Southern Iraq, ancient Sumer and Akkad, is a land of contrasts. Rapid modernization has brought tractors, new crops, and industrial factories. But certain agricultural and irrigation practices, construction techniques, and many other details take one back thousands of years. Change amidst stability, or stability despite change, may be said to characterize not only today, but millennia of Mesopotamian history.

Settlement patterns and land use have been shown by archaeological surface survey to have been tied to shifting watercourses, problems of salinization, depletion of land, and movements of population. Remains of villages, towns and cities lie alongside half-buried ancient canals in the middle of the desert. Some urban centers were important enough to survive longer than most. One such site was Nippur, which came into existence some time prior to 4000 B.C. and was not abandoned until about A.D. 1000.

The history of the Nippur region during the past one hundred and twenty years shows how extreme and precipitate changes in local conditions can be.

Around 1850, various British visitors reported that they were obliged to use boats to reach Nippur. The area for miles on all sides
We decided to use the information given us by J. P. Peters and the other Pennsylvania excavators, and to follow the old trenches for awhile, in order to avoid Persian levels and reach early levels in as short a time as possible.

In published and unpublished reports, there is an account of a long trench cut in the wall of the Sennacherib Temple near in the area of the kitchen-rooms. This trench led to the highest point of the wall from the southern edge of the Euphrates, to the area of the Shalmaneser jars, which were dated to about the same period as the destruction of the city by the Babylonians. The Persian excavations discovered a large building, or palace, with a central court flanked by baked brick columns.

To determine the structure of the wall, we had to number the columns. The Columned Hall of the building was found to be a large rectangular room with columns of the mercantile Mariusha family (5th century B.C.). In a tunnel sunk below some of the rooms of the palace, a few tablets were found. After this, another tunnel was found, which was covered with clay.

These were invaluable collections of administrative texts from the time of the Assyrians (c. 1300 B.C.), which contain much more evidence to be known.

Being interested in the Kassite Period, and in administration, I considered this area the prime candidate for excavation. Knowing that the Columned Hall was Sennacherib in date (306 B.C.) and thus earlier than Persian, and keeping in mind the location as a large pit, we thought that we could reach Kassite levels, and perhaps some administrative building in this season. However, there was a problem. Inconsistency in the unpublished records concerning the Kassites remains under the Col-

umned Hall. In one place Kassite was said to be just one meter below the Hall. In another, the depth was given as two meters, and in another, four. This, we assumed, was the result of an error in recording, or a mistake in identifying levels.

Upon arriving at Nippur in mid-December, 1972, we found that nature was a factor to be taken into account in our operation. The Columned Hall was, in fact, a large pit, but the exact location of the Kassite administrative archive a bit farther west was under a tremendous sand dune. The best we could do this season was to try to find Kassite levels under the rooms associated with it.

Work began in the Columned Hall area, WA, in late December. Remains of the Hall and related rooms were almost nonexistent. At a slightly lower level we found earlier Seleucid structures, including a large foundation wall. This wall, which had been cut by Pennsylvania's long trench, was a corner of a structure that lay to the north of the excavation. Our Squares WA 7, and 8, northeast of this wall and inside the structure, consisted of a mass of deliberate fill, then to link one's own work with that of previous excavations and unpublished material.

The Nippur season of 1972-73, the thirteenth modern season and the fifth in which Chicago has worked alone, had much of change/development within it. Any archaeological research in Mesopotamia must address itself to cultural change, but it must also be aware of cultural traditions and the way of history linking periods. Our specific aim in the campaign, however, brought into play other elements of the new and old. With this season, the Oriental Institute was launching a long-term project of research, and to that end the old trenches for awhile, in order to avoid Persian levels and reach early levels in as short a time as possible.

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Kassite remains at three and a half and four meters below the Columned Hall. In WA 7-8, on the other side of the Seleucid foundation, however, Kassite remains were found at five and a half meters. As we work west, under the dune, we will probably find Kassite materials at one or two meters below the Columned Hall. The "inconsistency" in the old records was, in fact, an accurate record of remains found on a hillside under the Seleucid building.

In a gully south of the main operation in WA, we opened a small stratigraphic pit. This operation proved to be extraordinarily productive. Below Seleucid levels, there were two meters of trash pits, dating to Achaemenid and Neo-Babylonian times. Here we found two complete medical commentaries of an ancient scholar who was famous enough to be quoted in tablets found at Uruk, a hundred miles south.

Below the trash pits, were found substantial Neo-Babylonian house walls. We expected then to find Kassite remains, but instead, below a very thin sand lens, we found Old Babylonian (c. 1800 B.C.) and Ur III (c. 2100 B.C.) levels. We then, at a depth of five meters from the top of the pit, began to uncover walls made of plano-convex-shaped mud bricks. Such mud bricks are usually the hallmark of the Early Dynastic Period (c. 3000-2350 B.C.). Our two meters of walls, with two buildings and four associated floors, contained Kassian material (2350-2000 B.C.). Here we found, besides Kassian pottery, four Akkadian cylinder seals, a fragment from a brick stamp of Naram-Sin, a king of the dynasty.

Under the Kassian levels, we found another plano-convex mud-brick walls along with Early Dynastic pottery types. We had no time to take the pit further down. It is clear that we have here a rich location for fairly early material. This seems to be a private house area, and is not covered with much later material.

We carried out another operation on the West Mound. This was our area WB, toward the southern end of the mound. Here, near the findspot of another cache of Kassite tablets found by Pennsylvania, we chose a location that seemed undisturbed and was covered with Kassite sherds. A little digging made it plain that Pennsylvania had been here before us. The top meter and a half was composed of old trenches and back fill. When we finally reached "good dirt," we were in Old Babylonian houses. These buildings yielded much information. In one court we discovered many whole or reconstructable pots lying where they had been left in the nineteenth century B.C. Fragments of clay plaques, figurines, and other debris lay in the courtyard.

The walls of the building—of baked brick, a rarity in private houses of the Old Babylonian Period—indicated that this building was more than usual interest. The finding of several canaliform tablets in the court and in a small adjacent room supported that conclusion.
sion. Among the tablets were contracts dated to the 34th and 35th years of Hammurabi, and one dated to the 13th year of Samsuiluna. We thus have about a twenty year bracket (1756-1736 B.C.) for the dating of the house. Also found among the tablets was a literary text in Sumerian.

Below the Old Babylonian level are older, Isin-Larsa, houses. The series of whole and fragmentary pots plus the sherds from WB should help to discriminate Isin-Larsa from Old Babylonian types. This is a range of pottery that is as yet inadequately distinguished.

Probably the greatest importance for future work is the knowledge that the WB area gives excellent opportunities for reaching early levels with little overburden. Our Isin-Larsa levels are about nine meters above plain level. Strata such as those of the Early Dynastic Period that elsewhere have been found under layers of later debris, or below plain level, may at this spot be found relatively easily.

The final operation for this season was a small pit, SQ, sunk in a low area northwest of the ziggurat in the eastern part of the site. This excavation was carried out by Dr. Peter Mehringer, an earth scientist from Washington State University, in order to sample strata that may give a pollen and faunal record of climate at Nippur over the past few thousand years. Carl Haines, the former director of Nippur, who was with us as a special consultant, remembered that when he made soundings in this locality in 1951-52, he observed a blackish layer about a meter below plain level. He thought that this might be evidence of an ancient swamp. Mehringer found this and another stratum that he thinks were swamp sediments. His analysis and report will appear at a future date.

Looking at the season as a discrete unit of research, we can point to several notable accomplishments. In our main area, WA, we discovered what seems to be a major temple, although we must now try to determine its relation to its surroundings. In the stratigraphic pit, WA 50c, we have, I think, demonstrated conclusively the use of plano-convex mud bricks in the Akkadian Period. Also, we have from this cut a large, well stratified collection of potsherds, including glazed specimens, that will help to set up a better ceramic chronology. The changes in glazes may cause us to reassess our understanding of glazing, especially when detailed chemical and microscopic studies are made. The private house area, WB, has likewise furnished good ceramic criteria from floor levels dated by tablets to distinguish the important Isin-Larsa/Babylonian sequence.

The season must also be viewed as a link with past work at the site, and as the first part of a new program of research. We will continue to work in the trenches opened this year, trying to answer the questions raised. We intend to expand, especially in private house areas, and sample other parts of the West Mound and the plain level around it. Sherd s on the plain indicate possible locations of early material without late overburden. In conjunction with such soundings, attempts will be made to trace more of the city wall.

In terms of method, we hope to continue combining old techniques of excavation with new ones, trying to bring in scholars and students in anthropology, paleobotany, and other fields whenever possible. For a site as complex and gigantic as Nippur, we need as much help from various disciplines as we can obtain. Digging merely for objects or for history is no longer justifiable. Piecing together cultural evidence, establishing the historical relevance of an object, a building, or a city, and trying to relate these to environmental or other factors as elements in a larger process are the task of archaeology today. For Meso- potamia, elaborate research designs may be possible. However, it is my opinion that until a firm ceramic sequence is established, such research must be questionable. The main task for the next few years must be the setting up of that sequence, with an eye to future cultural and historical studies. It is our intention at Nippur to be open to new ideas, and try new methods, but to focus on the basic work of good recording and pursuit of a reliable sequence. It may not be as exciting as other programs, but it will be more important.

McGuire Gibson obtained his Ph.D. from the Oriental Institute and is now Director of the Nippur Expedition. He has worked on the material from early excavations at Kish and has prepared a report thereon.

Suggested Reading
Hansen, D. P. and G. F. Dales
1962
"The Temple of Inanna, Queen of Heaven, at Nippur," Archaeology, 15, 75-84.