

Karen L. Wilson • Deborah Bekken • Editors



WHERE KINGSHIP DESCENDED FROM HEAVEN

Studies on Ancient Kish



INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ANCIENT CULTURES
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
STUDIES IN ANCIENT CULTURES • NUMBER 1

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Stucco bust FM K.1427 (FM 236400b) from Palace 2, Square Court (see page 129);
Late Akkadian cylinder seal FM 156668 (X.387) and impression (see pages 288–89);
Isin-Larsa / Old Babylonian seal impression FM 156031 (see pages 294–95);
Early Houses Stratum in Ingharra, Trench Y, looking northeast (see page 2)
Back cover:
Trench Y, Burial 685, found within Early Houses Stratum (see page 6)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

After the invasion of Iraq and the looting of the Iraq Museum on April 10–12, 2003, President George W. Bush instructed the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to set aside monies to sponsor projects related to Iraq and Iraqi culture under the program title “Recovering Iraq’s Past.” Bennet Bronson (then curator of Asian Archaeology and Ethnology), Stephen Nash (then head of collections for Anthropology), and William J. Pestle (then collections manager for Old World Archaeology and Human Remains) submitted a proposal to fund a reevaluation of all the Field Museum’s holdings from the site of Kish and, to the extent possible given geopolitical circumstances, to reconcile those collections with material from the same excavations held in England and Iraq. Their proposal was successful—the NEH awarded a grant of \$99,985, roughly half the amount requested, and in fall 2004 the Kish Project formally began.

In 2005, the US Department of Defense awarded the Field Museum a grant of \$976,000 under its Iraq Cultural Heritage Assistance Project, which was designated, at least in part, to continue mitigating the disastrous effects of the looting of the Iraq Museum. Later in 2005, the American Association of Museums selected the Kish Project to be part of its International Partnerships Among Museums (IPAM) program, through which professional connections were made with museum staff throughout Iraq, not just in Baghdad. Because of delays due to the ongoing war with Iraq, the IPAM partnerships did not take off for several years, but in 2009–11, selected museum professionals from Iraq joined the Kish Project in Chicago for several months.

Over the course of seven years, the support of several grantors—including the NEH (2004–6), the US Department of Defense (2006–11), and several anonymous donors—greatly enhanced the project. From 2004 to 2009, varying combinations of Nash (who left the Field Museum in late 2006), Pestle (who left in 2009), and Deborah Bekken (then director of government affairs and sponsored programs) supervised or administered a wide range of personnel and volunteers focused on studying, recording, and conserving the Kish materials. The hiring of Karen Wilson as senior research associate was one of the first steps they took in this project and one that, given her expertise in Iraqi archaeology, made possible many of the efforts to follow. Along with Sarah Coleman (then collections assistant), they concentrated on a range of tasks that aimed to assemble a database synthesizing such varied records as field cards, catalog cards, publications, and excavators’ notes.

The successful completion of the Kish Project could not have been accomplished without the generous participation of numerous Field Museum staff members, including Jamie Kelly (now head of collections for Anthropology), J. P. Brown (conservator), Leslie Schramer (intern), and many others. In addition, the Field Museum supported the development and organizational tasks required to host the symposium. Partners at the Ashmolean Museum, principally Roger Moorey and Stephanie Dalley, and the late Donny George of the Iraq Museum were crucial to accomplishing, at least in part, the goal of reuniting the three long-divided Kish collections.

As noted in the introduction, the symposium in 2008 drew together a community of researchers who brought diverse perspectives on the history and relevance of the site of Kish. We thank all the symposium participants for their contributions to this volume. Special thanks are also due to the Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures of the University of Chicago for its support in publishing this volume.

WHERE KINGSHIP DESCENDED FROM HEAVEN

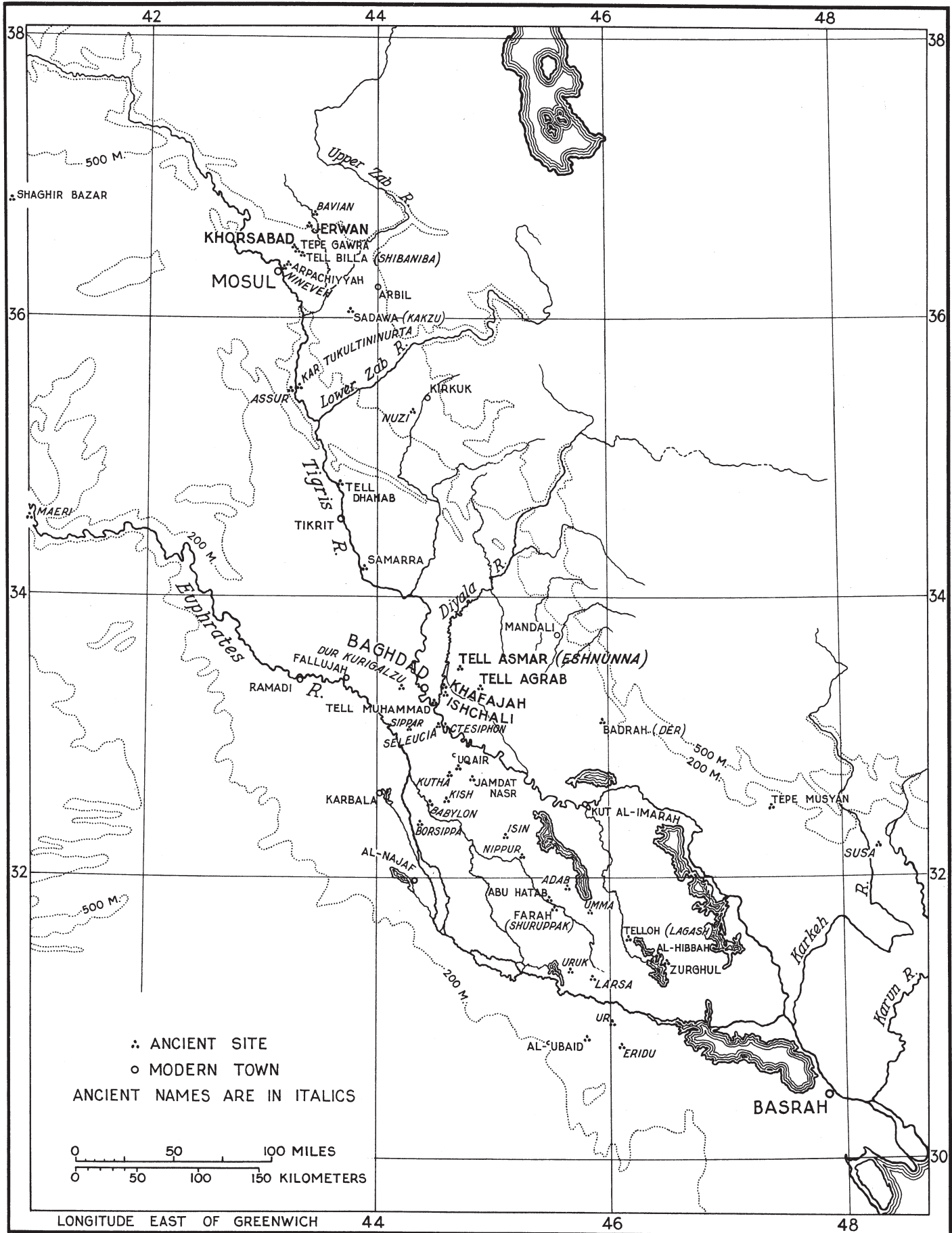


Figure 0.1. Map showing the location of major sites in Mesopotamia (sites excavated by the Iraq Expedition are shown in larger type).

INTRODUCTION

The site of Kish is located on the floodplain of the Euphrates River in modern Iraq, 12 km east of ancient Babylon and 80 km south of Baghdad (fig. 0.1).

The ancient remains consist of more than forty mounds scattered over a 24 km² area divided by the ancient course of the Euphrates River into eastern and western portions (fig. 0.2). The eastern complex (known in ancient times as Hursagkalama) is dominated by a series of mounds known as Ingharra, whereas the ziggurat of Uhaimir towers over the western portions of the city. The earliest remains on the site date back at least as far as 3000 BC; the latest probably can be dated to the seventh century AD.

The ancient city of Kish held an extraordinary position during the formative periods of Mesopotamian history. At that time, it seems to have been the only important city in the northern part of the alluvium, whereas there were several major centers in the south. According to the Sumerian King List, Kish was the first city in which “kingship descended from heaven” after the great flood that destroyed the world. During the third millennium BC, rule over Kish appears to have implied dominance over the entire northern part of the plain, and the title “King of Kish” bestowed prestige analogous to that of the medieval Holy Roman Emperor.

From 1923 to 1933, the Field Museum of Natural History and the University of Oxford conducted archaeological excavations on the site under the absentee directorship of Stephen Langdon of Oxford. Ernest Mackay, protégé of the famed archaeologist Sir Flinders Petrie, served as field director through the season of 1925–26. He was succeeded by Louis Charles Watelin, who supervised excavations for the duration of the expedition. Over the course of ten years of work, the Field Museum–Oxford University expedition explored seventeen different mounds, both inside and outside the ancient boundaries of Kish. As was the custom of the day, the excavations were enormous in scale. Hundreds of men and boys worked at breakneck pace to remove soil to depths of 15 m or more in trenches tens of meters in length on a side.

Initial excavations at Kish centered on the ziggurat and adjacent structures at Uhaimir. These represented a series of temple buildings and rebuildings that ranged in date from the Old Babylonian to the Neo-Babylonian period (ca. 1750–550 BC), with possible traces of earlier remains of the third millennium BC. Later work on Ingharra revealed a massive Neo-Babylonian temple complex, roughly 130 m² in area, with walls preserved to a height of more than 4 m. This temple stood on an Early Dynastic plano-convex brick platform that also supported two adjoining ziggurats or temple towers of the mid-third millennium BC. Broad areas adjacent to the Neo-Babylonian temple were cleared down to plain level in a series of trenches, designated by a veritable alphabet soup of letters, over the course of the excavations. This work revealed habitation levels stretching back to the beginning of the third millennium BC and a cemetery that extended south toward Mound A. Included in this cemetery were a series of remarkably rich burials, each of which contained multiple human skeletons and a wheeled vehicle drawn by a team of bovids or equids. These are often referred to as “chariots” and the burials as “chariot burials,” although the term “cart” more aptly describes these four-wheeled means of conveyance. These graves appear to date to Early Dynastic I/IIIa (ca. 2700–2600 BC) and are the direct predecessors of the richer royal burials at Ur.

Mound A contained a palace of the Early Dynastic III period (ca. 2500 BC), over which was another extensive cemetery. The 154 graves in the A Cemetery were rich in ceramic vessels, copper (weapons, tools, pin, and vessels), and luxury items (e.g., ostrich-eggshell vessels and, in one case, an iron dagger). They date to the end of the Early Dynastic and the beginning of the Akkadian period (the end of the third millennium BC). Graves of the same date found on the adjacent portion of Ingharra appear to have been even more richly furnished, attesting to a stratified society in which wealthier individuals were buried closer to the sacred complex with its ziggurats than were the less well-to-do.

North of Ingharra was a second, somewhat earlier, Early Dynastic palace, dubbed the “Plano-Convex Building” after the shape of the bricks used in its construction. Mound W, to the west of Ingharra, yielded

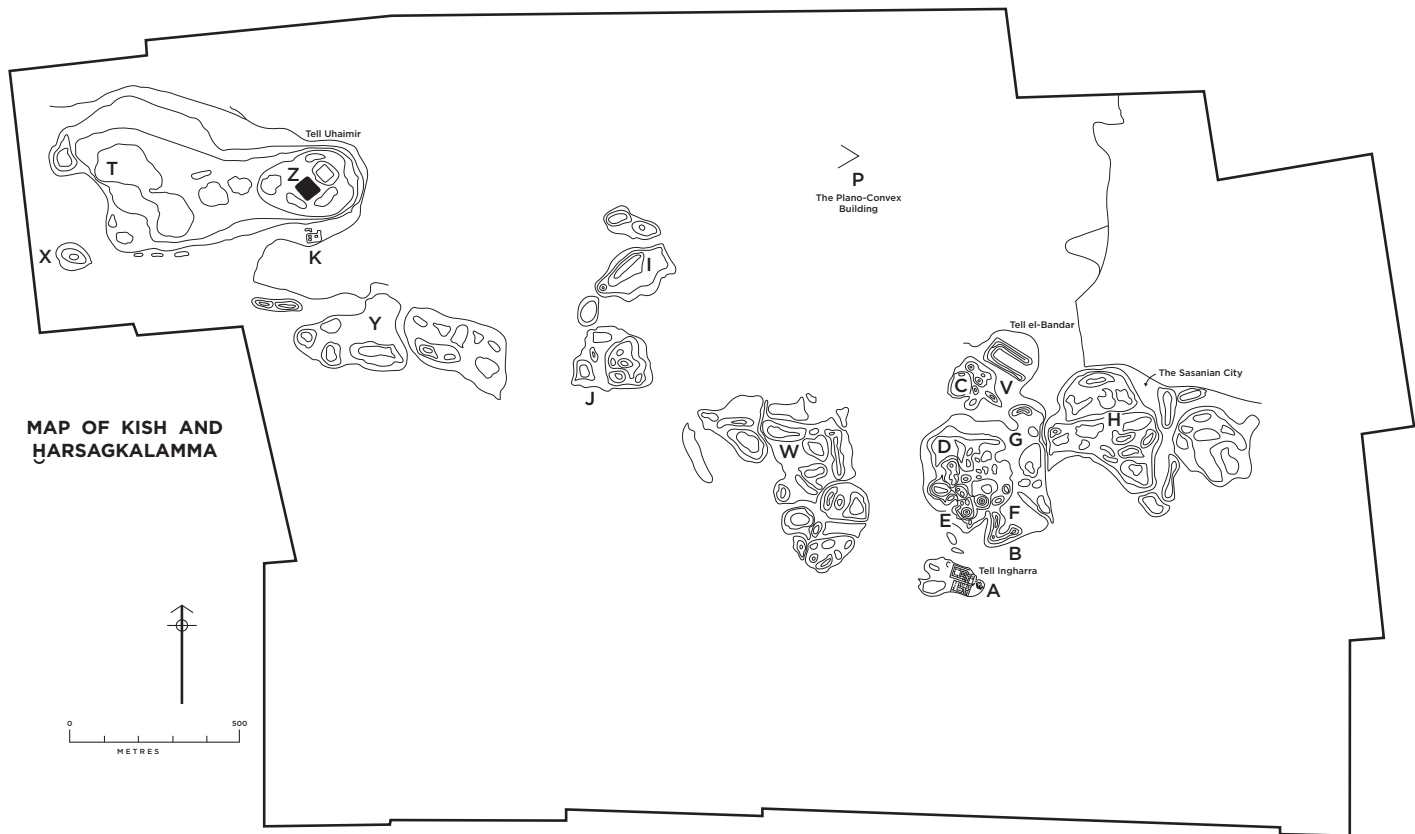


Figure O.2. The tells at Kish (after Mackay 1925).

hundreds of texts of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods (first half of the first millennium BC), as well as graves of the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Tell H, to the east, seems to have been a city of the Sasanian period and included a series of eight “palaces” or elite residences. These were richly decorated with elaborate patterned and figural stucco, datable to the late seventh or first half of the eighth century AD. The expedition also excavated in several other locations—including Jamdat Nasr (type site of the eponymous fourth millennium BC chronological period), located 30 km northeast of Kish—that were deemed to be of interest by sponsors or field directors or both. Here a monumental building, probably administrative in nature, yielded early clay tablets, seal impressions, and richly polychromed pottery vessels.

Pursuant to guidelines established before the first season in 1923, the finds were divided at the end of each season, with the Iraq Museum retaining half of the objects and any one-of-a-kind pieces and the two excavating institutions splitting the remainder; Oxford retained all the inscribed objects, and the Field Museum received most of the archaeological, skeletal, and scientific materials. In a similar fashion, the records of the excavation were dispersed among the three institutions. Duplicate sets of the field registers, cards, and photographs went to the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology and the Field Museum. Such records as the field directors’ reports to Langdon eventually ended up in Chicago, whereas Mackay’s detailed notes on his discoveries are part of the Ashmolean Museum’s archives. While this was standard operating procedure for the time, note-keeping at this project was, as with many other elements of the excavation, subpar. Seton Lloyd perhaps described it best, stating that the site “was badly excavated, the excavations were badly recorded and the records were correspondingly badly published.”¹ The result of the project was thus a single coherent assemblage of material culture arbitrarily divided into three collections separated by thousands of miles. This division occurred not just on the scale of individual contexts (e.g., graves or rooms) but also on the level of individual artifacts, pieces of which were dispatched to the four corners of the globe without note of their common origin.

¹ Lloyd 1969, p. 48.

Beginning in the fall of 2004, the Field Museum undertook a reevaluation of all holdings from Kish. Over the next seven years, with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities (2004–6), the US Department of Defense (2006–11), and three private donors, Field Museum curators, collections managers, and conservators worked to improve our understanding of the site and its contents.

One of the key goals of the effort was to produce a final site report covering the eleven seasons of excavation. This was envisioned as a complex undertaking, assembling the pieces provided by the various records and data sets left—but largely undigested and uninterpreted—by the excavators.

Over the next several years, efforts concentrated on assembling a database that synthesized such varied records as field cards, catalog cards, publications, and excavators' notes to provide as complete a record as possible for everything that had been excavated. A principal goal was the production of a full synthetic catalog of the Kish holdings of the three institutions among which the finds had been divided (Ashmolean Museum, Field Museum, and Iraq Museum) aimed at reconstructing assemblages (with objects from all three locations) by provenience. To this end, teams of up to ten interns worked on data entry and scanning of records and photographs during the summers of 2004 and 2005. The Ashmolean Museum generously sent all their Kish archival material to Chicago so that it could be incorporated into the database. These 16 cubic feet of documents included everything from original expedition field cards, notes, correspondence, and photographs to the entire corpus of Kish documentation compiled over a period of three decades by longtime Kish scholar and Keeper of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum, P. R. S. Moorey. All the collections-related records from the Kish holdings of the Field Museum and Ashmolean Museum were databased (some 20,000 object records), and all the photographs produced by the expedition, numbering more than 5,000 images, were scanned. It is unfortunate that circumstances in Iraq following the invasion in 2003 prevented us from working there. We did, however, profit greatly from the fastidious lists of the Iraq Museum's material compiled by Moorey when he studied the Kish material in Baghdad in the 1970s. It soon became obvious, however, that although the resulting database was of immense value in terms of documenting the artifact collections, it was not going to add significant further information concerning the history of the site to the pioneering studies of McGuire Gibson and Roger Moorey.²

To highlight new research and insights into the material culture from Kish and the importance of the site to Mesopotamian archaeology, the Field Museum held a symposium in November 2008 that brought together an international group of scholars, who presented papers on various aspects of ancient Kish. This volume grew out of that symposium, gathering new work that has been conducted on the material from Kish.

In his contribution (chapter 1), Guillermo Algaze focuses on Trench Y's Early Houses Stratum (EHS), dating to the early third millennium BC (Early Dynastic I), and emphasizes that the EHS provides evidence for intramural burials. These intramural burials at Kish represent one of the earliest instances of an urban mortuary practice that would continue throughout the third and early second millennia BC, and a marked break from burial practices common in the preceding millennia.

In chapter 2, Deborah Bekken examines the 360 animal figurines from Kish at the Field Museum and their variability in style, completeness, and context. She draws comparisons with zoomorphic figurines from other Near Eastern sites and examines how they might have been used—as toys, objects of worship, decorative objects, or magical images, among other uses.

In chapter 3, Stephanie Dalley provides a masterly synthesis of what we know of the history and cults of Kish in the light of the numerous cuneiform sources. She explains which texts throw light on particular aspects of the history and culture and fill in gaps in the archaeological record of the twin cities Kish (Uhai-mir) and Hursagkalama (Ingharra).

In chapter 4, Laure Dussubieux stresses the critical importance of defining the composition of Sasanian glass to advance our understanding of how the glass industry was organized in the Sasanian empire. She suggests that Sasanian glass production may have been centralized at an as-yet-unknown site and that production would have been distributed from this site to different secondary glass workshops, which then transformed the glass into containers that were distributed throughout Iraq and beyond.

² Gibson 1972; Moorey 1978.

INTRODUCTION

In chapter 5, McGuire Gibson presents a long-anticipated report on his efforts at cleaning a portion of the profile of the Y trench in the fall of 1978. Gibson's report represents a substantive contribution to our understanding of the Kish excavations and Watelin's interpretation of the results of his work in the Y trench.

Mark Golitko reports in chapter 6 on the X-ray fluorescence analysis of thirty-two obsidian pieces, the majority of them bladelets or tools on bladelets, in the Field Museum's collections from Jamdat Nasr and Kish. This analysis shows that most of the obsidian from the two sites derives from sources near Bingöl or Lake Van in eastern Turkey.

In chapter 7, Trudy S. Kawami presents a thorough and detailed study of the stuccos from the "Sasanian" palaces uncovered on Mound H. Kawami concludes that the stuccos from Kish—as well as those from other sites in and around Ctesiphon—are post-Sasanian and probably date to the late seventh or early eighth century. She suggests that the Lakhmids, rather than the Umayyids, built, or at least decorated, the Mound H buildings.

In chapter 8, Thomas J. Loebel reports the results of use-wear analysis of thirty chipped stone artifacts from the Field Museum's Kish collections. High-powered magnification of the utilized edges of chipped stone tools has the potential to show polishes, striations, and edge damage arguably indicative of the tools' use on different materials.

In chapter 9, William J. Pestle, Christina Torres-Rouff, and Blair M. Daverman provide a reassessment of the human skeletal remains from Kish. Their invaluable work provides what is probably the only detailed look at the ancient human population of the northern Mesopotamian floodplain currently available.

In chapter 10, James L. Phillips and Michelle E. Ekwall present the results of a study of nearly 11,000 chipped-stone objects and more than 400 ground-stone objects.

Finally, in the "Catalog of Ancient Near Eastern Seals Now in the Collection of the Field Museum," McGuire Gibson, with Margaret Brandt and Leslie Schramer, presents the seals organized by period and subject matter. The catalog provides provenience, details such as material and size, and comparanda for the seals in this important and previously unpublished collection.

ABBREVIATIONS

BIBLIOGRAPHIC

ABL	R. F. Harper, <i>Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collections of the British Museum</i> . 14 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1892–1914
Ashm.	Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford
Bab	Babylon (excavation number of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft expedition to Babylon)
BM	British Museum, London
CAD	I. J. Gelb et al., <i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> . 21 vols. Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956–2010
Camb.	J. N. Strassmaier, <i>Inschriften von Cambyses, König von Babylon (529–521 v. Chr.), von den Thontafeln des Britischen Museums</i> (= Babylonische Texte 8–9). Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer, 1890
FM	Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago
ISAC	Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures, University of Chicago
LB	Liagre Böhl Collection, Leiden
MLC	Morgan Library Collection (siglum of the Yale Babylonian Collection, New Haven)
Nbk.	J. N. Strassmaier, <i>Inschriften von Nabuchodonosor, König von Babylon (604–561 v. Chr.), von den Thontafeln des Britischen Museums</i> (= Babylonische Texte 5–6). Leipzig: Eduard Pfeiffer, 1889
PhBab	Photo Babylon (photo of the Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft expedition to Babylon, 1899–1917)
RIME	<i>The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia: Early Periods</i> . Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990–
RLA	E. Ebeling et al., <i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie</i> . 15 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1932–2018
STT	O. R. Gurney and J. J. Finkelstein, <i>The Sultantepe Tablets</i> . 2 vols. London: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, 1957–64
TCL	Textes cunéiformes du Louvre. Paris: Geuthner, 1910–
VAT	Vorderasiatische Abteilung, Tontafeln (siglum of the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin)

GENERAL

A	adult	EHS	Early Houses Stratum
Akk	Akkadian	esp.	especially
BCR	basalt, Columbia River	et al.	<i>et alii</i> , and others
BL	buccolingual	etc.	<i>et cetera</i> , and so forth
c.	century	eV	electronvolt(s)
Ca	calcium	Fe	iron
ca.	<i>circa</i> , approximately	ff.	and following
CaCO ₃	calcium carbonate	fig(s).	figure(s)
CaSO ₄	calcium sulfate (gypsum)	FWHM	full width at half maximum
cat.	catalog	g	gram(s)
cf.	<i>confer/conferatur</i> , compare	ha	hectare(s)
ch.	chapter	HCl	hydrochloric acid
cm	centimeter(s)	I	infant
CO	cribra orbitalia	ICP-MS	inductively coupled plasma mass spectrometry
d.	died	i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
df	degrees of freedom (statistics)	I-L	Isin-Larsa
dl	detection limit	IM	Iraq Museum, Baghdad
E _{Ce}	electrical conductivity of saturated soil	indet.	indeterminate
ED	Early Dynastic	JN	Jamdat Nasr
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example	JU	juvenile
		K	potassium

ABBREVIATIONS

keV	kiloelectronvolt(s)	P	phosphorus
Kg	kurtosis	p	probability (statistics)
km	kilometer(s)	p(p).	page(s)
KOH	potassium hydroxide	PCB	Plano-Convex Building
LA	laser ablation	PH	porotic hyperostosis
LEH	linear enamel hypoplasia	pH	potential of hydrogen (acidity measure)
M	molar	pl(s).	plate(s)
m	meter(s)	PN	personal name
μA	microampere(s)	ppm	parts per million
MA	middle adult	PPNB	Pre-Pottery Neolithic B
mand.	mandibular	r.	reigned, ruled
max.	maxillary	r ²	coefficient of determination (statistics)
MG	McGuire Gibson	Rb	rubidium
mm	millimeter(s)	rev.	reverse
MMD	mean measure of divergence	RN	royal name
Mn	manganese	sig	significant (statistics)
mo(s).	month(s)	Sk	skewness
Mz	mean grain size	So	sorting
N	normality (chemistry)	sp.	species
n	sample size (statistics)	Sr	strontium
n(n).	note(s)	s.v.	<i>sub verbo</i> , under the word
NA	Neo-Assyrian	SW	southwest
N/A	not available, not applicable	t	test (statistics)
NB	Neo-Babylonian	Ti	titanium
Nb	niobium	vol(s).	volume(s)
NE	neonate	vs.	versus
nm	not measured	XRF	X-ray fluorescence
no(s).	number(s)	YA	young adult
OA	old adult	Zn	zinc
OB	Old Babylonian	Zr	zirconium

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