The dating is mainly based both on the epigraphic data and the pottery assemblage, which allow to distinguish six different sub-phases (IIIa-f). The first two of them, associated with the names of two rulers, are attested with certainty only in the south-east court of the Ekur and in the ziqqurat. The Temple of Enlil presents written evidence of four other rulers, whose work at the ziqqurat is not attested. Therefore, the investigation of phase III revealed the presence of at least six kings¹⁸, even if it is unclear whether all of them worked at the entire Ekur or only at parts

¹⁸ The epigraphic evidence attests the possible existence of other buildings within the Ekur, here not considered as there are no archaeological traces preserved.

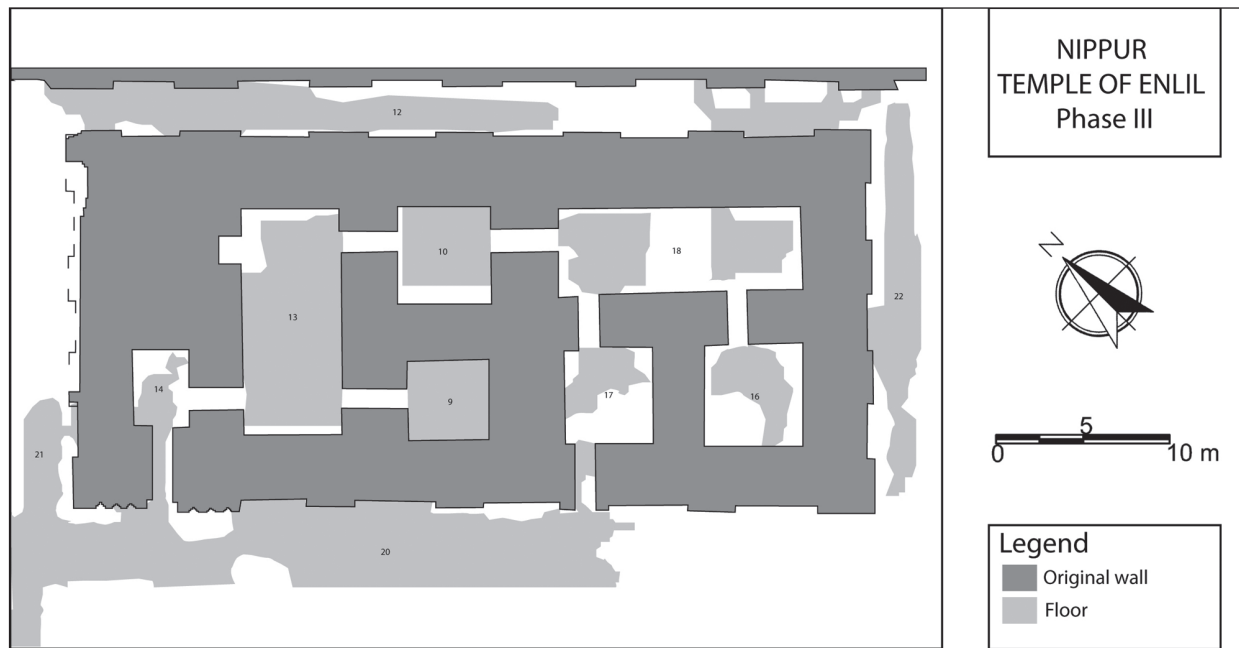


Fig. 10. Temple of Enlil, phase III. Kassite period (redrawn after McCown et al. 1967: pl. 22)

of it. The first evidence (Phase IIIa), consisting of stamped bricks, dates back to the king Kadašman Turgu (1287-1269 BC)¹⁹, who restored and enlarged the ziqqurat. Indeed, he placed a new brick casing wall, covering at least three sides of the structure. Furthermore, Hilprecht identified a pavement in the south-east court of the Ekur, laid about 76 cm below the Assyrian flooring. It was supposed to have been the continuation of the lower courses of a paving placed around the base of the ziqqurat of Kadašman Turgu, in order to protect its foundation from the water. Hilprecht also suggested the existence of some structures which did not leave archaeological remains, due to the presence of traces of ashes, bitumen and charcoal (Hilprecht 1904: 377-378).

Phase IIIb consists only of some works carried out at the ziqqurat by Kadašman Enlil II (1269-1260 BC) who left an inscription bearing his name on some bricks (McCown et al. 1967: 17). The rebuilding within the Ekur should have been completed by the middle of the 13th century BC, when the first notable restoration of the Temple of Enlil is attested (phase IIIc). This is related to the king Kudur Enlil (1260-1251 BC), due to the retrieval of many inscribed bricks. The Kassite temple was erected over the Ur III phase, where

new floors were laid at about 25 to 30 cm above the earlier pavements. Its foundations did not correspond exactly to the earlier ones, but the plan remained nearly the same (McCown et al. 1967: 12). The rooms presented only little modifications and several new installations perhaps related to ceremonies and religious rituals (McCown et al. 1967: 31). From the middle of the 13th century BC onwards, several restorations were carried out by other Kassite kings (phases IIIId, IIIe and IIIf). Indeed, some stamped bricks of the kings, Šaragakti Šuriyaš, Adad-šuma-ušur and Mele-šihu, were discovered in the Temple of Enlil. However, it is hard to isolate every change in a specific building phase related to a certain royal figure, also because the modifications were probably on a small scale, as the limited number of inscribed bricks suggests (McCown et al. 1967: 12). The following rulers continued to do some works in the sacred area of Nippur until the end of the 11th century BC, at least. However, the works were on a minor scale, and no substantial renovation was undertaken (Armstrong 1989: 200-201). After the king Mele-šihu, no written evidence of other Kassite kings was retrieved.

Phases IIIb, IIIc and IIIId can be paralleled with area SE, level V2. In this area, the excavations carried out in room 3²⁰ retrieved ten inscribed tablets

¹⁹ All the dates regarding the Kassite kings are taken from Sassmannshausen 2004: 67, tab. 1.

²⁰ In most of the rooms three floors have been found. De-

from floor 2 (McCown et al. 1978: 47-48). The epigraphic evidence refers to the kings Kadašman Enlil II, Kudur Enlil and Šaragakti Šuriyaš (Biggs 1978: 93), the latter of which (1251-1238 BC) can be taken as a *terminus ante quem* for dating this phase. Conversely, both SE V1 and V3 cannot be surely related to a king and they are thus dated to the Kassite period in general²¹. The pottery assemblage provides a more general chronological attribution for phase III²² (fig. 9), nonetheless it helps to correlate the Kassite Ekur with other areas excavated at Nippur, such as WB²³ and WC. Among open shapes a large number (about 45) of crudely made bowls represents a hallmark of the Early and Middle Kassite period (for comparison see Zettler 1993: pls. 72-74; McCown et al. 1978: pl. 49.10). Another wide open bowl (fig. 9.3) with flat base might be included within the Post-Kassite tradition, by means of comparisons with area WB level Ic (Gibson et al. 1978: pl. 63.48). One last open specimen is a high-footed bowl (fig. 9.5), which belongs to an early 2nd millennium BC tradition continuing throughout the Kassite period. Similar exemplars have been brought to light in area SE level V at Nippur (McCown et al. 1978: pl. 49.2). Among close shapes, three elongated small jars with out-turned rim, rounded wall and pointed base (figs. 9.8; 9.7; 9.10) are typical of the entire Kassite period. A peculiar vessel (fig. 9.9) with vertical rim and flat base might be paralleled with the Kassite levels of area SE (McCown et al. 1978: pl. 50.2). Finally, a curious tall vessel (fig. 9.11) with slightly out-turned rim, vertical wall and flat base, cannot be apparently compared with other Kassite shapes. The Kassite kings maintained power until about 1150 BC when they were replaced by the rulers of the Second Dynasty of Isin, who conducted some architectural activities in the site. A significant restoration of the temple (phase IIIg) is attributed to the king Nebuchadnezzar I (1125-1104 BC), the fourth king of the Second Dynasty

spite of the lack of a proper stratigraphical sub-division within phase V by the archaeologists, it is possible to argue that there were three Kassite occupational phases in area SE. These are here named SE V1, V2, V3 (for a discussion of the stratigraphy of area SE see McCown et al. 1978: 37-38).

²¹ SE V3 can be dated to the Early Kassite period, while SE V1 is certainly later than Šaragakti Šuriyaš.

²² The pottery sherds are here indicated either with their museum numbers or with their excavation numbers.

²³ Area WB was excavated by McG. Gibson at the end of 1970s (Gibson et al. 1978). It consists of a large multi-room building with an extended archaeological sequence spanning from the Old-Babylonian through the end of the 2nd millennium BC.

of Isin. Many of his stamped bricks were found, especially on the south-western side of the temple and in *cella* 13. This evidence proves that the building had remained in use until at least the first part of the Second Dynasty of Isin and perhaps until the 11th century BC (Armstrong 1989: 194). Moreover, according to a later inscription of Simbar-Šiḫu²⁴, the first king of the Second Dynasty of the Sealand (late 11th century BC), Nebuchadnezzar I dedicated a throne to Enlil. The inscription reported that Simbar-Šiḫu rebuilt the Ekur after the looting of the city by the Arameans and the Suteans. However, the excavations did not recover any archaeological traces of restoration certainly attributable to this king (Goetze 1965: 133)²⁵. After Simbar-Šiḫu, the written documents related to the Ekur seemed to cease.

During the 10th century BC Nippur was probably abandoned, at least for a short period of time. This datum is archaeologically confirmed by the presence of a layer of sand between the Kassite and the Assyrian levels. The area around the sacred mound should have been no longer cultivated by the inhabitants of the city. Therefore, the sand could accumulate and the wind deposited it over the previous structures and floors, even in the temple area (McCown et al. 1967: 27; Cole 1990: 18). This layer could thus be related to a decline and crisis period, although hardly attributable to a specific historical event (Armstrong 1989: 198-199). The archaeological traces of occupation in the 9th century BC are very meagre, too. The settlement was probably concentrated only in a small area around the Ekur (Armstrong 1989: 230). This probable partial abandonment of the

²⁴ The inscription was preserved only in a later copy, which seems to maintain the lines of the original (Goetze 1965: 125). Goetze (1965) reported that the correct reading for the king's name is Simbar-Šiḫu, instead of Simmaš-Šihu and Simmaš-Šipak, as he has been previously called. The inscription does not give any information about the origin of this king and it makes possible that he was a usurper, who founded a new dynasty. The lines only suggest that he was a military, perhaps of some high grade, and that he attributed to himself a lineage from the dynasty of the Sealand (Goetze 1965: 133).

²⁵ It is possible to compare this inscription to another one (BM 27859), very similar in its content, which says: "Simmaš-Šihu [...] fashioned the throne of Ellil in the E.kur.igi.gál" (Goetze 1965: 134). However, there was not apparently enough space in the Kassite temple to put a throne. Furthermore, the Ekurigigal cannot be related to the Enlil temple with certainty. The original name of the temple is unfortunately unknown and the so-called Ekurigigal mentioned in the inscription might have been another building in the Ekur enclosure, not yet identified by the excavations (Armstrong 1989: 196-197).

site is also visible in the North Temple area (SE IV phase), corresponding to the late Kassite until the end of the Neo-Assyrian period. This is not a structural level, but a layer of potsherds laid down owing to the erosion of the mound (McCown et al. 1978: 38-39).

During the Neo Assyrian period the site probably flourished again. Indeed, an extended occupational evidence belonging to this phase (IIa) and to the following Neo Babylonian period (phase IIb-Ia?) has been revealed in the Ekur complex. The Assyrian king Esarhaddon probably restored the Temple of Enlil, although the extension and the types of his works in the entire Ekur are not well known, because of the retrieval of stamped bricks only from secondary contexts (Cole 1990: 99). His successor Assurbanipal was the Assyrian ruler who undertook the major works in the Ekur (phase IIa). He provided the ziqqurat with a new encasing coating made of baked bricks and rebuilt the conduit dug into its face (Cole 1990: 102). The Temple of Enlil was rebuilt by Assurbanipal (fig. 11), as proved by the stamped bricks retrieved, even if nearly all the archaeological evidence is not preserved. It was, in fact, badly damaged by both the foundations of the following structures and the trenches dug during the first Pennsylvania expeditions²⁶. As for the south-eastern court of the Ekur, Hilprecht connected the pavement²⁷ laid at the topmost of the sequence, with Assurbanipal, although no stamped brick was found in its original context (Hilprecht 1904: 376).

The excavators assigned the same phase II also to the following occupational level of the Temple of Enlil, dating back to the Neo Babylonian period. Phase IIb, whose earthen floor was partially and badly preserved, is associated to the king Nebuchadnezzar II, owing to the retrieval of a stamped brick (McCown et al. 1967: 18). Evidence

of a Neo Babylonian occupation are attested also in areas WC-1 (level 1, Zettler 1993: 23-25) and the North Temple (SE III) (McCown et al. 1978: 39), both contexts dated by the excavators to the same period.

During the Parthian period (phase Ib), a radical change in the layout of the area occurred due to the construction of a fortress and several surrounding structures (fig. 12), which have nearly completely destroyed or sealed the previous contexts. From the late second century AD (phase Ic), there are no traces of other building activities and the area became a burial ground (Keall 1970: 34-35).

Bits of History: the Stratigraphy of the Akkadian Phase (VI)

Akkadian Nippur

Jacobsen (1957)²⁸ pictured the role of Early Dynastic Nippur as an “all-Sumerian place of assembly” with the role of the election and the legitimization of the Sumerian kings. The sacred area of Enlil was supposed to be the physical location of such a gathering of all Sumerian people (Jacobsen 1957: 105-106). The Akkadian kings tried to preserve the Early Dynastic religious traditions (McMahon 2012: 649-650), spending many efforts in the restorations of the temples and in particular of the sacred Ekur. The aim was the creation of a privileged relationship with the god Enlil, in order to seek a legitimization of their power over the whole of Sumer (Liverani 1988: 202).

Nippur in the Akkadian period is archaeologically little known, compared to what is known from later times. The Ekur was rebuilt twice during the Akkadian period, under Naram-Sin (2254-2218 BC) and his successor Šar-kali-šarri (2217-2139 BC) (McMahon 2012: 650-651). As for the evidence at our disposal, they were the only Akkadian kings who spent great efforts in the worship of Enlil, providing his sanctuary with gifts, offerings and probably extensive building projects.

²⁶ The layout of the edifice is understandable only regarding few rooms: the previous rooms 9, 10 and 13. However, there is a notable change respect to the earlier level. Room 13, the space interpreted as a *cella* during all the previous phases, was now divided into two smaller areas (numbered 6 and 8 on the plan) by means of a partition in the north-eastern part of the room. Therefore, the function and the use of the building must have changed in some way. It is even questionable whether the building had still a religious function or not (McCown et al. 1967: 18).

²⁷ The pavement extended for about 19 m (63 feet) south-eastward, starting from the causeway of the ziqqurat. The excavators did not find architectural remains over this flooring and they thus inferred that during the Assyrian period it should probably have been an open court (Hilprecht 1904: 376).

²⁸ Jacobsen (1957) outlined the history of Mesopotamia identifying seven major periods. The first period, called “primitive democracy” was an initial political development of the country, based on mutual agreement centred on a general meeting. It would be in this framework that Nippur emerged as the city which hosted the meeting place of all the Sumerian notable centers (Jacobsen 1957: 136).

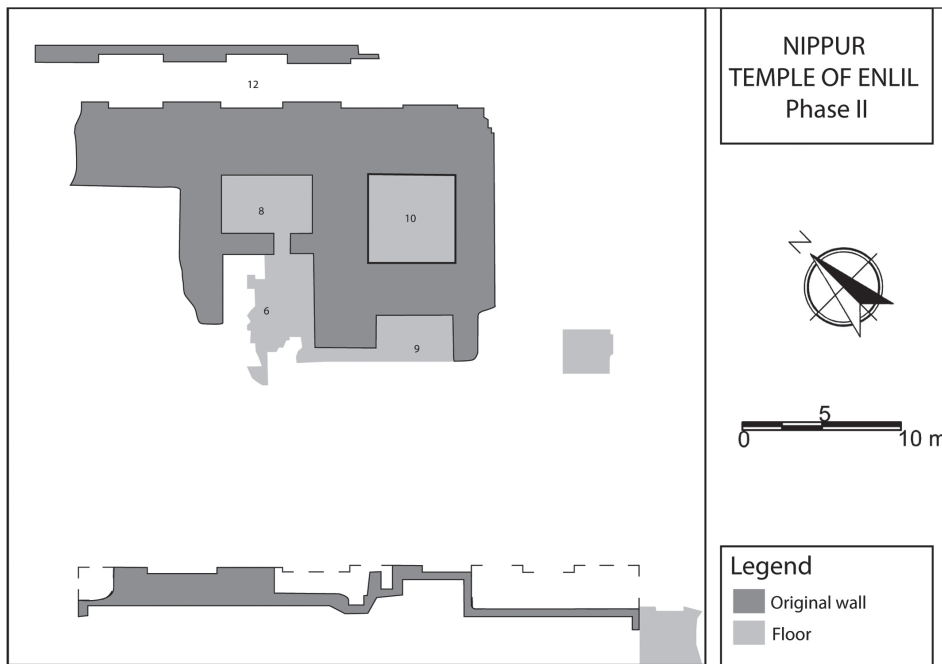


Fig. 11. Temple of Enlil, phase IIa. Neo Assyrian period (redrawn after McCown et al. 1967: pl. 26)

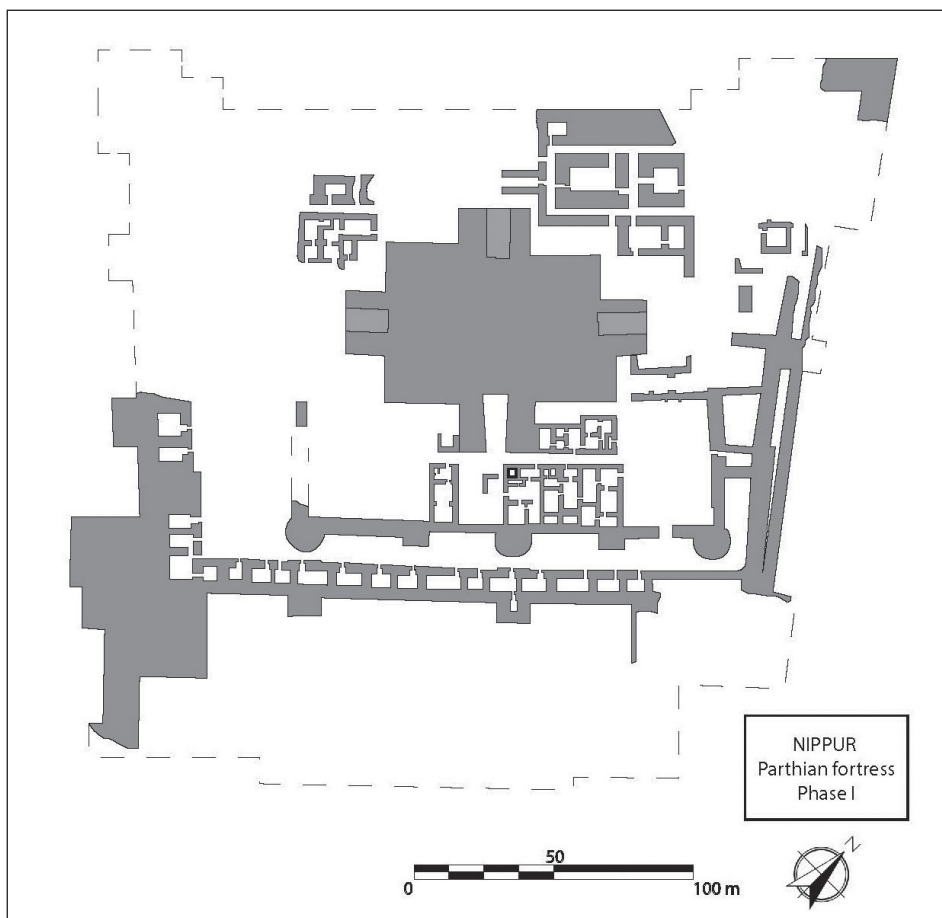


Fig. 12: The Parthian fortress overlying and partially re-using the Ekur, redrawn after an original plan (Courtesy of the Penn Museum)

Other evidence from Akkadian Nippur are very meagre (Cole 1990: 7).

The Ekur Court

The Pennsylvania expeditions recognized a pavement in the south-eastern court of the Ekur, which could be dated to the Akkadian period, in particular to the king Naram-Sin. The pavement was at about 4.90 m²⁹ under the surface and it stretched for a considerable part of the sacred area. Many stamped bricks, mostly of Naram-Sin³⁰, were found into the flooring (Hilprecht 1904: 388-389). The Akkadian pavement was taken by Hilprecht as a sort of dividing line within the Ekur court between the levels defined “post-Sargonic ruins”, consisting of about 5 m of debris³¹, and the “pre-Sargonic ruins”, going down for about 9 m, before reaching the virgin soil (Hilprecht 1904: 391).

As for the epigraphic evidence, two lots of tablets were found in the courtyard of the Ekur, both in secondary context. One was retrieved by Peters during the second expedition, near the foot of the central staircase of the ziqqurat. The second one was found by Haynes³², during the third expedition, in the stratum between two clay-fillings

of Ur-Namma’s platform, even though the exact findspot cannot be safely identified (Westenholz 1987: 21). The majority of the texts are dated to the reign of Naram-Sin (*ibidem*: 22) and they probably refer to an Akkadian institution related to the Ekur. They likely represent the records of a working project on a big scale, probably a rebuilding of the entire Ekur. Westenholz (*ibidem*: 24-25) tried to reconstruct the appearance of the sacred area during the Akkadian period on the base of these texts, highlighting its impressive features and the richness of the materials and decorations. It remains uncertain who began this work, whether Naram-Sin or Šar-kali-šarri, because many stamped bricks of both of them were found³³ (*ibidem*: 27-29).

The Ziqqurat

The existence of a ziqqurat preceding the Neo Sumerian structure still remains hypothetical. A religious building of some kind is likely to have been existed, although there were no enough archaeological evidence to make reliable suppositions about its shape or architectural features. Hilprecht (1904: 451) hinted at some possible reasons which make the presence of an Akkadian ziqqurat plausible. He noticed that the pavement of Naram-Sin, where excavated, did not apparently extend underneath the ziqqurat. It rather seemed to occupy the same space of the following pavements, laid by later kings. Furthermore, the L-shaped structure found beneath the eastern corner of the Ur III ziqqurat, at about 3.35 m below the pavement of Naram-Sin, was built by a king of the Akkadian dynasty. The bricks used were, in fact, of the same type of the ones employed by Naram-Sin and Šar-kali-šarri for their constructions. Hilprecht hypothesized (*ibidem*) that this unusual structure could have been a foundation for the eastern corner of a ziqqurat erected by Naram-Sin. In this case, the L-shaped construction would have had the same function of the later unbaked bricks pavement of Ur-Namma, placed all around and beneath the ziqqurat in order to sustain its huge bulk (*ibidem*). However, the supposed existence of a pre-Akkadian ziqqurat has not found any archaeological confirmation, so far.

²⁹ The measurements and elevations are in accordance with Hilprecht’s report (1904).

³⁰ Three stamped bricks of Naram-Sin are stored in the University Museum of Pennsylvania (Museum numbers: B 16204A; B16204B; B 16204C). Their precise findspot is not given, but they are only said to have been found into the “temple pavement”, during the third expedition. Two of them are complete, while the third one has a corner missing, but the stamped inscription is entire. Their size is standardized (height: 7,5 cm; length: 39/40 cm; width: 39/40 cm).

³¹ This is an unusually limited thickness for such a long span of time, but it could be easily explained by the fact that each ruler used to level the previous remains, before making changes or erecting some new structures within the court (Hilprecht 1904: 391).

³² With these words Haynes reported the discovery: «Between the crude bricks of the platform, and below the platform itself, were found fragments of bronze, and well formed copper nails, proving a high antiquity of bronze vessels and nails. Copper nails certainly date as far backward as the era of Sargon of Agade, and I can but think that bronze vessels also will be found to date from that early period [...]. A quantity of archaic tablets were found underneath the platform or pavement. They are badly broken and they have the appearance of having been thrown away like the vase fragments, which have been found hitherto above the platform of Ur Gur. [...]. The tablets were found on a level with and close beside a bit of burned brick pavement containing the stamped bricks of Sargon and his son Naram-Sin.» (Letter to E.W. Clark, of the 20th of July, 1895 – Courtesy of the Penn Museum: archive record no. 238).

³³ Naram-Sin probably began this great building project, razing to the ground all the previous structures. The work was then continued by his son Šar-kali-šarri, who relaid the pavement, using both his own bricks and his father’s (Westenholz 1987: 27-29).

The Temple of Enlil

Naram-Sin was the first king to have begun the works at the so-called Temple of Enlil³⁴ (McCown et al. 1967: 25). Part of the Akkadian structure was then probably covered by the ziqqurat of the later period. One of the main evidence of an Akkadian temple dedicated to Enlil are the inscriptions and stamped bricks of Naram-Sin and Šar-kali-šarri, found beneath the foundations of the Ur III temple. It remains unclear whether Šar-kali-šarri completely rebuilt the building or made only some restorations. The only certainty is that he posed a new brick pavement and probably built a new enclosing wall around the temple (McCown et al. 1967: 25-26).

The excavators identified two levels (VII and VI), connected to the temple preceding the Ur III phase and defined by them «pre-temple strata», although they had specified that the distinction between level VII and VI is «arbitrary and does not imply a cultural differentiation» (McCown et al. 1967: 3). Level VII consisted of six floors, underneath the bottom of the wall's foundation of a single locus, i.e. room 13. In this place, in fact, they made an additional sounding and reached the lowest point in the entire temple area. The composition of these floors suggests that their use was not intensive and hence, that this area was probably an open courtyard, resurfaced several times. It was interpreted as the first sacred area consecrated to Enlil (McCown et al. 1967: 3). Level VI consisted instead of 4 floors (4-1), dated to the kings Naram-Sin (VI4-VI3) and Šar-kali-šarri (VI2-VI1), on the base of the inscribed bricks and tablets retrieved (*ibidem*).

A new subdivision of these early strata is here proposed. Level VII is not taken into account because a stratigraphic and architectural study, as well a precise chronological reassessment, has been made impossible by the paucity of data. Level VI (here phase VI) is divided into six sub-phases (VI6-1). Two hypothetical other floors (VI6 and VI5) are identified on the base of some unpublished potsherds³⁵ (figs. 13-14). Therefore, the chronological subdivision of phase VI here pro-

posed is based both on the epigraphic evidence and on the pottery assemblage.

- Phases VI6 and VI5 can be preliminarily dated to the transition between Early Dynastic IIIb and Early Akkadian³⁶. From the earliest floor (VI6) comes a stemmed dish (fig. 13.2) with applied decoration and wavy lines incision. This specimen is widely attested in central and southern Mesopotamia from the Early Dynastic III into the Akkadian period. In particular, a close comparison with Nippur area WF-level XVIIb-c (McMahon 2006: pl. 79.3-4), dating to the Early Dynastic IIIb to the Akkadian transition, is here proposed. Moreover, two conical bowls (figs. 13.3; 13.1), one of which has an out-turned thick rim, can be generally dated to the Late Early Dynastic to the Akkadian period. A small jar (fig. 13.4) with out-turned rim from floor VI5 can be paralleled with area WF-level XVa (McMahon 2006: pl. 96.6-8).

- Phases VI4 and VI3 date back to the reign of Naram-Sin mainly on the base of the epigraphic evidence, both of tablets and stamped bricks (McCown et al. 1967: 25). Floor VI4 is the lowest stratum found below the entire surface of the temple. In the south-western part of locus 18, two drains were found (McCown et al. 1967: 3). One of them, probably the earliest one, bore an inscription of Naram-Sin, stamped on a brick. Moreover, an Akkadian tablet (UM 55-21-096 = CDLI no. P257314) was found. Phase VI3 is dated on the base of an Akkadian sealing³⁷ and an inscribed tablet (UM 55-21-095 = CDLI no. P257313).

The pottery assemblage from these floors can be compared with levels XVa to XIIIb in area WF (McMahon 2006: pl. 78.7). From floor VI4 comes one bowl (fig. 13.6) with a wide out-turned rim and flat base, and a small foot perhaps belonging to a goblet³⁸. Both shapes might be ascribed to a general Early Akkadian period. More substantial is the assemblage coming from floor VI3, belonging to

³⁴ Here it is used the term “Temple of Enlil”, in accordance with the excavators’ interpretation, even though it is not definitively sure whether this building was already a so-called temple dedicated to Enlil, or simply a cultic structure of some kind.

³⁵ On some of them, a note indicating “EN VI5” and “EN VI6” is reported.

³⁶ An unpublished photograph of the Joint Expedition to Nippur represents a stone, coming from room 19 and related to the king Lugal-kišareš-dudu (= “Lugalkiginedudu”), as the caption refers, even though it is very hard to distinguish any inscriptions on it (Courtesy of the Penn Museum: original photographs nos. 571-572). Unfortunately, it is not specified at which floor of level VI it was found. Moreover, in accordance with the list of objects given by the excavators (McCown et al. 1967), any finding was retrieved in room 19. The reign of Lugal-kišareš-dudu is dated to the Early Dynastic IIIb period (Marchesi, Marchetti 2011, 123). Therefore, if the stone was really related to this king, it would be one of the few written pieces from the Early Dynastic period retrieved in the temple.

³⁷ Museum number: P 51-6-362.

³⁸ Museum number: A 65865.

a slightly later horizon perhaps middle Akkadian. A carinated bowl (fig. 13.8) with a slightly out-turned rim, coming from this floor, belongs to a typology generally dated to the Late Akkadian into Ur III period. Indeed, it can be paralleled with type O-17 from area WF (McMahon 2006: 90.1). Another open conical bowl (fig. 13.9) with thick rim can be dated to the Akkadian period on the base of the comparison with level XIIIb in area WF (McMahon 2006: 84.67). Among closed shapes, a small jar (fig. 13.14) with out-turned rim and probably rounded wall belongs to an Early Akkadian horizon (McMahon 2006: 96.6-8).

- According to the excavators, the latest phases VI2 and VII belonged to the reign of Šar-kali-šarri. This is confirmed by the presence of at least five brick stamps, as well as several inscribed tablets and few sealings (McCown et al. 1967: 25). In particular, from phase VI2, come some brick stamps and a tablet (UM 55-21-092 = CDLI no. P257311). Phase VII has revealed again brick stamps of Šar-kali-šarri³⁹, and late Akkadian tablets (UM 55-21-079 = CDLI no. P257304; UM 55-21-080 = CDLI no. P257305; IM 058022 = CDLI no. P121516⁴⁰).

Pottery from floor VI2 presents some shapes dated to the Late Akkadian period. Among open shapes, three shallow dishes with out-turned rim (figs. 14.1; 14.2; 14.3) are comparable with the assemblages from levels XIIIb

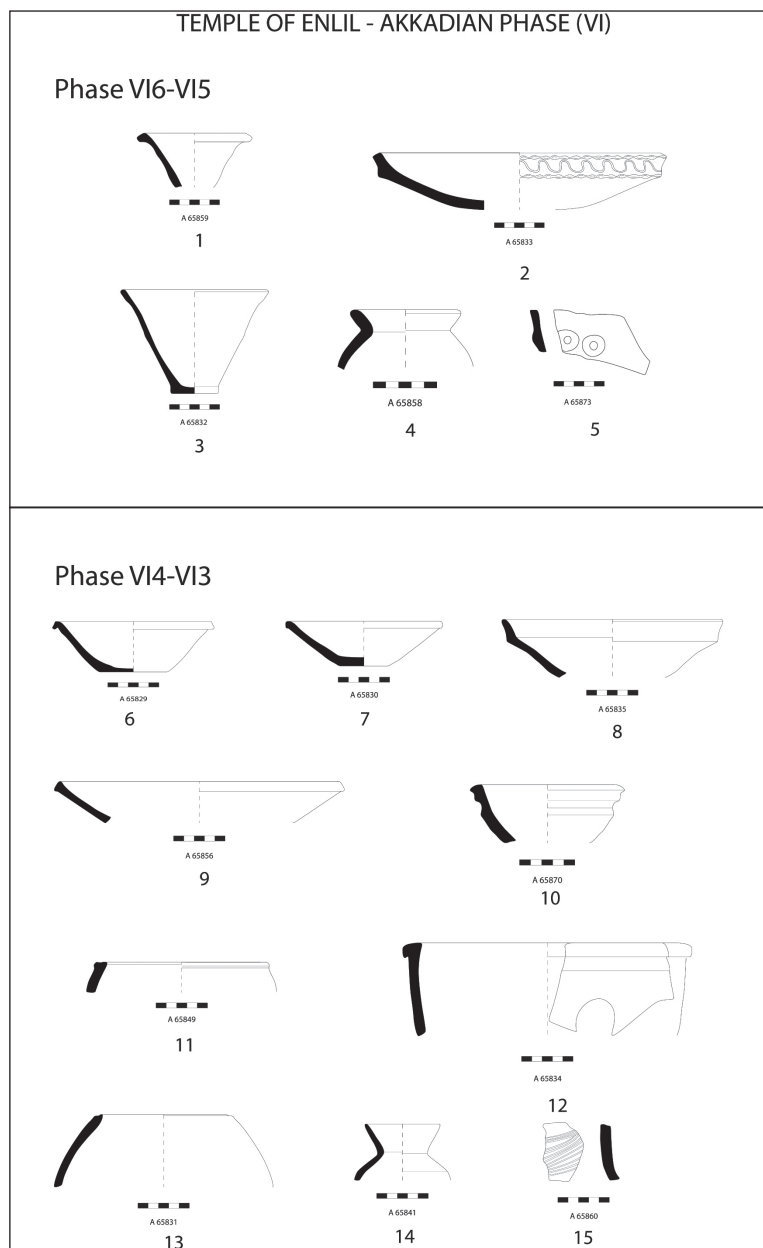


Fig. 13. The pottery assemblage from phase VI6-VI3

³⁹ Museum numbers: P 51-6-315; A 28971; A 28975; B 55855.

⁴⁰ There is an unpublished photograph (negative number: 48996) among the records stored in the archives of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, showing a tablet in a wall. The caption of the photograph identifies it as a tablet coming from locus 10, level VI. According to the list of objects reported by the excavators (McCown et al. 1967), there are only two tablets from that room. The first one (field registration number: 2NT 612) comes from level VI – floor 3 and it is currently stored at the University of Pennsylvania Museum (Museum number: 55-21-95). The photograph quite surely refers to the other tablet (field registration number: 2NT 447), coming from level VI – floor 1, currently kept at the Iraq Museum of Baghdad (Museum number: B 58022; CDLI number: IM 058022). Published by Owen (1982: 65, pl. 181, no. 819). However, it appears to be an early Ur III text, on paleographic ground (courtesy of Aage Westenholz).

to IX in area WF (McMahon 2006: pl. 84.8, pl. 85.1-7). Furthermore, a small jar with double out-turned thick rim (fig. 14.5) belongs to a Late Akkadian tradition (McMahon 2006: pl. 109.10-12). A large globular jar with small vertical rim (fig. 14.4) is a typical Akkadian specimen also attested in level XIa of area WF (McMahon 2006: pl. 98.14). The only diagnostic shape from floor VII is a spout (fig. 14.8) that can be generally dated from the Early Dynastic to Akkadian period.

To conclude, on the basis of the analysis of the diagnostic finds, we can compare phases VI6

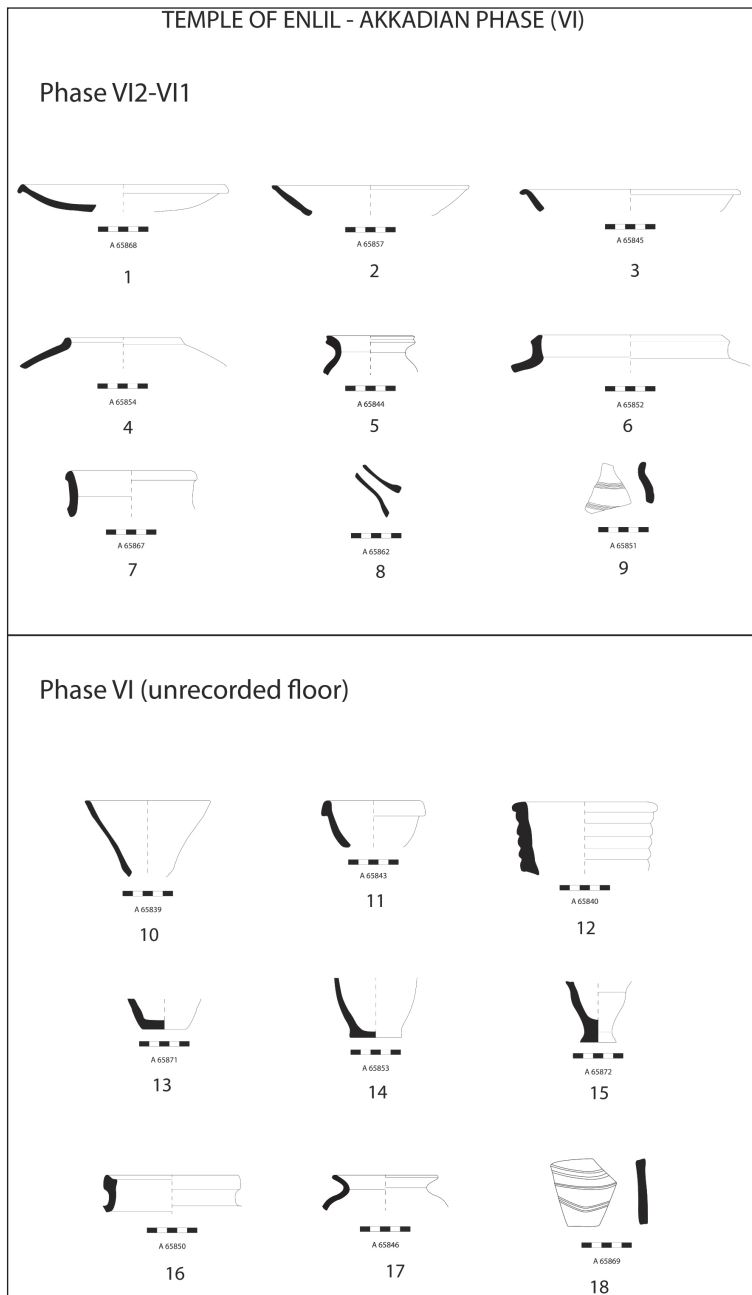


Fig. 14. The pottery assemblage from phase VI2-VI1 and from unrecorded floor

and VI5 with phase XVIIb to XVa of area WF, as well as level II in the North Temple of Nippur. The following floors, VI4 and VI3, date to the epoch of Naram-Sin and their materials can be paralleled with phases XVa to XIIIb in area WF and with level I in the North Temple. Finally, both epigraphic finds and pottery assemblage allow to date floors VI2 and VI1 to the period of Šar-kali-šarri. They should be contemporary with levels XII to IX of area WF.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was the reconstruction of the archaeological sequence recovered in the sacred area of the Ekur at Nippur and its correlation with the neighboring areas, as well as the main historical events. This research has been possible thanks to the analysis of the unpublished records collected in the archives of the museums of Philadelphia and Chicago. The combined use of both stratigraphic and epigraphic data has allowed to compare the main structures of the Ekur, also correlating their building phases with the entire area. It has been thus possible to identify a long, almost uninterrupted, sequence extending from the Early Akkadian period to the Parthian occupation. Each phase presents several subdivisions concerning restorations or even rebuilding of the structures. When possible, according to the evidence given by inscribed documents and stamped bricks, I have included some sub-phases into a more precise time frame in relation to a certain king. Moreover, the pottery assemblages, especially related to the Akkadian and the Kassite periods, allowed to confirm some dating and to compare the phases and the sub-phases of the Ekur with other areas of Nippur. One of the main focuses of this paper has been the re-analysis of the Akkadian occupational phase. In particular, a great wealth of archaeological data is available for the so-called Temple of Enlil. Indeed, crossing the stratigraphical, epigraphical and ceramics data pertaining to the Akkadian occupation, I have recognized six archaeological sub-phases, that can be clustered into three macro historical phases. Floors VI6 and VI5 have been related to the transition between the Early Dynastic period and the beginning of the Akkadian epoch, mostly on the basis of the pottery assemblage. Phases VI4 and VI3 have been dated to the reign of Naram-Sin, while the following VI2 and VI1 to his successor Šar-kali-šarri, on the base of inscribed bricks, tablets and pottery evidence.

Despite the results achieved by this research, many challenging questions remain. Among these

matters, it would be important to examine all the archaeological and epigraphic remains, by means of a contextual analysis with the aim of re-assessing the spatial and functional organization of the area.

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