England and France have done a noble work of exploration in Assyria and Babylonia. It is time for America to do her part. Let us send out an American expedition.


By Richard L. Zettler and William B. Hafford
View of the Nippur Temple excavations seen from atop the Nippur ziggurat, 1899. PM image 139049. OPPOSITE: Bull-headed lyre fragment, ca. 2450 BCE. Discovered in the Royal Cemetery at Ur, PG 789. PM object B17694B.

After working briefly at Nineveh, Botta turned to Khorsabad, northeast of Mosul. Layard meanwhile unearthed Nimrud, ancient Kalhu (Biblical Calah), southeast of Mosul. The colossal stone bulls (with wings and human heads) that guarded the doorways and the massive reliefs that lined the walls of the palatial rooms created a sensation when they were installed at the Louvre and the British Museum.

By the early 1880s, Americans wanted in. Orientalists, including John P. Peters, an Episcopal clergyman who would later become Professor of Hebrew at the University of Pennsylvania, were agitating for exploration in Assyria and Babylonia. Soliciting funds for an exploratory venture, Peters approached Catherine Lorillard Wolfe, a New York philanthropist and art collector, who agreed to provide the estimated costs. The resultant Wolfe Expedition spent January–April 1885 seeking potential excavation sites in the area south of Baghdad.

Peters had little luck in sparking subsequent interest until he met Edward White Clark, a prominent Philadelphia financier, in July 1887. Clark had traveled to Egypt and the Levant on his Grand Tour and was an avid reader of Layard’s popular accounts of excavations. He was certain Philadelphia would support large-scale excavations in Mesopotamia.

Clark approached William Pepper, Jr., a physician and Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, with the hope of linking the expedition to the University. Penn’s Trustees agreed to the affiliation in December 1887 with the proviso that all finds from the excavations that could be legally exported would become property of the University. They agreed to provide a “fire-proof” building for the finds, and their actions laid the groundwork for Pepper’s plans to establish the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

The Penn Museum in Mesopotamia (Iraq)
Prominent Philadelphians organized the Babylonian Exploration Fund and acted in concert with the University to support excavations at Nippur (modern Niffer), an ancient series of mounds that the Wolfe Expedition had noted as promising. The Fund supported a total of three excavation seasons from 1889–1896 and the University sponsored a fourth expedition on its own in 1899–1900.

Nippur was the first American excavation in Mesopotamia, but certainly not the last. Many institutions would go on to support expeditions and the Penn Museum would continue to be an important player, sponsoring or supporting excavations of at least ten sites in Iraq. The modern nation came about after the dissolution of
the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I and the British were given the task of assisting the country in its early stages. The Penn Museum teamed up with the British Museum in these early years to excavate the site of Tell al-Muqayyar (ancient Ur) from 1922–1934.

Jointly with other institutions, the Penn Museum sponsored excavations in Iraq again after World War II. Though foreign excavations slowed during the Iran-Iraq War and halted in the subsequent Gulf Wars, they have recently begun again and the Museum continues to support investigation and preservation of ancient sites throughout the country.

**Excavations in Persia (Iran)**

Archaeological excavations in Persia (Iran) began in 1850, when British geologist William Kennett Loftus began work at Susa (modern Shush) in what is now the Khuzestan province of western Iran. Several decades later, French archaeologists Jane and Marcel-Auguste Dieulafoy initiated a new series of excavations at Susa, and by 1900 Persian authorities had signed conventions that gave the French a near complete monopoly over all excavation in the country.

After a **coup d’état** in 1921, the Persian government signed a new convention ending the French monopoly. It then passed an Antiquities Law in 1930 that effectively opened the country to archaeologists of other nationalities. The Antiquities Law, like that in Iraq, provided for a division of finds between the government and excavators, but reserved the right to appropriate important objects from among the discoveries.

**The Penn Museum in Persia (Iran)**

Horace H. F. Jayne, the Museum’s director in the 1930s, characterized Persia as of “immense significance to our knowledge of the history of civilization.” When he received word from several well-informed sources that excavation in Persia was no longer to be solely French, he dispatched archaeologist Frederick R. Wulsin to Tehran to represent the Museum’s interests. Wulsin submitted a request for permission to excavate Damghan, about 215 miles east of Tehran and erroneously thought to be the Parthian capital, just days after the Antiquities Law had been approved.
Jayne hired Erich Schmidt, a young German archaeologist with a Ph.D. from Columbia University, to direct Penn’s excavations in Persia. Schmidt arrived in Tehran in mid-1931, after closing the excavations at Fara in southern Iraq. He completed preliminaries in the capital and then traveled on to Damghan, where he had a permit to excavate. There he focused his efforts on Tepe Hissar, a Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age site, working until November and then completing excavations the following year. All the while he relied on the critical financial support of Mrs. William Boyce Thompson.

The Penn Museum, buoyed by Mrs. Thompson’s pledges of support for Schmidt’s work, sponsored his excavations in Iran throughout the 1930s. Together with the Boston Museum of Fine Arts it supported excavations in and around Rayy (ancient Rhages), on the southern outskirts of Tehran, and later at Persepolis and sites in its immediate vicinity. Meanwhile, Wulsin had secured a permit to excavate Tureng Tepe, near Asterabad (modern Gorgan) in northeastern Iran.

World War II brought archaeological excavations to a halt, but the Museum resumed work in Iran in the postwar years. For example, Carleton Coon initiated surveys and excavations at four widely dispersed cave sites in 1949, looking for the remains of Paleolithic and Neolithic occupations, and Robert H. Dyson, Jr., conducted major excavations at Hasanlu Tepe south of Lake Urmia. In addition to working at Hasanlu, the largest site in the region, Dyson also conducted excavations at other sites nearby. In fact, the Penn Museum, often in conjunction with other institutions, supported excavation at more than a dozen sites across Iran into the 1970s.

While foreign excavations largely ended with the Iranian Revolution in 1978, the Museum continues to be actively engaged in publishing earlier excavations in Iran, such as Hasanlu, and routinely provides access to its extensive collections for researchers from around the world.

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Nippur, Iraq
1889–1952

John Punnett Peters, Penn Professor of Hebrew and avid Orientalist, began excavations at Nippur in February of 1889. It was the first American excavation in the Middle East, but it met with disaster when local tribesmen, seeking revenge against one of the Turkish policemen guarding the expedition, burned the American camp on the exposed summit of Nippur’s west mound. Peters and his team were forced to flee. Nevertheless, they returned for a second season in 1890 and two more up to 1900. Some critics have characterized the Nippur excavations as mining for cuneiform tablets, a characterization partly true but not completely fair. Penn’s excavators revealed substantial architectural remains including the ziggurat and the temple of Enlil, chief of the Sumerian deities, and a large fortress that the Parthian inhabitants of Nippur built over it in the 1st century CE. They unearthed thousands of burials and logged tens of thousands of artifacts in addition to cuneiform tablets. Nevertheless, the tablets did receive much attention. In excavating two private houses dating to the 18th

LEFT: Incantation bowl, 400–700 CE, PM object B2965A. VIEWS OF NIPPUR ABOVE: Parthian coffins in situ (top left), PM image 148755; ziggurat at Nippur (top right), PM image 7103; American excavation camp (bottom left), PM image 5303; workers gathering outside their reed huts (bottom right), PM image 7114.
century BCE, for example, archaeologists found more than 17,000 tablets, revealing much of what we know of Sumerian literature today.

Decades later, Penn Museum excavators returned to Nippur. In the aftermath of World War II, they formed a joint project with the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, in hopes of finding more cuneiform tablets as well as uncovering much more about the city itself. Indeed, Donald E. McCown, who directed the excavations, opened two operations on the southern tip of Nippur’s eastern mound, where Penn had discovered so many tablets in the 19th century.

Although Penn withdrew from excavations after the third (1951–1952) season, the Oriental Institute pressed on through the nineteenth (1990) season. McGuire Gibson took over the Nippur excavations in the eleventh (1972–1973) season and continued until the time of the First Gulf War, when excavations were temporarily suspended in Iraq. Gibson focused his efforts largely on Nippur’s west mound, where John Peters began work, and even excavated a part of the first expedition’s camp in 1989, ironically, the 100th anniversary of the start of American excavations.
Ur (Tell al-Muqayyar), Iraq 1922–1934

At the close of World War I, the Penn Museum approached the British Museum about forming a joint expedition to excavate in Mesopotamia, a region that had come under British control in 1917. Penn wanted to return to Nippur, but the British Museum suggested Tell al-Muqayyar (ancient Ur), where it had worked in 1918–19 with promising results.

In 1922, under an initial permit from the Ministry of Communications and Works in the newly created nation of Iraq, C. Leonard (later Sir Leonard) Woolley began excavations at Ur for the joint expedition. He continued under permits from the Antiquities Department, governed by the 1924 Antiquities Law that allowed a division of finds. Woolley uncovered many important aspects of ancient Mesopotamian life and culture in his 12 years at Ur, including the ziggurat and its surrounding sacred structures; the Royal Cemetery with its 16 spectacular tombs and thousands more mundane graves; domestic structures in neighborhoods with local shrines and workshops; and glimpses of the original habitation.

LEFT: Often called “Ram in the Thicket,” this statuette from the Royal Cemetery actually depicts a goat rampant in a tree. Ur, Iraq, ca. 2450 BCE. PM object 30-12-702. VIEWS OF UR ABOVE: Aerial photo of the excavations taken in 1930 (top left), PM image 191616; diggers in Pit X in 1934 (top right), PM image 192327.
dating back to 5500 BCE. The astounding wealth of the Royal Cemetery—especially that of the largely intact tomb of Queen Puabi—created a great stir among archaeologists and the general public alike. Here was evidence of powerful kings and queens whose courtiers had gone to the afterlife alongside them, yet their dynasty was documented nowhere else in Mesopotamia. The investigation of the deepest habitation, some 18-20 meters below the surface of the mound, also yielded an attention-grabbing discovery: a layer of water-lain silt some 3.5 meters thick that was evidence of a great flood. Floods were common in alluvial Mesopotamia, but this one was so large that it may have inspired legends, and Woolley at times linked it with the Biblical flood.

Though Woolley employed as many as 300 workers and dug 4–5 months every season, he uncovered only a small portion of the overall city. Nevertheless, he greatly advanced archaeological knowledge. His excavations ended in 1934, but in 2015 Penn archaeologists, along with those from other institutions and under the direction of SUNY Stony Brook, returned to continue excavations on a smaller scale.
Tepe Gawra, Iraq
1931–1938

Tepe Gawra (Kurdish for “Great Mound”) is located near modern Mosul. It is a small site that was occupied ca. 5500–1500 BCE. Penn Professor of Semitics Ephraim Speiser was drawn to the site because of its long sequence of prehistoric occupations characterized by painted pottery.

Speiser conducted a three-week exploratory excavation in 1927. The Penn Museum and ASOR (American Schools of Oriental Research) then excavated on a larger scale from 1931–1938. The original plan was to start at the top of the mound and strip the superimposed occupation layers completely one by one. As they dug deeper, however, excavators struggled with the increasingly large layers and with dirt removal. After clearing the upper ten layers they restricted work to roughly one-third of the total area and continued down to the earliest levels.

Tepe Gawra remains the indispensable type-site for the sequence of northern Mesopotamia in the later 5th and 4th millennia BCE. Its structures and artifacts demonstrate increasing complexity and organization leading toward the development of cities.

LEFT: Rope decorated jar from Tepe Gawra. PM object 38-13-52. VIEWS OF TEPE GAWRA ABOVE: Tepe Gawra mound (top left), PM image 46308; house and staff at Gawra (top right) ca. 1937, PM image 44945; round house excavation (bottom left), PM image 44788; excavation of temple in level XIII (bottom right), PM image 44838.
Khafaje, Iraq 1937–1938

The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago excavated at Khafaje and other sites on the lower Diyala river (ancient Tutub) northeast of Baghdad from 1930–1937. The excavations revealed impressive architectural remains including a large oval temple complex of the mid- to late 3rd millennium BCE, as well as an array of small finds including distinctive statuary. The stratigraphic sequences of temples and houses helped to provide the definition of the Early Dynastic period from roughly 2900–2350 BCE.

In the 1936–1937 season, however, the Oriental Institute ran into financial trouble and the Penn Museum financed the excavation beginning in January of 1937. After a month, Field Director E.A. Speiser wrote: “Our brief season at Khafaje is just about over. To us the results seem altogether fantastic.” They had learned more about the sequence of temples and uncovered statues buried within. Excavations continued in 1938, unearthing more temple architecture and earlier and later remains on the main and subsidiary mounds.

**RIGHT:** Alabaster statuette of a priest found alongside many others at Khafaje. PM object 37-15-31.

**ABOVE:** Excavations in the Nintu temple at Khafaje revealed many votive statues beneath the floor. PM image 149969.
Damghan, Iran
1931–1932, 1976

When the French lost their Iranian excavation monopoly in 1930, Erich Schmidt went to open excavations for the Penn Museum. Winter in the mountains, however, was inhospitable and so he went first to Iraq, working at Fara (ancient Shuruppak) from February to May 1931. The site had been excavated by the Germans in 1902–1903 and Schmidt found great difficulty working there due to the extent of the old trenches and the piles of dirt they had left behind. Major sandstorms caused additional trouble, and although there were some interesting finds, Schmidt did not continue work here in later years.

Instead, he traveled to Tehran in June and confirmed his permission to excavate in and around Damghan, separated from the Caspian Sea by the Elburz Mountains. Damghan was initially thought to be ancient Hecatompylos, the capital of the Parthian Empire (ca. 200 BCE), but excavations in the citadel revealed no pre-Islamic remains and thus Damghan

LEFT: Bowl with painted horned animal, found at Tepe Hissar. PM object 33-21-116. VIEWS ABOVE: Sandstorm (top left), PM image 147819; Tepe Hissar mound with sun rays piercing through cloud cover (bottom left), PM image 143995; Damghan citadel (top right), PM image 82739.
proven not to have been the Parthian capital after all.

The surrounding plain included many sites of archaeological interest and Schmidt investigated several. He found most of the sites to have been almost entirely Islamic in date, but Tepe Hissar revealed early pottery and Schmidt focused his work here for much of his two seasons. Occupation at Hissar had been mostly Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age (ca. 4500–2500 BCE), though a Sasanian building was located about 200 meters away. Excavation revealed many graves, so many in fact (782 in the second season alone), that mortuary analysis overwhelmed the work.

Almost 50 years after Schmidt closed his excavations, the Penn Museum, Turin University, and the Iranian Center for Archaeological Research undertook a joint project to restudy Tepe Hissar. The 1976 season examined categories of evidence that Schmidt had been unable to study closely with the techniques of his day, such as mineral slag, animal bones, and plant remains. The new project also included a detailed survey of Parthian and Sasanian settlements in the Damghan Plain.
Rayy, Iran
1934–1936

The Penn Museum and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts conducted joint excavations at Rayy (ancient Rhages), on the southern outskirts of Tehran, from 1934–1936. Once again it was Erich Schmidt who directed the work. Similar to the excavation permit for Damghan, the permit for Rayy covered a very large area—encompassing the surrounding plain of about 14 square miles. Schmidt worked at many sites in this region, uncovering Neolithic and Chalcolithic, as well as Parthian, occupation levels at Cheshmeh Ali; late Sasanid–early Islamic (Umayyad) buildings with decorative stuccos at Chal Tarkhan; and extensive early Islamic remains at Rayy itself.

Rayy, now essentially a suburb of the Iranian capital, was occupied until the Mongol invasions in 1220 CE. The Abbasid rulers (ca. 750 CE) established a mint here and Islamic coins were common finds in the excavations. In fact, the city expanded greatly in the 8th and 9th centuries as shown by the development of an outer city and the large amount of artifacts of the period found here.

Left: Silver dirham (obverse) from the Rayy mint. PM object 46-29-25. Above: View of the citadel at Rayy. Courtesy of The Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, image AE-333.
Persepolis, Iran
1937–1939

The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago hired Erich Schmidt to continue its restoration and excavation at Persepolis in 1935, while he was simultaneously overseeing the excavations at Rayy. With Schmidt's encouragement, the Penn Museum, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, and the Oriental Institute signed a cooperative agreement to pool resources and continue excavation at Persepolis and sites in its immediate vicinity.

Because it had been the Achaemenid Persian royal capital (ca. 550–330 BCE), Persepolis, near Shiraz in Fars Province, was of particular interest to the Iranian government. The Shah visited on several occasions to observe the work in 1937 and 1938. Excavations were also conducted at nearby sites, such as Tall-i Bakun, with its pre- and proto-historic occupation levels; Istakhr, the Sasanian capital; and Naqsh-i-Rustam, burial place of the Achaemenid Persian kings. When the Museum of Fine Arts withdrew from field work, the Penn Museum and the Oriental Institute funded one last season in 1939.
Hasanlu Tepe, Iran
1956–1977

In 1956, Robert H. Dyson, Jr., initiated excavations at Hasanlu Tepe, in the Qadar River (or Ushnu-Solduz) valley, south of Lake Urmia in northwestern Iran. The excavations were sponsored by the Penn Museum with support from the Hagop Kevorkian Fund, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Archaeological Service of Iran. Hasanlu had a long sequence of occupation, from at least the Early Bronze Age (ca. 3000 BCE) to the Medieval Period (ca. 1300 CE), but it is arguably best known for its burned Early Iron Age remains. These remains tell the stark tale of a violent destruction of the citadel and surrounding lower town ca. 800 BCE. Excavators cleared away the ash and rubble to reveal the remnants of burned buildings, skeletal remains of more than 250 inhabitants and combatants, and tens of thousands of artifacts.

The invaders who destroyed Hasanlu ca. 800 BCE may have been Urartians and their allies from the Trans-Caucasus, but there is much debate about just who was involved in the struggle. Skel-
etons were found in the streets and buildings, many with weapons, helmets, and other objects. Perhaps the most spectacular find, however, was a large gold bowl or beaker whose base and sides were embellished with figural scenes (humans, deities, and animals) hammered in low relief. The bowl was found with three skeletons, people who seem to have been trying to make away with it when the building collapsed.

Dyson conducted 14 seasons of excavations at Hasanlu, ending in 1977. One of his main goals for the long-term field project was to reconstruct the cultural history of the Ushnu-Solduz valley. In order to get a broader picture of the region, he also conducted excavations at other sites nearby, including Pisdeli Tepe and Dalma Tepe (1961), Hajji Firuz Tepe (1961 and 1968), Agrab Tepe and Ziwiye (1954), and Se Girdan and Dinka Tepe (1966 and 1968). These sites were smaller than Hasanlu and often allowed for a closer look at earlier periods of habitation. The investigations therefore extended the understanding of the valley’s inhabitants back to the Late Neolithic (ca. 6500 BCE).