



UR REGION ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT

REPORT 2013

Ur Region Archaeology Project

Founder Donors 2013

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Welcome

Welcome to the first report of the Ur Region Archaeology Project. It was a wonderful moment to stand on top of the ancient mounds of Tell Khaiber on 14 March 2013 when the first spadeful of soil was removed. After a challenging few months the project is now well and truly underway thanks to the generous support of all those individuals and institutions listed opposite. I record here my particular thanks to our Founder Donors: Baron Lorne Thyssen, Gulfsands Petroleum, the British Institute for the Study of Iraq, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

This is the first British archaeology project to take place in Iraq proper for over twenty years. Our prime purpose is of course archaeological research: to explore the rich and unique ancient heritage of Iraq. We chose the important Ur region, where almost no excavation has taken place since the 1940s, and in this report, you will find a summary of what we have found so far at Tell Khaiber,

namely, a massive building, perhaps a governor's residence or even a temple, dating to around 1,900 BC.

But we also have further aims. As expressed in our original vision for the project, we intend to:

- *Enhance the profile of Iraq's incomparable heritage, at home and abroad;*
- *Encourage and support a new generation of Iraqi archaeologists;*
- *Rekindle a sense of pride in a history shared by all Iraqis;*
- *Show that southern Iraq is once again a good place to work.*

These are long-term and ambitious goals, and we are only at the start of the project. In the following pages, you will see how much progress has already been made.

Dr. Jane Moon

Bridging the canal next to Tell Khaiber.



Research: mapping Tell Khaiber

Contour mapping shows where other buildings may lie.

Geophysical prospection confirms sub-surface presence of large walls.

Surface collection of artefacts highlights specialised areas.

Contour survey

One of the first things all archaeologists need to do when starting a new excavation is to map their site in detail. In 2013, we carried out a detailed contour survey of Tell Khaiber 1, using a digital mapping instrument. Over five hectares were mapped with contour lines twenty centimetres apart. This has revealed the details of the site, including small bumps away from the main mound that protrude above the alluvium. The contour map is particularly useful in combination with the data from the geophysics and surface collection in helping us understand how the site formed and what we will encounter under the surface.

Geophysics

We also carried out a geophysical survey over two hectares using a fluxgate gradiometre, covering the area where the large building was visible from satellite photographs. The instrument measures the differential magnetism of buried soil to detect features buried in the top metre of the site. Although analysis of the results is continuing, they confirm the presence of the large rectangular building. In combination with the satellite photographs, the full analysis of this data will enable us to map many of the features of the structure and to target excavation on specific parts of the building.

Surface collection

The surface of Tell Khaiber is covered with a litter of broken pottery, slag, bricks and other objects. We completed a systematic collection of this material, using collection points laid out at approximately 20 metre intervals. At each collection point, every item was retrieved within an area

of 20 square metres (defined by a circle with a radius of 2.52 metres). In total 133 collections were made across Tell Khaiber 1. When these are mapped out, we can immediately see areas that were probably used for refuse disposal, with high densities of material concentrated on small raised areas.

As we understand more about the pottery from the site, it may be possible to see which parts of the site were occupied at different dates and whether there were specific activities carried out in some places, such as pottery manufacture.

1. Walking the lines of the gradiometre survey.
2. Surveying Tell Khaiber with the total station theodolite.
3. Mapping the details with our Toughbook tablet PCs.
4. Systematic collection of artefacts from the surface.



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Research: excavating Tell Khaiber

The discovery of a large monumental building was the highlight of this year's work.

Covering at least 4,000 square metres, it is one of the largest Old Babylonian buildings uncovered in southern Iraq.

The monumental building visible on the satellite image of Tell Khaiber 1 was the obvious place to start our investigations. We needed to locate it on the ground, establish its date and gain some idea of the state of preservation—in other words, start to get to know it. This would enable us to build our strategy for more extensive excavation in future. The southern main wall of the building shows up particularly clearly, so we removed the surface crust along a strip that bisected its line, and there it was: over three metres wide, built of densely packed mud-bricks. We were then able to trace the line of the wall for a distance of a full thirty metres – and we reckon there are another twenty metres to go! Surprisingly, cross walls belonging to rooms were found

on both sides, so although this is clearly the main wall of the building, it is not the outermost one. This strange arrangement needs further investigation.

Forty metres to the northeast, we could see on the surface a differentiation in colour that we thought indicated an even larger wall. However, this turned out to be a plaster floor lying just below the modern mound surface. The limits of the associated room have yet to be defined, but we can say that it is over three metres wide, with an alcove on one side, and is at least thirteen metres long. The floor treatment as well as the size suggests it was an important room, but what was it used for? Parts of three adjacent rooms, two with rather smart brick pavements, were also found. This is certainly an area that will repay further excavation next year!

So now we know for sure that we have an important building that covers over 4,000 square metres, and from the artefacts and pottery, we can say that it probably dates to around 1,900 BC, early in the

Old Babylonian period. For the moment we are still guessing at its function, but further work should make it yield up its secrets.

This is only the latest surviving building on the site. What happened at Khaiber before that? To begin to find out, we chose an area outside the main building to the southwest, and excavated all the way down to the modern water table, where of course we had to stop. We dug through 2.5 metres of archaeological deposits, but even the lowest did not seem to be earlier than 1,900 BC. Odd fragments of much earlier pottery occur here and there so earlier occupation must be present somewhere. Perhaps it is even deeper, inaccessible below the water table. Or perhaps there was shifting occupation and in another part of site we will find it closer to the surface.

1. Flags mark the line of the +3 metre wide mud-brick wall.
2. Excavating a pot draws an audience.
3. Communal breakfasts offered a welcome break.

Overleaf: Tell Khaiber 2013 excavation staff.



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Research: the assemblage

A rich variety of objects demonstrates business, administrative and possibly cult activities.

These date to early in the Old Babylonian period, around 1,900 BC.

The presence of written records shows the potential to recover valuable historical information.

Artefacts found in and near the great building testify to a wide range of activities, some of the everyday kind, and some more specialised. We were especially delighted to recover written material: five fragments of cuneiform tablets and an inscribed figurine. The tablets relate to the control of agricultural areas, orchards, gardens and fields. One mentions a governor, confirming the importance of the settlement. The figurine, probably of a dog, has an inscription that mentions

recovery from illness, and Gula, the goddess of healing.

Complete pottery vessels found near to the surface confirm an occupation date of the early Old Babylonian period, i.e. early second millennium BC.

Tools of all sorts testify to numerous economic activities taking place. Large grindstones and flint sickle fragments confirm that grain was grown and processed here, and spindle whorls fashioned from potsherds point to textile working. A copper awl was probably used to work leather or wood. In one area, pieces of exotic stone, some from broken alabaster bowls, were being reshaped into attractive gaming pieces. The wealth of at least some citizens is evidenced by a large copper anklet.

We were lucky enough to find art objects too, in the form of three moulded clay plaques with human figures: a male worshipper, a female goddess, and a woman in a flounced

robe. These are typical of the period, and are likely to have had a religious significance as yet unclear to us. They are often found in and around temples but occur in other locations too, so are not conclusive evidence that our building is a temple.

Environmental data—plant and animal remains—collected in excavation or recovered through wet-sieving in buckets is currently in the process of being examined by specialists at York and Liverpool Universities.

What our preliminary work has shown is that we can expect to find abundant artefacts, and that they are in a reasonable state of preservation. All objects of museum quality have already been deposited in the Iraq Museum in Baghdad, and all other material is securely stored at Ur for further study during coming excavation seasons.

1. Clay tablet with cuneiform writing, 6.5 cm wide.
2. Pottery jar, 12.8 cm high.
3. Stone disc, 3.9 cm diameter.
4. Copper anklet, 10.5 cm diameter.
5. Alabaster gaming pieces, largest 3.9 cm long.



Community

Four Iraqi archaeologists worked with the international team.

Six radio interviews and scores of newspaper articles about the project.

Project social media sites attract a substantial following.

Encouraging and supporting a new generation of Iraqis to look after their heritage is a key objective of our project. Four Iraq archaeologists worked alongside the international team at Tell Khaiber in 2013, learning the latest techniques and approaches. For the junior ones, this included basic excavation, such as how to use a trowel properly, and how to manage the work area in a disciplined manner, safe for both personnel and antiquities. At a more senior level there were many fruitful exchanges of experience over recording systems and technology. Formal

and informal opportunities were used to upgrade language skills on both sides.

Now that we have a good grasp of what skills transfer is required, we plan to expand and formalise the training element of the project, and to run a Field School for Iraqi undergraduates in future. We are exploring potential partners, and the possibility of including accreditation from the University of Manchester.

Support for the project from the local community is crucial. The local press published articles about the excavations, prompting visits by dignitaries from the local towns of Badha, Refa'i and Nasiriyah. We are fortunate to have the firm endorsement of the local sheikh of the Al-Ghizzi, who provides site guards and workmen.

Personal security was provided by the local authorities, and despite the slight limitations on travel this necessarily imposed, we were able to

initiate contact with the universities of Dhi Qar and Qadissiyah, and make visits to the State Board for Antiquities and Heritage in Baghdad.

Enhancing the global profile of Iraq's heritage is another key aim, and international coverage of the project was extensive. Professor Stuart Campbell gave several radio interviews on his return, including to BBC Radio 4 and Radio Free Europe. There were press interviews in Iraq and in the UK, and an Associated Press article ran in *The Times*, *The Washington Post* and the *Mail Online*, as well as in scores of regional newspapers all over the world. News about the project was regularly given out via the website, and via social media such as Twitter and Tumblr, and the number of followers has risen dramatically.

1. Jane and 'Ali at a conference on heritage management at Dhi Qar university.
2. Engaging with local as well as international media is part of our mission.
3. The bilingual web site is an important tool for communicating with Arabic-speaking audiences.



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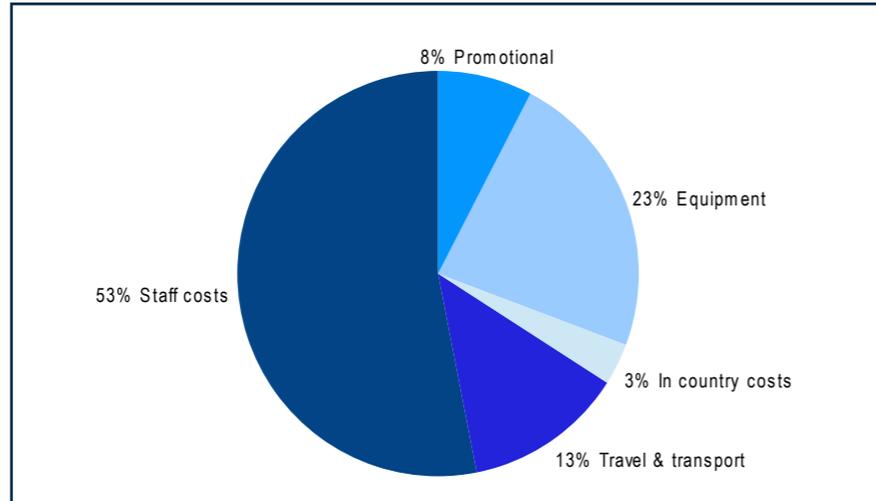
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Funding

The accounting year for the project runs from 1 May to 30 April. The figures given here are for the 2012–13 year and are provisional. F. H. Salman & Co., the local partner in Iraq of PriceWaterhouseCoopers, is currently auditing the accounts for this period.

The Ur Region Archaeology Project receives no statutory funding and so is entirely dependent upon voluntary contributions. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, the project received £84,750 in 2012–13. Substantial help-in-kind, such as accommodation, security, transport, and equipment was also donated, with an estimated value of £30,000.

In common with many other knowledge-based organizations, staff costs represent the largest single item of expenditure. This reflects our commitment to recruiting professional archaeologists to the project, thereby ensuring first class results and, equally importantly,



continuity of staff over the lifetime of the project.

Capital expenditure includes the purchase of computers and camera equipment, as well as all the other materials required to get an archaeological project into the field. Promotional costs include UK office and fund-raising expenditure. The largest single item of in-country expenditure is the subsistence cost for the team.

In 2014, we will be a much larger team excavating in Iraq. With our Iraqi colleagues and

our specialists we will be at times over twenty in number. We will also be excavating for longer. This will increase our expenditure across the board. In particular, extra funding will be required to provide additional accommodation at Ur, as well as vehicles for the daily transport to and from Tell Khaiber.

We are confident that the preliminary results presented in this report will demonstrate the value of the project and encourage existing donors to continue their support, and new ones to come forward.

Ur Region Archaeology Project

Team 2013

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[www. urarchaeology.org](http://www.urarchaeology.org)