



ADELHEID OTTO & KAI KANIUTH (HRSG.)

unter Mitarbeit von FEMKE GROPS

50 Jahre Vorderasiatische Archäologie in München

Der vorliegende Band feiert das 50-jährige Bestehen des Instituts für Vorderasiatische Archäologie der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. Er schöpft aus Archivalien, Forschungs- und Verwaltungsdaten, vor allem aber aus den Erinnerungen seiner Mitglieder seit der Gründung im Jahr 1970. Institutsgeschichte, Lehrerfahrungen und Forschungsleistung sind die drei vielfach ineinander verwobenen Eckpunkte, zwischen denen sich die Beiträge bewegen. Das lebendige Bild einer Gemeinschaft von Praktizierenden ist zugleich Würdigung des Vergangenen und Werbung für eine weitergehende Erforschung der „Wiege der Kulturen“.

Adelheid Otto &
Kai Kaniuth (Hrsg.)

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Ur. Excavations in Area 5 (Photo: B. Einwag).

Excavations at Ur (2017 and 2019)

A team of LMU contributed to the renewed investigations of Ur with a geophysical prospection and the minute excavation of a small area at the periphery of the South Mound. The main results of the latter were the uncovering of a large and richly equipped house of the Old Babylonian period and of structures from the underlying Ur III level.

شارك فريق من جامعة ميونخ في أعمال البحث المتجددة في أور، من خلال الاستقصاء الجيوفيزيائي والتنقيب المحدود في منطقة صغيرة عند محيط التل الجنوبي. نتج عن أعمال التنقيب هذه الكشف عن منزل كبير مجهز بثراء واضح، يعود للفترة البابلية القديمة إضافة إلى إنشآت معمارية من سوية أور الثالثة الأقدم.

Who has not dreamt of excavating once at Ur? That this dream came true for a team of our institute was made possible by kind permission of Iraq's State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, by the former Minister of Culture Dr. Abdulmir Hamdani and Profs. Elizabeth Stone and Paul Zimansky from Stony Brook University, New York (SUNY), the directors of the renewed Ur excavations who generously invited us to join their endeavors which they had begun in 2015 (Stone and Zimansky 2016). The LMU team, consisting of archaeologists, philologists, geophysicists and an anthropologist, worked at Ur for two seasons in spring 2017 and again in 2019.¹ Our work was funded by grants from the Gerda Henkel Foundation and the *Münchener Universitätsgesellschaft*. The team cooperated closely with the American team – E. Stone, P. Zimansky, W. B. Hafford and M. Seabrook – members of which were also taking care of the analysis of the faunal and floral remains (K. Twiss and M. Charles). Up to twenty workmen from Nasriya assisted in our excavations in Area 5, and up to forty worked in the areas of the American team (Fig. 1).

Sir Leonard Woolley's legendary excavations at Ur between 1922 and 1934 are not only considered to be among the best-known excavations in the Near East, they have also brought to light the earliest ziggurat, which had been built in Ur's sacred temenos area by Urnamma, the first king of the Ur III dynasty around 2100 BCE. It is the most spectacular archaeological monument of Southern Mesopotamia preserved to this day (Fig. 2). But one of Woolley's greatest achievements was the excavation of the Old Babylonian city quarters – crucial for our understanding of Old Babylonian life and death, literature and architecture, economy and arts. The Isin-Larsa and Old Babylonian (c. 2000–1740 BCE) excavated remains consisted of dozens of domestic dwellings, shops and chapels which were arranged in densely settled living quarters, accessible only by narrow winding lanes. Woolley's team excavated them on a large scale with the help of hundreds of workmen. Archaeologists today will never aim at similarly large-scale exposures for a lack of financial means on the one hand and different methodologies and techniques on the other, but focus instead on meticulous in-depth investigations of limited areas.

Our goals were threefold: to investigate the overall structure of the South Mound – hitherto fairly unknown – with the help of geophysics (see Scheiblecker/Faßbinder, ch. III.28), to get access to the Ur III levels on the South Mound, and to excavate a single Old Babylonian house as accurately as possible, by applying any modern method which seemed adequate. One may wonder how such a research – extremely limited in scale – can contribute to

¹ The members of the LMU team were (in alphabetical order): Pierre Borsdorf, Jasmin Braun, Denis Busch, Albert Dietz, Berthold Einwag, Jörg Faßbinder, Andrea Göhring, Martin Gruber, Michael Herles, Kai Kaniuth, Manfred Lerchl, Anne Löhnert, Sandra Ostner, Paola Paoletti, Mandana Parsi, Elisa Roßberger, Walther Salaberger, Marion Scheiblecker, Laurin Stöckert.

our knowledge of the Old Babylonian past. But Woolley himself – despite his successful excavations and publications – did regret that he could only rarely link the



Fig. 1. Members of the 2019 campaign at Ur (Photo: P. Zimansky).

archaeological remains of the excavated dwellings with the information from the cuneiform texts coming from the same buildings. These tablets and all the artefacts and objects found in the houses – modest and fragmentary as they are – gain enormous value through their context, as has been aptly described by Woolley himself: “... these documents, not always of any great interest in themselves, gain immensely in value from their association with individual houses and should furnish a remarkably detailed account of this quarter of the city of Ur.” (Woolley/Mallowan 1976: XVIII). We think that Woolley would be happy to know that in the renewed Ur project – nearly a hundred years after his own – the archaeological, epigraphical, anthropological, and scientific remains of a few Old Babylonian houses were excavated and interpreted in close cooperation between scholars of various disciplines, and – in the case of our house in Area 5 – resulted in a remarkably detailed insight into one family’s life at Ur around 1840 BCE (MC) (see Stone et al. 2021).

We started excavation as far south as possible, at a slope near the periphery of the main mound, which was called “Area 5” – the areas excavated by E. Stone’s team being Areas 1–4. Baked brick walls were already



Fig. 2. Drone photo of Ur, the ziggurat in the foreground, Areas AH and 1–4 (SUNY) at the top, Area 5 (LMU) at the upper right corner (Photo: B. Einwag).



Fig. 3. The Old Babylonian house during excavation (Photo: B. Einwag).

visible on the surface: Would they belong to the modest dwellings of impoverished people who lived far from the center, or rather to workshops, stables, storage rooms or any other kind of construction? Area 5 is situated at the slope of the mound, where the levels of the first millennium and the Kassite period were eroded in most places, and mainly sarcophagi – often destroying earlier levels – were testimonies of the later first millennium.

The Old Babylonian level, however, was lying directly below the surface and enabled us to excavate one house with three occupation phases within two campaigns (Fig. 3). The house turned out to be a spacious compound, regularly built, and matching quite well Woolley's ideal type of a courtyard house. A row of rooms surrounded the courtyard, and an additional large room was secluded in the least accessible part of the house – Woolley would have called this the “domestic chapel”. The house measures 236 sqm and consists of 16 rooms and a courtyard. The ground plan is regular and nearly rectangular, the southwestern and southeastern sides forming a perfect right angle, measuring 16 m each, i. e. 32 Babylonian cubits. One gets the impression that spacious building plots were available here, and that the well-planned

house had not to respect other buildings – as was the case in Area AH, the crowded city center excavated by Woolley, where the houses were built right next to each other. Our house was surrounded by streets in the W and N, by a private alley in the East, and a large open space in the South. If we compare the size and number of rooms with other houses at Ur, our house is the largest and has the highest number of rooms, with the exception of No. 11 Paternoster Row, which comprised more than 19 rooms; but this building was interpreted by Woolley as a khan and seems not to have been a normal dwelling (Woolley/Mallowan 1976: 150–153). The size and regularity of this house can not only be explained by the elite status of its owner (see below), but indicates that here lay the spacious areas of Ur where new construction areas were laid out by royal authority in the middle of the 19th century. This was the time when the house was built (Phase 1), but after a short time it was abandoned again, and underwent massive change. It was divided into two parts in Phase 2, and the floor was raised by up to 80 cm through an artificial fill. In Phase 3 the house was altered again; parts of it – most of it was eroded by then – were transformed into a workshop area, before it was



Fig. 4. *Terracotta plaque depicting an Old Babylonian seated king (Photo: P. Zimansky).*



Fig. 5. *The small table model with crawling snakes (Photo: A. Otto).*

finally abandoned, probably together with the rest of the city, at the time of king Samsu-iluna around 1740 BCE.

Remains of the former life, ranging from artefacts such as pottery, tools, figurines, seals, sealed labels and cuneiform tablets not to mention less spectacular, but nonetheless important remains of mats, baskets or meals, were retrieved in all three occupation phases, thanks to meticulous excavations and the sieving and flotation of the material.

If we consider all the evidence, we arrive at a fairly detailed picture of the house owners and their activities, especially in Phases 1 and 2. The house was erected around 1840 BC on the levelled building remains of the Ur III period, i. e. on a virgin plot which had only been used for a few burials between 2000 and 1840 BCE. It was built and inhabited in Phase 1 by a certain *Sîn-nada*, a priest and manager of the Ningal temple – the second most important temple of the city – and his wife *Nuṭṭup-tum*. Several texts found in various rooms of the house seem to indicate that both were involved in the management of the Ningal temple. *Sin-nada* was a high official and subordinate to the Larsa kings. A moulded terracotta plaque kept in the house, depicting the enthroned king, wearing his royal brimmed cap and holding a beaker in one hand (Fig. 4), illustrates this relationship.

Several letters which had been sent by *Sîn-nada* to *Nuṭṭup-tum* were found: apparently he was often away from the city. The letters bore the sealings of two different seals of *Sîn-nādā*. His first seal shows the suppli-



Fig. 6. *The paved lavatory in the north-eastern corner of the house.*



Fig. 7. Sealed label with the typical Isin-Larsa adoration scene to the seated king (Photo: P. Zimansky).



Fig. 8. Tablet lying in the debris between animal bones and sherds of Room 5.

ant goddess standing opposite a standing male god. The inscription names Sin-nada as the priest of the Ningal temple and as a servant of Sin-eribam – a king of Larsa who reigned only from 1842–1840, which offers a fairly precise date for the seal's production. His second seal shows the typical Old Babylonian scene of the victorious king opposite the suppliant goddess, and the inscription is now identifying Sin-nada as the servant of the Larsa king Šilli-Adad, who reigned for not more than 9 months, before Warad-Sîn removed him from the throne. This date – 1835 BCE – is the latest attested in dozens of tablets, tablet-cases and labels found in Phase 1 so far. It seems therefore, that Sin-nada, member of Ur's religious and political elite, had to leave his house and perhaps even his position and the city as a consequence of the dynastic change.

The immobile equipment and mobile remains in the rooms allow to distinguish the function of most rooms. The reception room was divided into two parts, each part



Fig. 9. Copy of the Lament over the destruction of Sumer and Ur (Photo: P. Zimansky).

equipped with a basin-like installation. One of these basins seems to have served for ritual purpose, since a small moulded clay model of a table, decorated with crawling snakes, lay next to it; reddish and blackish traces testify to its use as an incense burner (Fig. 5). The spacious kitchen was equipped with two domed ovens and a sophisticated drainage system. The north-eastern corner of the house – the outer wall rounded since it had to respect the street outside – was equipped with a sumptuous lavatory, neatly paved with baked bricks. A hole in the middle was linked to a drainage shaft more than 8 m deep (Fig. 6). The excellent hygienic conditions certainly contributed to the exceptionally good health of the inhabitants of Ur in the Isin-Larsa period, which is corroborated by the analysis of the anthropological remains.

The house was not only used for living, cooking, receptions, rituals and other standard domestic activities, but also for the education of children. Several school tablets were found in one room filed along the rear wall, more school tablets were found discarded in the neighboring room, together with letters and letter cases, broken pottery, the remains of meals and sealed labels bearing the seal impressions of several different senders (Fig. 7). It is not too easy to recognize fragmentary labels and tablets



Fig. 10. Large bread-oven in a room of Phase 2 (Photo: L. Stöckert).



Fig. 11. Left: An Old Babylonian double-pot burial is going to be opened (Photo: M. Gruber); in the background the Ur III courtyard; right: the same burial opened (Photo: P. Borsdorf).

within this mixed debris (Fig. 8), but we were lucky to find even a copy of the famous ‘Lament over the destruction of Sumer and Ur’ which had possibly also been in use here as part of the scribal education of the advanced pupils (Fig. 9). In sum, it is certain that Sin-nada’s family belonged to the elite of Ur and that the neighborhood of Area 5, although at the edge of the city, was occupied by wealthy citizens.

The house was altered during the Phase 2: all the floors were raised and a row of six rooms in the north was separated from the main house in the south. One

room in the northern part was equipped with a large, formerly domed bread oven – similar to a modern pizza-oven (Fig. 10); possibly, this room along the street was used as a bakery, while the remaining house continued to be used for dwelling purposes. A few sealings and tablets suggest a date of Phase 2 approximately in the time of Rim-Sîn of Larsa, i. e. around 1830–1760 BCE.

The Isin-Larsa house was immediately built on top of the Ur III level: the mudbrick walls of the Ur III period were razed and leveled, before the baked brick walls were built. We found no occupation later than the Ur III

one and prior to 1840 in this area. This explains why the house was larger and more regular in shape than the houses in AH and EM. However, the Ur III mudbrick walls must still have been visible in the early second millennium, since several tombs – sarcophagi, single- or double-pot burials – were carefully interred inside the ancient rooms or placed on top of the leveled wall (Fig. 11).

The excavated remains of the Ur III level consist of a large open courtyard area and a row of narrow, door-less rooms which were found completely empty – possibly, they had been used as storerooms or granaries. Many objects which were found on the courtyard, e.g., various weight stones, cylinder seals, and pottery including a set of carinated bowls inside a deep vessel, can be associated with economic procedures such as weighing, measuring and possibly distributing goods. A saddle mill is proof for the processing of grain in the courtyard. Since the

area is situated near the city-gate, we suggest that goods, which had been brought in from the outside, were registered, stored and distributed in this area during the Ur III period.

Many questions remain unanswered after only two seasons of excavations, and it would of course be wonderful to gain more information about the Ur III occupation, to excavate Sin-nada's house completely and to get some information about his Old Babylonian neighbors. Nevertheless, the wealth of data which we were able to assemble in this short time is exceptional and still awaits full processing – with the help of many students and colleagues who have already greatly contributed during the laborious excavation campaigns. The mentioned results are just a small part of what was achieved thanks to the exceptional work of all the team members and helpers who are warmly thanked here.

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Adelheid Otto

(continued from page 333)

Adelheid Otto, having worked extensively on activities in and inhabitants of houses in Northern Mesopotamia, always admired Woolley's capability to interpret the excavated remains in the most comprehensible way and to make sense of thousands of individual finds by defining the ideal type of an Old Babylonian house. After a short visit to Ur in 1997 she had dreamt of excavating once an "Ur house". Twenty years later, the time had come. The two campaigns in Ur were among her most exciting experiences as an archaeologist. The photo shows her excavating the tablet on Fig. 8.