

AN ASSESSMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN JUNE 2008: AN IRAQI-BRITISH PROJECT

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Introduction

The proposal to develop an Iraqi-British project to protect and promote cultural heritage in Southern Iraq was first mooted at a lunch in the British Museum on 24 September 2007, involving Major-General Barney White-Spunner, Charles Moore, former editor of the Daily Telegraph, Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, and John Curtis, Keeper of the Department of the Middle East at the British Museum. The lunch had been arranged to provide Major-General White-Spunner with recent information about the state of the Iraqi cultural heritage, as he was due to be deployed to Iraq in February 2008 as Commander-in-Chief of British troops and General Officer Commanding the Multi-National Division South-East. At the lunch, it was suggested that the greatest need would be to arrange for the inspection of archaeological sites and, if necessary, to arrange for the protection of them. It is known that archaeological sites particularly in Southern Iraq suffered grievously from looting, particularly after the Second Gulf War. Major-General White-Spunner immediately recognised the importance of this proposal and appointed a project manager, Major Hugo Clarke, to work up a scheme with John Curtis. The project has been made possible by a generous grant from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport,¹ that has covered all costs except those incurred in Iraq, which have been met by the British Army.

The matter was taken forward in meetings at the British Museum on 19 November 2007, 26 November 2007 (at the launch of the British-Iraqi Friendship Society), 9 January 2008, 15 January 2008 (with Colonel Richard Irons, Colonel Crispin Walker, and General Mohan al-Furayji), and 31 January 2008; and at Picton Barracks in Bulford, Wiltshire (Headquarters of the 3 (UK) Division) on 11 December 2007. Initially a list of sites was drawn up² that included some of the most important in Southern Iraq and some that were known to have been very badly looted. The list was as follows: Uruk, Ur, Umma (Tell Jokha), Eridu, Girsu (Telloh), Zabalam, Kisiga (Tell al-al-Lahm), Lagash (Tell al-Hiba), Kisurra, Adab (Bismaya), Isin, Shurruk (Fara), Larsa, Ubaid, Shmeeth, Umm al Aqarib, Bad-tibira and Nina. However, it quickly became clear that it would not be practical to visit all these sites, and it was decided to restrict the list, first to sites in the four provinces that were originally under British military occupation (Basra, Muthanna, Dhi Qar and Maysaan) and secondly to sites that could be easily accessed by air from Basra or from Tallil. Therefore, the final list was as follows: Ur, Ubaid, Eridu, Warka, Larsa, 'Oueili, Lagash and Tell al-Lahm.

¹ Katie Childs, currently on secondment to the British Museum from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, has been of great help in organizing all aspects of this project. We should also like to record thanks to Hannah Boulton, who has handled the media interest in this project with her customary skill and diplomacy.

² The list was drawn up with the assistance of Dr Abbas al-Hussainy, formerly Chairman of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage.

The first part of the project took place in the period 12-16 April 2008 when John Curtis flew out to Basra via Kuwait and was accommodated for several days at Basra Airbase. On Monday 14 April a team consisting of Major Hugo Clarke, Major Rupert Burrige (Royal Engineers), Major Tom Holloway (Media Officer), Corporal Martin Coleman and Corporal Sharron Davey (photographers) and John Curtis flew from Basra Airbase to Tallil Airbase in a Merlin helicopter and, after a short stop on the ground at Tallil, took off again to visit archaeological sites. The helicopter circled around Eridu a few times to take photographs and then landed; it flew over Warka, again with photographs being taken, then flew to where Larsa was believed to be, but the site could not be located (the co-ordinates were incorrect), and then the helicopter returned to Tallil, flying around Ur a few times before landing. From Tallil Airbase the team drove out to Ur for a tour of the site. Photographs from this trip are included in this account.

The purpose of this initial visit was to test the viability of the project. It was established that from a logistical point of view it would indeed be possible to visit by helicopter some or all the sites on the list, provided there was complete agreement from the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage. The next step was for these proposals to be presented to Iraqi officials and the international community so that they could be discussed and, hopefully, approved. Accordingly, a meeting was arranged at the British Museum on 29 April entitled “Workshop to Discuss Cultural Heritage in Southern Iraq”. The workshop, by invitation only, was attended by about 60 people with a special interest in Iraqi cultural heritage. It was particularly gratifying that four Iraqi colleagues were able to come, namely Dr Mufid al-Jazairi, Chairman of the Cultural Committee in the Iraqi Parliament, Mr Bahaa Mayah, Advisor to the Iraqi Minister of Tourism and Antiquities, Dr Ismail Hijara, Liaison Officer for the US Embassy in Baghdad, and Dr Saad Eskander, Director of the Iraqi National Library.³ At the workshop, chaired by Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, introductory addresses were given by Andy Burnham, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Bahaa Mayah, and Major-General Barney White-Spunner. These were followed by an outline of the archaeological project from Major Hugo Clarke and John Curtis respectively. The project was discussed and analysed by the audience, and Dr Margarete van Ess and Professor Elizabeth Stone both made valuable contributions to this discussion. In the afternoon there was a lively debate about the Iraqi National Library, led by Saad Eskander, and concluding remarks were made by Major-General White-Spunner, Bahaa Mayah, and Dr Mufid al-Jazairi. Warm support for the Archaeology Survey was expressed by the Iraqi participants.

With this mandate from the workshop, and with the full approval of the Iraqi State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, the next and main phase of the project was planned for the period 1-10 June 2008. It was intended that during this period condition assessments should be undertaken at eight different archaeological sites, namely Ur, Eridu, Ubaid, Warka, Larsa, Tell el-‘Oueili, Lagash and Tell al-Lahm. If appropriate, recommendations would be made to improve conditions at these sites. With this brief in mind, Dr Margarete van Ess, the Director of the German Archaeological Institute excavations at Warka, and Professor Elizabeth Stone of Stony Brook University, New York, an

³ Also invited were Dr Amira Edan (Director of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage), Mr Qais Hussein Raheed (Director of Excavations, SBOAH), Dr Etimad Y. al-Qasiri, (Director of Heritage, SBOAH), Mr Qahtan A. Abdul-Hussein (Director of Basra Museum), and Mr Burhan A. Rahdi (Director of Wasit Museum), but largely due to difficulties in obtaining visas they were unable to come.

internationally recognised authority on the use of satellite imagery in Iraqi archaeology, were invited to join the British Museum team of John Curtis and Paul Collins. It was anticipated that the team would be joined by Iraqi colleagues whose participation in the project was essential and without whose assistance it could not have gone ahead.

For the nights of 3-4 and 7-8 June the team was accommodated at Multi-National Division South-East Headquarters in Basra Airport, and for the nights of 5-6 June, in Tallil Airbase.

The site inspections were undertaken over three days (5-7 June), flying out of Tallil in a Merlin helicopter. We were joined by three Iraqi colleagues: Mr Qais Hussein Raheed, Director of Investigations and Excavations, State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, and Mr Mehsin Ali, Deputy Director of Iraq Museums, joined us in Basra; and Mr Abdulmir M. al Hamdani, the Inspector of Antiquities for Nasiriya Province, joined us at Tallil. They made an invaluable contribution to the project. It had been hoped that Mr Qasim Abdel Hameed al-Basri would also be able to accompany us, but unfortunately there was no room on the helicopter and he generously offered to stay behind. In fact, on each of the three days there were twenty-five people in the helicopter, namely five crew,⁴ Major Hugo Clarke, Major Rupert Burrige, a seven-man protection force,⁵ a signaller,⁶ a medic,⁷ the two-person combat camera team,⁸ the three Iraqi archaeologists, and the four-person British Museum team. On the first day, when we flew from Basra to Tallil and, after a pause, out to Eridu, we did not arrive at the site until 11.00 a.m. by which time it was uncomfortably hot and there was a strong wind blowing, affecting visibility and impairing our ability to work efficiently on the site. Before leaving Basra, on 3 June, it had been 48.5° C, and although we did not note the temperature at Eridu the suspicion is that it was hotter. Therefore, on the two succeeding days we got up at 3.00 a.m. and were conducting our first site assessments at 4.30 a.m. or shortly thereafter, when it was just becoming light, and the helicopter assessments were completed by mid-morning. The plan to undertake site assessments was entirely successful in that we were able to land at, and visit, all the sites on the reduced list, namely Eridu and Ur on the first day (5 June), Warka, Ubaid, and Ur again on the second day (6 June), and 'Oueili, Larsa, Lagash and Tell al-Lahm on the third day (7 June). The helicopter crew was able to locate the sites instantly thanks to precise co-ordinates supplied by Elizabeth Stone. At each site great care was taken to land either some distance away from the mound or in an area of the site that was not archaeologically sensitive (e.g. at Warka). Similarly, when we were circling sites in order to take photographs the helicopter remained at a sufficient height to avoid stirring up clouds of dust.

For logistical and military reasons it was only possible to spend a limited time at each site. This meant that only in the case of very small sites (e.g. Ubaid) was it possible to look all around the main mound, and even here the team would have benefited from spending more time at the site. Because of these time constraints the visit to each site had to be carefully planned, and the route taken around the site was plotted in each case by

⁴ Flt Lt Paul Rothwell, Flt Lt Charlie Young, Flt Lt Phil Holdcroft, Sgt Jon Bailey, Sgt Cailean Logan.

⁵ Capt Chris Miles, Sgt Lee Jones, Cpl Jacky Humble, L Cpl Jay Camepa, L Cpl Mohammed Seru, Fus Lee Monaher, Fus Michael Clark.

⁶ L Cpl Tom Stokes or L Cpl Rutherford.

⁷ Pte Steven Still.

⁸ Cpl Sharron Davey, Cpl Andy Holmes.

Elizabeth Stone with her own GPS equipment. In spite of the restricted nature of the inspection at the larger sites (e.g. Larsa, Lagash, Tell al-Lahm), it is felt that the team obtained a reasonably good idea of the situation at each site. In each case we were looking for evidence of looting, and when it might have occurred; for evidence of military damage, whether before or after the coalition invasion in March 2003; and for evidence of damage deriving from nearly thirty years of neglect. In each case, the conclusions are summarised below. In addition to these visual *ad hoc* assessments, we were fortunate to be accompanied by two RAF photographers (the combat camera team) who compiled as complete a record as possible, both from the air and on the ground. Sharron Davey was responsible for video-filming, and Andy Holmes (previously, on 14 April, Martin Coleman) for static photographs. Altogether some 800 photographs were taken, and amongst them are some of the best photographs ever taken of the sites in question. They are such a valuable resource that it is important that they be widely available as soon as possible, and they will be posted on a website without delay. In addition to visiting the eight sites on the list, we were also able, on the afternoon of Friday 6 June, to drive by car around the Tallil airbase looking for sites that had been surveyed by Henry Wright in 1966. We located one of them (see below).

Catalogue of the sites in the order in which they were visited

Tell Abu Shahrain (Eridu): Visited 11.00-13.07, 5 June, 2008

The seven mounds of Eridu lie about 24 km south-west of Ur. Excavations were conducted by a number of early explorers (J. E. Taylor 1855; R. Campbell Thompson 1918; H. R. Hall 1919) with a major investigation led by Fuad Safar between 1946 and 1949 on behalf of the Iraqi Directorate General of Antiquities.

J. E. Taylor, "Notes on Abu Shahrain and Tell el Lahm", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15 (1855), pp. 404-15; R. Campbell Thompson, "The British Museum excavations at Abu Shahrain in Mesopotamia in 1918", *Archaeologia* 70 (1920), pp. 101-144; J. Oates, "Ur and Eridu: The Prehistory", *Iraq* 22 (1960), pp. 32-50; S. Lloyd, "Abu Shahrain: A Memorandum", *Iraq* 36 (1974), pp. 129-38; F. Safar, M. A. Mustafa and S. Lloyd, *Eridu* (Baghdad 1981).

In Sumerian literature Eridu is claimed as one of the most ancient cities in Mesopotamia, said to antedate the mythical Flood and to be the first city to hold kingship. Eighteen successive levels of mud-brick temple architecture, dating from the Early Ubaid to the Late Uruk periods, were exposed during the 1940s excavations on Mound 1; the painted pottery recovered provided the basis for the fourfold division of the Ubaid period. An extensive Ubaid period cemetery was also excavated. The remains of a ziggurat of the Ur III period dominate the centre of the mound. Early Dynastic palaces were excavated on mound 2.

The helicopter landed to the north-east of Mound 1. The visit began at a watchtower presumed to have been erected by the Italians in late 2003. The team climbed to the top of the mound; there is evidence of erosion across the site, especially in two deep gulleys, which has revealed inscribed bricks. The inspection proceeded to the remains of the dig-house located on the eastern side of the mound. The lower walls of the dig-house, built from ancient baked bricks, could be traced although no examples of inscribed bricks, visible within the structure in 2003, could be seen. Related to these findings is the report, made by Professor Stefano Seminaria, at an event in the Italian

Cultural Institute in London on 29 March 2006 announcing the inauguration of the Baghdad Virtual Museum. He related that, on 20 or 21 March 2006, Professor Giovanni Pettinato and Professor Silvia Chiodi had discovered at Eridu a tablet covered with bitumen. They had looked further and found 500 tablets “disturbed by an explosion”. The tablets were said to be literary, historical and lexical. The historical tablets dated from the time of Eannatum, and the latest tablets were from the time of Amar-Suen. This information, or variations of it, was also circulated on various Italian and international websites. Following these revelations, Dr Donny George, then Chairman of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage, sent inspectors to Eridu, who reported back that there were no tablets on the surface of the site, but only fragments of stamped bricks from the site of Eridu itself and from sites surrounding Eridu such as Ur. On 19 July 2006, at the 52^{ème} *Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* in Münster, Professor Pettinato reported that he had actually only found some 70 stamped bricks at Eridu. It seems, then, that what Pettinato and Chiodi actually found were stamped bricks used to build the modern Eridu dig-house.⁹

There is no evidence of looting or of recent visits to the site – car tracks were visible near a neighbouring canal and the site fence, which was not visited; from the air, it was possible to see the posts of the fence. Surface scraping close to the fence is presumably the result of field irrigation. Two site guards, who were not present during the inspection, are based at a village some distance from the mound.

Tell el-Muqayyar (Ur): Visited 13.40-17.00, 5 June 2008; 14.00-15.30, 6 June 2008

J. E. Taylor investigated the ziggurat in 1854; H. R. Hall undertook some excavations in 1918-19; and C. L. Woolley directed the Joint Expedition of the British Museum and the University of Pennsylvania Museum from 1922 to 1934.

C. L. Woolley *et al.*, *Ur Excavations I-X* (London and Philadelphia, PA 1927-76); *Ur Excavations Texts I-IX* (London and Philadelphia, PA 1928-1976); J. Oates, “Ur and Eridu: The Prehistory”, *Iraq* 22 (1960), pp. 32-50; C. L. Woolley and P. R. S. Moorey, *Ur of the Chaldees* (London 1982).

Ur was occupied from the Ubaid period (c. 4500 BC) to the end of the fourth century BC. A large cemetery dating from the Uruk to Early Dynastic periods was partly excavated and included the famous “Royal Graves” (c. 2500 BC) and the Third Dynasty of Ur royal tombs (c. 2100 BC). Many of the excavated public buildings date to the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur when the city was the centre of a major kingdom dominating southern Mesopotamia. Private housing of the Old Babylonian period (c. 2000-1600 BC) was revealed, as were monumental buildings of the Kassite period (c. 1500-1200 BC). The city was the focus of construction and restoration by Nebuchadnezzar II and Nabonidus during the sixth century BC.

⁹ In his memoirs (*The Interval – A Life in Near Eastern Archaeology*, Oxford 1986, p. 113), Seton Lloyd wrote of “the almost total lack of building material” for “setting up base” at Eridu: “To solve this we [Lloyd and Safar] felt justified in looting the ruins of Woolley’s old expedition-house at Ur, ten miles away, and bringing in lorry-loads of baked bricks – many of them stamped with royal names, but beautifully intact”.

The inspection began at the ziggurat, which is marked on the south-eastern façade with bullet, shell and shrapnel holes; this damage appears to have occurred in 1991.¹⁰ From the ziggurat the inspection moved to the following areas of the site.

Temple of E-Dublal-mah. This building has suffered considerably from erosion of the brickwork, especially at the corners of the building. A protective layer of concrete, placed over the top of the walls, may have exacerbated problems because of its weight and by directing rainwater against the brickwork beneath, leading to undercutting. The result is the collapse of certain sections of brickwork which has left a gaping hole in the northwest corner. Four large bomb craters close to the temple, which were observed in 1992, have since been filled in.¹¹

Palace of E-Hursag. The walls were restored in 1961 using ancient and modern bricks. There have been some areas of collapse, especially in the north-west area of the building.

Third Dynasty of Ur Mausolea. A line of concertina razor wire limits access to the area of the tombs, although this has been breached in places. There is some collapse and erosion of walls, including damage caused by bird droppings. The wooden props supporting the arches in the tomb of Shulgi appeared to be in a good condition with no evidence of termite activity. Access to this tomb is blocked by razor wire laid on the modern steps leading down to the ancient stairs. Part of the roof of the Amar-Suen tomb had collapsed approximately thirty years ago. The roof of another tomb has also collapsed in places, resulting in two significant holes which are in urgent need of specialist conservation/restoration work.

Southern end of the site. An area of houses was reconstructed in 1999 in preparation for a planned visit by Pope John Paul II, who wished to worship in the supposed birthplace of Abraham.¹² Alongside are the remains of brick houses of the Isin-Larsa period which have suffered heavily from erosion. The relationship of the reconstructed houses to the original plan of the excavated buildings should be a subject for study. A crater north-east of the Old Babylonian houses was noted – this was caused by a rocket in February 2008. It was reported by the site guard that three rockets landed at Ur in April 2008; of these, one fell near the guard's house and another some 23 m south-east of the ziggurat.

“Flood Pit”. Some natural collapse and erosion.

Giparu. A small section of the building has been reconstructed using ancient bricks to form the skin of casemate walls filled with ancient and modern bricks and concrete. Several holes were noted in the brick skin.

¹⁰ See BM report 2007:

http://www.britishmuseum.org/the_museum/news_and_press_releases/statements/iraq_war/summary_of_activity_2007.aspx.

¹¹ In 1991 a photograph was released by the United States Department of Defense showing two Iraqi MiG-21 fighter planes positioned in front of the Ur Ziggurat. It has been suggested that the bomb craters resulted from the targeting of these planes by coalition forces. However, the position of the craters does not correspond with the alleged location of the planes, raising the possibility that something other than the planes was being targeted.

¹² The visit was cancelled due to the worsening political situation (sanctions and an air exclusion zone had been in place since 1990).

North-east of the main site. The Visitor Control Centre to Tallil Airbase remains in position on the area known as Diqdiqqa (an ancient suburb of Ur).¹³ A modern gateway (large arch) has been constructed at the site entrance; it lies approximately 100 m from the intersection with the main road towards Tallil Airbase.

Until recently there was unrestricted access to the archaeological site of Ur for coalition troops based at Tallil, and it is suspected that large numbers of troops wandering around the site at will did some damage. Now, however, the site is out of bounds and special permission is needed to visit it.

Warka (Uruk): Visited 04.50-07.45, 6 June, 2006

Uruk is located about 15 km east of modern Samawa. W. K. Loftus excavated at Warka in 1850 and 1854. Major German excavations began in 1912 under J. Jordan, and recommenced after World War I, in 1928, under the direction of Jordan, A. Nöldeke, E. Heinrich, and H. J. Lenzen. Work was halted in 1941 and resumed under Lenzen from 1954 to 1967 and under H. J. Schmidt until 1977. R. M. Boehmer directed excavations from 1980 to 1990 and M. van Ess in 2001 and 2002.

W. K. Loftus, *Travels and Researches in Chaldea and Susiana* (London, 1857); J. E. Curtis, "Loftus' Parthian cemetery at Warka", *Akten des VII. Internationalen Kongresses für Iranische Kunst und Archäologie : München, 7.-10. September 1976* (Berlin 1979), pp. 309-17; Excavation reports: *UVB (Uruk vorläufiger Bericht)*, *ADFU (Ausgrabungen der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft in Uruk-Warka)* and *AUWE (Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka, Endberichte)*; R. M. Boehmer, "Uruk 1980-1990: A Progress Report", *Antiquity* 65 (1991), pp. 465-78.

Uruk was occupied from the Late Ubaid period (c. 4000 BC) until the seventh century AD. Immense ceremonial/religious architecture and associated remains, including the world's earliest writing, dating to c. 3500-3000 BC (the so-called Late Uruk period) have been excavated. Uruk remained a major city into the second millennium BC, with repeated rebuildings of the temple precinct of Eanna. After a decline around 1700 BC, the settlement regained something of its status in the later second and first millennia BC including major buildings constructed during the Seleucid and Parthian periods, such as the Bit Resh and Gareus temples. There is also an extensive Parthian cemetery.

The helicopter landed in square J XV, next to the track leading to the guard's house. The inspection began at the guard's house and moved to the Eanna ziggurat. The team proceeded through the Late Uruk "temples" (Temple C and the Pillar Hall) to the Stone Cone Mosaic Temple and, passing at the edge of Bit Resh, on to the Anu Ziggurat and the Stone Temple. The major problem at the site is erosion. The expedition house remains in a good condition although termites have attacked wooden shelving in a work room, and plastic bags holding sherds have disintegrated. The fence surrounding the site had been renewed with Japanese funding in 2006. There is no evidence of looting at the site, which is protected by 15 SPF (Special Protection Force) personnel (one of whom arrived to check the presence of the inspection team) and an on-site guard (the German institutional system is able to maintain constant payments for the on-site guard).

¹³ See note 10.

Tell al-'Ubaid: Visited 08.05-09.05, 6 June, 2008

The site lies 6 km west of Ur. Excavations were conducted by H. R. Hall in 1919, C. L. Woolley in 1923-4, and P. Delougaz and S. Lloyd in 1937.

H. R. Hall and C. L. Woolley, *Ur Excavations I: Al-'Ubaid* (Oxford 1927); P. Delougaz, "A Short Investigation of the Temple at Al-'Ubaid", *Iraq* 5 (1938), pp. 1-11.

Late Ubaid period (*c.* 4000 BC) modest houses were uncovered with typical painted pottery. To the south-west of the site an extensive cemetery was revealed; graves date to the Ubaid period, and to the Early Dynastic period (*c.* 2900-2350 BC). The remains of a mud-brick temple platform and staircase dating from Early Dynastic III (*c.* 2500 BC) to the Third Dynasty of Ur (*c.* 2000 BC) were excavated. The Early Dynastic III temple had not survived, but decorative elements of the building were found at the base of the platform, including copper lions with bitumen cores and a copper panel showing the lion-headed eagle Imdugud.

The helicopter landed to the south-west of the mound. The tell was extensively damaged by military installations when it was established as an Iraqi command post in early 2003: a four-metre square hollow (now about 1.5 m deep) on the summit of the mound was probably the position of a radar station. Radiating from the base of the mound are up to 10 vehicle bays (measuring approximately 17.5 x 4 m) formed by parallel mounds of earth now about 1.5 m high. There were also numerous other hollows and pits around the mound, presumably dug by the military. There were no obvious signs of looting. The site is fenced but the fence has been broken in at least two places – there is no obvious gate. At least four firing positions facing towards the south-east were identified within the fenced area. A number of vehicle tracks crossed the site. There are no designated guards for Ubaid but guards from Ur protect the site along with SPF personnel. The site was threatened in 2005 by the proposed construction of twelve brick factories to the north. Opposition to this project by the Inspector of Antiquities, Mr A. Hamdani, was ultimately successful but resulted in his imprisonment on trumped-up charges from the end of March to the beginning of July 2006.

Tallil Airbase: Visited together with Ur 16.15-17.15, 6 June, 2008

Tallil Airbase, used by the coalition forces, is one of the largest military airbases in the Middle East (*c.* 5.9 km x 4.8 km).¹⁴ Three sites recorded in a survey of the region by Henry Wright in 1969 (numbered 2, 14 and 81 in the published report) are now located within the perimeter of Tallil Airbase. Site 2 was located by the inspection team in the southern centre of the airbase, close to the southernmost of the two runways; access was restricted because of the possible presence of unexploded munitions, but M. van Ess noted Old Babylonian and Middle Babylonian pottery. In the expected location of Site 14 (viewed only from a distance) were what A. Hamdani described as the remains of a nineteenth century village. We were not able to inspect Site 81. A fourth site, No. 13 in the survey, lies outside the perimeter fence and was not visited, but satellite images suggest that it was bulldozed between August 2004 and August 2005.

¹⁴ See note 10.

H. T. Wright, "The southern margins of Sumer", in R. McC. Adams (ed.), *Heartland of Cities* (Chicago and London, 1981), pp. 295-345.

Tell el-'Oueili: Visited 04.30-05.05, 7 June, 2008

In 1967, Tell el-'Oueili was discovered 3 km south-east of the major site of Larsa, and excavations were undertaken by J.-L. Huot and J.-D. Forest from 1976 to 1989.

J.-L. Huot, "Ubaidian village of Lower Mesopotamia: Permanence and evolution from Ubaid 0 to Ubaid 4, as seen from Tell el-'Oueili", in E. F. Henrickson and I. Thuesen (eds.), *Upon This Foundation: The Ubaid Reconsidered* (Copenhagen 1989), pp. 19-42; J.-L. Huot *et al.*, *'Oueili, Travaux de 1985* (Paris, 1991); J. L. Huot *et al.*, *'Oueili, Travaux de 1987-1989* (Paris 1996).

Six periods were identified, dating from Ubaid 0 (c. 6000 BC) to Ubaid 5 (c. 4000 BC), and domestic architecture and structures identified as granaries and silos were revealed.

The site was looted in 2003 and there are extensive remains of looter pits, now filled with sand, visible across much of the mound. There is no evidence of recent looting. The site has no fence, guard tower or designated guard. There is a surface scatter of Ubaid-period sherds, sickles and obsidian blades.

Tell Senkereh (Larsa): Visited 05.15-06.12, 7 June, 2008

Larsa lies approximately 20 km south-west of Uruk. Excavations have been conducted at the site by W. K. Loftus (1854), W. Andrae (1903), A. Parrot (1933, 1967), J.-C. Margueron (1967-70) and J.-L. Huot (1976-91).

W. K. Loftus, *Travels and Researches in Chaldaeia and Susiana* (London, 1857); J.-L. Huot, *Larsa, Travaux de 1985* (Paris, 1989); J.-L. Huot, *Larsa, Travaux de 1987 et 1989* (Beirut, 2003).

Although some evidence suggests the site was occupied during the Ubaid period, the earliest excavated phases are Early Dynastic in date (c. 2900-2350 BC). In the early second millennium BC the city rose to political prominence, and it remained a major settlement until the Parthian period. Excavations have concentrated on the E-Babbar temple and ziggurat. Several large houses of the Old Babylonian period were also uncovered.

The site was extensively looted in 2003; at the end of that year a guard tower was erected and the presence of a guard deterred further looting. The helicopter landed to the east of the E-Babbar mound and the team moved to the guard tower; this had been used for target practice from the north-east which had peppered the tower with holes – the tower had not been visited for some time as demonstrated by a nest with a young hawk within the observation platform. There are at least five designated guards for the site, based at Nasiriya, but none was present during the inspection visit. From the top of the E-Babbar and neighbouring smaller mounds there was little evidence of looting holes, and no clear evidence of recent looting. Large areas of the site are now covered with sand or eroded brick. The site is unfenced.

Tell al-Hiba (Lagash): Visited 06.33-08.10, 7 June, 2008

Lagash is one of the largest mounds in the Ancient Near East (some 600 hectares). The earliest excavations were undertaken by R. Koldewey in 1887. Six field seasons were conducted by D. P. Hansen starting in 1968.

D. P. Hansen, "Al-Hiba, 1968-1969: A preliminary report", *Artibus Asiae* 33/4 (1970), pp. 243-58; D. P. Hansen, "Al-Hiba, 1970-1971: A preliminary report", *Artibus Asiae* 35/1-2 (1973), pp. 62-70; E. Carter, "A surface survey of Lagash, al-Hiba, 1984", *Sumer* 46/1-2 (1989-90), pp. 60-3; D. P. Hansen, "Royal building activity at Sumerian Lagash in the Early Dynastic Period", *Biblical Archaeologist* 55 (1992), pp. 206-11.

Some evidence suggests an Ubaid and Uruk occupation but the city became important in the Early Dynastic period (c. 2900-2350 BC) with substantial temple architecture; the settlement was one of three urban centres that comprised the state of Lagash, the others being Girsu (modern Telloh, 25 km to the north-west) and Nina-Sirara (modern Zurghul, 10 km to the south-east). Al-Hiba was largely abandoned after c. 2350 BC, with only limited occupation at the site until around 1800 BC when it was completely deserted.

The helicopter landed near excavated Area B. The archaeological remains are in a good state of preservation. The site, which is unfenced, is under the strong protection of the Beni Said tribe and has seven guards from two villages: Ali Khan and Rebaih. The team was met by the local guard and villagers who reported that there had been some small-scale looting in 2003 by people from the town of Fajr but none since that date.

Tell al-Lahm (Kisiga): Visited 08.30-10.00, 7 June, 2008

Located about 38 km to the south-east of Ur, Kisiga is about twice the size of Eridu. Brief excavations were carried out by J. E. Taylor in 1855 and by R. Campbell Thompson in 1918. The most recent work at the site was undertaken by Fuad Safar in 1949 after local people informed him that Bedouin tribes had dug defensive pits and trenches on the mound.

J. E. Taylor, "Notes on Abu Shahrein and Tel el Lahm", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 15 (1855), pp. 404-15; F. Safar, "Soundings at Tell Al-Laham", *Sumer* 5 (1949), pp. 154-64.

The settlement dates from the Early Dynastic to the end of the Kassite period. The main mound was used as a cemetery throughout much of the first millennium BC.

The helicopter landed on the north-eastern side of the mound. The inspection team moved west across the mound to a large gully (oriented east-west). The south-western side and summit of the mound are covered by looter holes – pithos and bath-tub burials were the main attraction for the looters. Silt filled many of the holes. Sherds of Middle Babylonian, Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid date are visible on the surface of the mound. The site has been badly damaged by military activity and the remains of tank emplacements (17 x 3.4 m) and other military installations such as a circular cutting (some 9 m in diameter) and a rectangular feature (14 x 11 m) scar the large gully. These military features (at least some of which were visible in photographs of the site dating to 1992) are filled with silt. The appearance of the puddled mud in the bottom of the looters' holes was similar to that in the bottom of the military installations, suggesting that the looters' holes were not recent and probably dated from 2003. The presence of US forces

at Tell al-Lahm is demonstrated by numerous military food packages scattered on the surface. The site is unfenced. A large number of SPF personnel arrived in three vehicles after the team had been at the site for an hour.

Conclusions

The team found that the conditions were different at each site, so it is difficult (and dangerous) to generalise. Guards were present at three sites (Ur, Uruk and Lagash), and SPF police came to Tell al-Lahm. Watchtowers had been erected (apparently towards the end of 2003) at Eridu and Larsa, but no guards appeared at these sites (nor did they at the small sites of Ubaid and Tell el-'Oueili). The main purpose of the mission was to assess damage at the sites, and the damage observed can be categorised under four headings.

1. *Damage resulting from turning the sites into military defensive positions.* This was observed both at Tell al-Lahm and Ubaid, where in each case a command post had been established at the top of the site (one or more dug-out positions) and shelters for vehicles (tanks or armoured personnel carriers) had been created between banks of earth around the base of the mound. The construction of these defensive positions has inevitably necessitated the digging away of (presumably) previously undisturbed archaeological deposits, but it is not possible to quantify the extent of this damage. It is believed that these defensive works were created by the Iraq army in the period leading up to the coalition invasion of 2003. Tell al-'Ubaid at least occupies a strategic position overlooking the main north-south road that sweeps up from Kuwait, past Tallil, and ultimately goes to Baghdad.

2. *Damage to sites resulting from coalition activities.* Apart from Ur, the presence of coalition troops was noted only at Tell al-Lahm, attested by discarded American food wrappers. There was no certain evidence to identify any of the military damage at Tell al-Lahm (see above) or the looting at Tell al-Lahm (see below) with the occupation of the site by coalition forces, but it cannot be discounted. In the context of sites being damaged by a military presence we must mention Ur, which is within the perimeter fence surrounding Tallil airbase and until very recently was openly accessible to all coalition troops on the airbase. This meant that in the absence of other types of recreation large numbers of coalition troops visited Ur, and wandered at will around the site. There is no suggestion that any deliberate or malicious damage was caused, but large numbers of visitors wandering at will around the site in an uncontrolled fashion, without being restricted to designated paths or walkways, has inevitably done some damage, particularly in the area of the Third Dynasty of Ur tombs.

3. *Damage from looting.* There were clear indications of looting holes at Larsa, Tell el-'Oueili, Tell al-Lahm, and Lagash, and at Eridu inscribed bricks were looted from the collapsed dig-house. There were no signs of looting at Ur, Ubaid or Warka. It is difficult to put an exact date on the looting, but at Larsa, Tell el-'Oueili and Lagash it seemed to have occurred some time ago (and at Lagash was of limited extent), because the holes are now scarcely visible. At Tell al-Lahm, on the other hand, the holes have the appearance of being relatively fresh, with puddled mud at the bottom of each hole. However, it was

then noticed that the military installations at Tell al-Lahm, which were thought to date from 2003, had the same appearance. Therefore, it is likely that the looting holes at Tell al-Lahm are of similar date, i.e. 2003 or shortly thereafter. To sum up, no certain evidence for recent looting was found at any of the sites.

4. *Damage from neglect.* It is well known that for more than 25 years (since the beginning of the Iraq-Iran War) there has been underinvestment in the Iraqi cultural heritage, with the result that many sites and monuments are now suffering from neglect. This is a process that has accelerated since March 2003. It is particularly noticeable at Ur where buildings reconstructed in the 1960s and 1970s are now in poor condition and in urgent need of repair. Also, damage from erosion was noted at a number of sites, particularly Eridu and Tell al-Lahm, and this should be the subject of detailed archaeological investigation as soon as possible.

Measures that need to be undertaken urgently could include repairing the site fence at Ur and Ubaid, building a new fence around the Third Dynasty of Ur tombs and introducing signage and designated walkways at Ur. Some of the buildings at Ur (both ancient and reconstructed structures) should be repaired to arrest their deteriorating condition.

Although this survey seems to indicate that there has been no looting during the last few years, it should be noted that we visited only eight sites and these are all in the southern part of Iraq. We were not even able to visit sites in the north part of Thi Qar province (for example Umma, Zabalam, Adab and Girsu), and the situation at those sites, as well as at sites in the more northerly provinces of Qadisiyah, Wasit and Babil, might be completely different. Lastly, we should remember that the sites visited may not even be typical for the southern region.