

## THE NIPPUR EXPEDITION

*Richard C. Haines*

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Last November the Nippur Expedition returned to central Iraq for its ninth season of work at the large city-mound of Nippur. The staff consisted of Mr. James Knudstad as director and architect, Dr. Robert Biggs as epigrapher, McGuire Gibson as archeologist and photographer, and Miss Diane Taylor as archeological and epigraphic assistant. Tarik al-Janabi was the Iraq government representative; when he was called to do his term of army service, Miss Selma al-Radi was appointed in his place. The expedition had two objectives: the beginning of a systematic and complete excavation of the Ekur, a complex of buildings and courtyards dedicated to the city god Enlil, and the construction of a permanent headquarters.

The ziggurat in the main courtyard of Ekur was excavated by the Babylonian Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and the temple of Enlil beside the ziggurat was cleared by the joint expedition of the Oriental Institute and the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania in 1948–50. However, the southern part of the courtyard and the casemated enclosing walls are practically untouched. The Ekur is still better known from the written records than from the partly excavated remains. To clear the Ekur is not an easy or a quickly realized task. The Parthians used the dominating structures of the Ekur as a base for a huge fortress built with massive and deeply founded walls. The Babylonian Expedition dug out much of the fortress and then used the area as a dump, piling the dirt high above the original surface of the mound. This dump had to be removed, and the formerly excavated rooms had to be cleared of seventy years of accumulated debris before any meaningful excavation could begin.

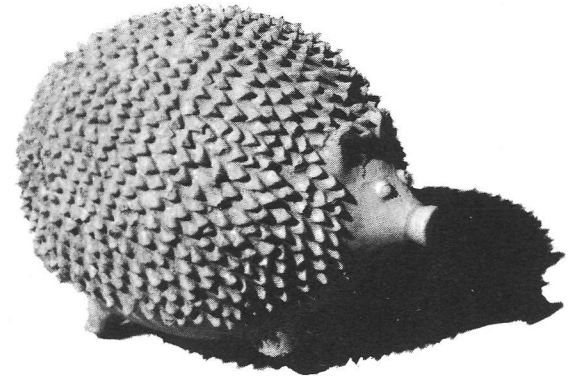
Fortunately, the removal of the dump and debris required little supervision so that the construction of the house, which required a constant and attentive eye, could be undertaken at the same time.

It took from early in November until the latter part of January before the mound site was ready for excavation and the house was habitable.

The house was designed by James Knudstad, who had learned what an expedition house should be like by living in rented and usually inadequate expedition houses in Iraq, Persia, and the Sudan. The plan of the house is a clean rectangle, with rooms grouped around three interior courtyards. The forecourt, where the vehicles are kept, serves the kitchen, the servants' rooms, and the work rooms for the expedition staff; the rear and very private courtyard is an access to the eight sleeping rooms and the necessary washrooms, showers, and toilets. Mr. Knudstad used the typical native construction which any village mason knows. The house is built of sun-dried bricks on a baked brick foundation and roofed with wood beams which support horizontal poles covered with matting, rushes, and mud plaster. It is large and substantial—and a most comforting sight as one approaches the mound.

Actual excavation started in early February and continued until the latter part of March. Work centered on the Parthian fortress covering the southern part of Ekur. The Babylonian Expedition, which had completely or partially dug some of the rooms, left others untouched so that the entire stratigraphy of the Parthian period has been pre-

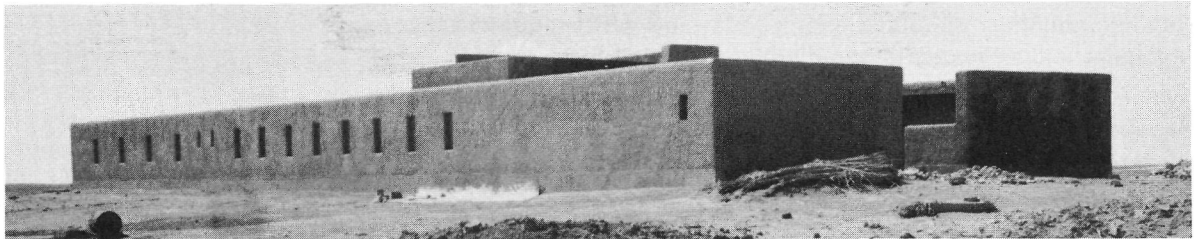
*A green-gray pottery hedgehog (12 inches long) which is actually a water jug. It was found in a niche in an arched doorway of the Parthian fortress at Nippur.*



served. The fortress had been repaired, rebuilt, and expanded and proves to be much more complicated than the existing records show. The complete clearance of the area will give a unique architectural sequence of Parthian building. It will have to be well studied before the walls can be removed and the Ekur below it can be exposed. It is not a work for the fainthearted and will take several seasons to complete.

This has been a season of beginnings. The new field house will permit the building-up of study collections and a reference library which has been impossible heretofore. A larger staff can be housed and still leave guest rooms for visitors. The feeling of optimism and permanence, reflected in the building of an expedition house, allowed the choice of the Ekur, the most sacred area in this holy city, as a site to be excavated. It is the most extensive program that the Oriental Institute has yet undertaken at Nippur.

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*A view of the new expedition house at Nippur from the northeast*