and intercalary months in Umma, Puzris-Dağān, Nippur, Lagāš and Ur during the Ur III period, JAC 17, 113–134.

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Umma. B. Archäologisch.


§ 1. Introduction. It is unlikely that there is any site in Mesopotamia for which there is a greater disparity between the written and archaeol. records than U. (mod. Tall Ġūfa, 31° 40’ 3” N/45° 53’ 13” E). The vivid cuneiform history of a powerful ED city-state and an important core province of the Akk. and Ur III kingdoms (U.² A) is in striking contrast to the paltry information from the archaeol. record, which until recently consisted entirely of casual surface observations by travelers and archaeologists. This situation has resulted from two closely related factors: U.’s remote location in the 19th and 20th cent. AD, and its status as a prime target for organized looters. This situation changed in the late 1990s, when archaeologists of Iraq’s State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) conducted four seasons of excavation (1999-2002).

§ 2. History of scholarship. Initial archaeol. observations come from early archaeologists who visited the site informally. In April 1889 J. P. Peters⁶ of the Nippur expedition visited U. In December 1902, W. Andrae⁵ visited from Fāra. He described the site and produced a sketch map. Both visitors reported dunes covering the W and S of the site, a high density of baked brick and stone fragments on the surface, and the logistical and security difficulties of reaching the region. Peters reckoned that it would be a difficult site to excavate on account of the lack of water and labor for excavation.

By the time that U. was visited briefly as part of the Warka survey of R. McC. Adams and H. J. Nissen in 1967, Andrae’s description was the most accurate, and was reproduced. Adams and Nissen did not survey the mound (Site 197) in detail, but noted outer limits in excess of the estimation of Andrae.

To halt the rampant looting of U. in the 1990s, the Iraqi SBAH conducted four seasons of excavation between 1999–2002. The first season (1999) included surface collection and topographical mapping. Excavations commenced in 1999, with the partial clearance of the Ur III temple of Šara⁸ (s. § 6), and ended in 2002. Excavations could not be commenced after the 2003 US invasion.


§ 3. Looting. U. has a long and sad history of illicit excavation. It was extensively looted at the start of the 20th cent. AD, in the final years of Ottoman rule. By coincidence, the looters struck an extensive archive of the household of the ēnsi of U. during the Ur III kingdom. The tablets rapidly reached the antiquities market and have ultimately been widely dispersed in museums and private collections. Although unprovenienced, the tablets give a vivid picture of society and economy at U. at the end of the 3rd mill. (U.² A). It is not possible to estimate the spatial extent of this early phase of looting.

In the initial years of Baathist rule in Iraq, looting was harshly suppressed, but it reemerged with the collapse of government control of the southern provinces in the early 1990s. U. in particular was heavily looted, over at least 16 ha of its central mound. In response, the SBAH undertook excavations at U. and other looted sites, under the principle that a continual presence, and the hiring of local workmen, would halt the illicit excavations.

Almost from the moment that the US invasion began in 2003, looters returned to the site in large and efficient organized gangs. The site was heavily damaged, far in excess of what had been done in the previous century of illegal excavation. As of October 2005, the post-1990 looting appears to encompass at least 45 ha of the settle-
§ 4. Description of the site (fig. 1). U.'s surviving remains are elevated mounds at the center with lower areas of settlement surrounding them. Andrae described the site as a 1000 m long main mound, about 15 m at its highest, with visible traces of monumental structures at its center. Adams and Nissen employed limited surface reconnaissance and aerial photographs to suggest that its full extent is approximately 1500 m in diameter. High linear mounds at the site's northwestern edge are probably traces of a particularly robust segment of the city wall, designed to face directly upstream. Based on patterns of soil discoloration in satellite images, the extent of the site covers approximately 262 ha, making it one of the largest Bronze Age cities in Mesopotamia. The western and southern extent of the site has been obscured since at least the late 19th cent. AD by a dune field. As of March 2003, the dune field covered approximately 86 ha of the site, or almost a full third of the likely settled area. Ultimately, this large dune zone may prove to be the only part of the site that has largely escaped despoliation by illegal digging.

§ 5. Settlement history. A prehistoric ('Ubaid and Uruk) origin to U. is likely but has very little empirical evidence; the Warka survey recovered clay sickles and flint blades but used an arbitrary 5 ha estimation. Likewise, Gamdat Naṣr and ED I settlement was considered "poorly attested or doubtful" by the Warka survey, although ED I levels were reached in a small sounding beneath the Šara temple. For these early periods, the bulk of later settlement renders them difficult to assess.

U. attained political prominence in the ED III period, and at this time settlement
probably expanded to the full 260 ha area of the site. In Area 3 on the main mound, a fragm. building is attributed to late ED III or the Akk. period.

Under Akk. rule, the settlement shrank, arbitrarily placed at 100 ha by the Warka survey. It remained around this size under the control of the 3rd dyn. of Ur, when U. was the capital of one of the most important provinces of the kingdom. The only substantial excavations at the site have uncovered the remains of the temple of Šara in Area 1 (s. § 6), dating to the end of the dynasty.

U. grew again in the OB period, perhaps regaining its full 260 ha. In Area 2, a mud brick building contained some evidence for pottery and figurine production: kilns, tournette, and molds. Area 4 contains graves belonging to the OB period.

The Warka survey recovered no evidence for Kassite or NB settlement; it appears that the site was fully abandoned after the OB period.


§ 6. Temple of Šara. On the northern flanks of the central mound, Iraqi excavators recovered a large well-built building identified as the temple of Šara* on the basis of a dedicatory pivot stone naming Šu-Suen* (of Ur). The building was incompletely excavated, and only the results of the first two excavation seasons have been published. The structure is 115 m long and 90 m wide, oriented NW-SE. A 4 m wide entrance at the center of the SE side was flanked by two 10 m wide towers. The exterior walls were over 6 m wide; interior walls were up to 1.5 m wide. The southern part of the temple consisted of a paved central courtyard 30 × 42 m, with double or triple ranks of rooms on all sides. Corridors and thresholds were also paved, while room floors were gypsum plastered. Rooms 8 and 9 were burnt. Tablets were found in two rooms (10 and 17); otherwise the building was empty. This situation may stem from looting at the time of the collapse of the Ur III kingdom, or from 20th-21st cent. AD looters, whose pits had caused extensive damage throughout the excavated parts of the temple. The northern half of the building, which probably contained the cella, remains unexcavated.

In the burnt room 10 were found 19 in situ cuneiform tablets, dated between SS 9 and IS 3, related to deliveries of animal hides and skins, tanning, and various leather objects. Of the thousands of U. tablets known, these 19 tablets are the only ones with archaeol. provenience.


§ 7. Hinterland. In the 3rd mill., U. sat on the levee of a major branch of the ancient Tigris river. The province of U. provides a case study in the comparison of archaeol. survey data and hist. geography derived from cuneiform texts. The Warka survey identified 19 sites from the time of the 3rd dyn. of Ur. The corpus of Ur III tablets, however, list approximately 150 settlements that can be attributed to the U. province. The texts describe a rich rural countryside of agricultural installations, shipping points, and isolated shrines, in addition to agricultural villages. Many of these sites may have been small, temporary, or constructed largely of reeds. A reassessment of the region using satellite imagery concluded that the original Warka survey under-identified such small rural settlements and activity areas.


J. Ur

Ummanaldas s. Humban-haltaš.

Ummanigaš s. Humban-nikaš.


