

Report on Meeting at Babylon 11 – 13 December 2004

A. Introduction

1. Babylon is unquestionably one of the most important archaeological sites in the world, and was the capital city of two of the most famous kings of antiquity, Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC) who introduced the world's first lawcode, and Nebuchadnezzar (604-562 BC) who built the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Excavations at Babylon during the last 150 years have uncovered some parts of the city but much remains buried beneath the earth and there is still a great deal to discover about the ancient city. In view of the historical and archaeological significance of Babylon, recent allegations of damage to the site during its occupation as a military camp are particularly serious. It was as a result of these allegations that a meeting was arranged at Babylon in the period 11th – 13th December.

2. The meeting was convened prior to the handover of the archaeological site of Babylon by the coalition forces to the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage in the Iraqi Ministry of Culture which is scheduled for 15th January 2005. The meeting was supposed to include a committee of Iraqi archaeologists, Polish archaeologists accompanying the Polish forces in Babylon, and representatives of the coalition forces. UNESCO was asked to send a representative, but declined to do so for security reasons. I was invited to attend as an independent observer by His Excellency Mufid al-Jazairi, the Iraqi Minister of Culture. Professor MacGuire Gibson of the University of Chicago and Professor John Russell, formerly the advisor to the Minister of Culture, were also invited to attend but were unable to do so.

3. A military camp was first established at Babylon by American forces in April 2003. Command of the camp was officially handed over to Polish forces in September 2003, but Polish forces were also present before this time. During most of this period infrastructure works to support the military camp were the responsibility of Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR). The camp (150 has) was established in the middle of the archaeological site (900 has) and surrounded the central enclosed part of the ancient city. I was informed that the camp had originally contained 2000 soldiers but that figure had now been reduced to less than 400.

4. In preparation for the meeting the three archaeologists attached to the Polish forces (Miroslav Olbrys, Agnieszka Dolatowska and Tomasz Burda) had prepared a long (more than 500 pages) document entitled *Report Concerning the Condition of the Preservation of the Babylon Archaeological Site*. As the title suggests, this document is essentially a condition report, and it contains many photographs that provide an invaluable record of the state of the site in November 2004. In my own report (below), frequent cross-reference is made to the *Polish Report*. As it is a condition report, many instances of interference or damage are included in the *Polish Report*, but they are not highlighted and there is no attempt to list them, to describe them in detail, to estimate when they occurred or to suggest who was responsible.

5. At the opening session of the meeting, Mr Borhan Shaker of the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage read out a statement from the Minister of Culture in which

amongst other things he asked me as an independent observer to write a separate report.

6. After discussion during the course of the meeting, it was agreed that 3 reports focusing on the archaeological site of Babylon should be made available at or soon after the time of the handover:-

- (i) The *Polish Report* referred to in 4) above.
- (ii) A report by the Iraqi side detailing all instances of damage to the archaeological site since its occupation by coalition forces.
- (iii) My report referred to in 5) above.

7. It should be stressed that my own report does not in any way purport to be a comprehensive assessment of damage to the site or interference with it since its occupation by coalition forces. That would be an impossible undertaking on the basis of a 2 ½ day visit. Nevertheless, in my opinion there has been substantial damage and listed below are examples of this damage. All the following instances were pointed out to members of the committee during a tour around the site led by Dr Maryam Umran Musah and her two assistants Mr Haidar Abdul Wahid and Mr Raed Hamed. This list should not be seen as exhaustive, but is indicative of the types of damage caused. Following on from the instances of damage pointed out by Dr Maryam (section B), I have added some comments and observations of my own in section C (Conclusions).

B. Review of Affected Areas

North-East Corner of Inner City (Area to East of Lake)

Dr Maryam reported that there were 5 cuttings in this area. The cuttings are into what may be old spoil-tips, perhaps from the excavations of R.Koldewey in the early 20th century, but this would need to be verified. We were shown four of the cuttings: -

1. A cutting c. 35m x 20m, depth 6m (*Polish Report*, pp.43-44, cutting no. A).
2. A cutting "of similar size" (*Polish Report*, pp.43-44, cutting no. B).
3. A cutting c.15m x 10m, up to 3m deep; now covered with new vegetation (not in *Polish Report*).
4. A cutting c. 5m square (not in *Polish Report*).

We were also shown 3 trenches, which apparently cut into ancient deposits: -

1. A trench c.30m long (*Polish Report*, fig. on p.45, trench at bottom of picture).
2. A trench c.10m x 4m, c.2m deep, to the west of the Inner Wall, between the 'Ronson Gate' and the observation post known as 'Dragon no.3' (not in *Polish Report*).
3. A crescent-shaped trench, c.10m in length, and 1m deep, in the same location as above, but nearer the Ronson Gate (not in *Polish Report*).

The Landing Zone (Helipad)

1. This area between the Processional Street and the lake and close to the Ninmah temple was formerly an asphalted area c.50m x 100m that was used as a car park. It has now been greatly enlarged by an extension of c.50m x 200m to the east to

- make a landing zone for helicopters. The new area has been flattened, covered with compacted gravel and then treated with a petroleum product to prevent dust.
2. On the other side of the road bordering the landing field on the south side, a large area (c.60m x 100m) has been flattened and covered with gravel to create a parking lot.
 3. About 100m to the north of the landing field is an east-west dirt track now densely covered with small stones. There are also many large stones at the sides of the road. There are deep ruts in the area from the wheels of heavy vehicles. On the south side of this road there were formerly about 100 tall concrete blocks, to protect the helipad from gunfire (see *Polish Report*, fig. on p.42). The last of these blocks was removed on 11th December 2004.

Babylonian House

To the south-west of the Babylonian House, an area about 80m x 60m has been levelled and covered with gravel (see *Polish Report*, fig. on p.38).

Hammurabi Museum

1. The entire area between the Hammurabi Museum and the Greek Theatre has been levelled and covered with gravel (see *Polish Report*, fig. on p. 39, centre).
2. At the east end of the area between the Hammurabi Museum and the Greek Theatre, on the north side of the main road, an area c.20m sq. has been scooped out to a depth of c.1m.

'KBR no.2'

On the south side of the main east-west road running across the site, an extensive area with maximum dimensions of c. 400m x 120m (referred to as KBR #2 in the *Polish Report*) has been levelled and covered with gravel (see *Polish Report* pp. 51-52 and figs.).

Fuel Farm

This is to the north-west of the Greek theatre in the area referred to as KBR #1 in the *Polish Report*. There are six places here where fuel containers (bags) were positioned, four of them c.10m sq. and one of them c.30m x 10m. See figs. on pp.46-47 of the *Polish Report*. Earth probably from the surrounding areas was heaped up around them to form banks between and around the bags. There is evidence of environmental contamination here in the form of fuel leakage. Just nearby are tankers from which vehicles are currently being refuelled. There are signs of further serious fuel seepage here.

'KBR no.1'

To the east of the Greek theatre, to the north of the road, is another area (referred to as KBR #1 in the *Polish Report*) that has been levelled and covered with gravel. These areas are shown as C and D in the fig. on p. 46 of the *Polish Report*. In the west part of this area is a bunker built of concrete slabs and sandbags; the latter are now disintegrating.

Theatre

To the south of the Theatre, and on the north side of the road, is an area c.15m x 20m, covered with gravel and large stones, that is said to be a “tent position”.

“Ronson Gate” (near the ancient Marduk Gate)

1. Outside the so-called Ronson Gate, on the north side of the road, topsoil has been scooped off an area c.60m x 20m to create an earthen bank. About 70m to the south of the road, there is an east-west trench about 25m long which we could only see from a distance, as the area is thought to be mined.
2. From the observation tower at the gate, a trench could be seen beyond the east-west barrier of barbed wire and conix containers that is about 100m to the south of the road. This trench could be observed through a gap of about 30m in the conix containers. It is unknown how long it is.

Ziggurat (outside camp)

Dr Maryam informed us that there are three trenches in the area of Etemenanki (the ziggurat). These are said to be anti-tank precautions.

1. A trench with length 45m. No pottery, bricks or bones observed in the spoil. (Ditch A in the *Polish Report*, see figs. on pp. 53, 55-56).
2. E-W trench, length c.170m (paced out), c.2m deep, and 1.0-1.5m wide. Much pottery and many fragments of brick with cuneiform inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar were observed in the bank of spoil on the north side of the trench. (Ditch B in the *Polish Report*, see figs on pp.53, 57-58).
3. We were not able to see the third trench (Trench C in the *Polish Report*, figs. on pp. 53, 58-59) as it is inside the wire surrounding the camp.

Processional Street

In the south part of the Processional Street, approximately opposite the magazines of Etemenanki, 7 concrete barriers were placed on the road. They have recently been removed by helicopter (see *Polish Report*, figs on p. 69). Two areas of the 6th century BC brick pavement are exposed in this area, and in both cases the bricks are badly broken (*Polish Report*, figs. on p.69). This is thought to be the result of a heavy vehicle or vehicles driving over them. If this is so, it is likely that the bricks still covered by earth are similarly damaged.

Seleucid-Parthian Building

Dr Maryam pointed out that at one stage a vehicle was standing in the Seleucid-Parthian building to the west of the Nabu-sha-Hare Temple. (This is just to the north of the tower Dragon no.5).

“Reno Gate”

1. To the north of Reno Gate (which is to the west of the north-west corner of the ziggurat) there is a large flat area covered with gravel that is known as Tent City #2 (*Polish Report*, figs. on pp.27-28).
2. On the south side of the road to the west of the Reno Gate, in front of a brick factory, there is a cutting with maximum height 3m where the road has been widened (*Polish Report*, centre fig. on p.29).
3. To the west of the Reno Gate there is a trench c.30m x 10m, up to 2m deep, that is said to have been dug to fill conix containers (HESCO bags).
4. There are further large cuttings to the south of the barbed wire perimeter that we were not allowed to visit.
5. To the south of the Reno Gate for a distance of about 200m the road is lined by HESCO bags that have clearly been filled with deposits from the Babylon site, containing sherds, bones, etc.

Tent City #2

In the northern part of Tent City #2 there is much disturbance in an area used as an ammunition store. What remains is a horseshoe-shaped berm made up of deposits emptied from HESCO bags. These deposits clearly come from archaeological contexts. Much sand, said to have been brought in from the desert, has also been deposited in this area. See the *Polish Report*, fig. on p.31.

“Warsaw Gate”

1. Outside the so-called Warsaw Gate which is in the north-west corner of the camp there are 2 trenches, each c.20m long. See *Polish Report*, fig. on p.16. In the piles of spoil alongside the trenches there are many fragments of brick, some with inscriptions of Nebuchadnezzar.
2. About 200m south-west of the Warsaw Gate are HESCO bags protecting an open storage area with floodlights that are filled with earth containing many fragments of brick, some inscribed.
3. There is a large flat area (no gravel) between the Warsaw Gate and Saddam’s Palace on the west side of the road. Now only portable toilets are left on this site. There is a pile of brick fragments in one corner, some of them inscribed.
4. Across this large area there is an east-west earth bank, c.1.5m high. The deposited earth contains many fragments of inscribed brick. See *Polish Report*, centre fig. on p.18.
5. There is a large parking lot to the north-east of Saddam’s Palace (seen through the trees) that is now covered with gravel.

Ninmah Temple

The roof has collapsed in Rooms 6 (antecella), 8 (cella) and 18. This building was reconstructed in the 1960s (i.e. pre-Saddam) on ancient foundations, and the roof is modern.

Ishtar Gate

The iron gates at either end of the sunken part were stolen in the looting after the war, but were recovered and have now been reinstated. However, parts have been broken

off the gates and they can no longer render the area secure. The Ishtar Gate is one of the famous monuments from antiquity. The top part of the gate, with glazed brick decoration showing dragons, bulls and lions is now in Berlin, but the foundations with unglazed, moulded bricks showing animals are still in position at Babylon.

Dr Maryam pointed to the following damage to the moulded brick reliefs:-

1. There are bad cracks in tier 2 (see *Polish Report*, fig. on p. 90).
2. Extensive damage to body of dragon (*mušhuššu*) in tier 19 (see *Polish Report*, fig. on p.103).
3. Damage to hindquarters of dragon (*mušhuššu*) in tier 21 (see *Polish Report*, fig. on p. 104).
4. Damage to central part of body of dragon (*mušhuššu*) in tier 22 (see *Polish Report*, fig. on p. 105).
5. Damage to head and central part of body of dragon (*mušhuššu*) in tier 23 (see *Polish Report*, fig. on p. 106).
6. Damage to central part of body of dragon (*mušhuššu*) in tier 24 (see *Polish Report*, fig. on p. 106).
7. Damage to front middle part of body of dragon (*mušhuššu*) in tier 27 (see *Polish Report*, fig. on p. 110).
8. Damage to lower part of body of dragon (*mušhuššu*) in tier 29 (see *Polish Report*, fig. on p. 113).
9. Damage to upper middle part of body of dragon (*mušhuššu*) in tier 30 (see *Polish Report*, fig. on p. 113).
10. Damage to neck and upper front part of body of dragon (*mušhuššu*) in tier 31 (see *Polish Report*, fig. on p. 114).

Note: The worst damage is to the *mušhuššu* in tier 19 (no.2). This was already noted and photographed by the British Museum team in June, 2003. At that time, no damage was noted to the other *mušhuššu* figures. It has been suggested that most of the damage to the other *mušhuššu* figures was caused at the same time by a person or persons trying to remove a decorated brick.

Firing Positions

Dr Maryam referred to firing positions (pits or trenches for snipers) in various parts of the site but we did not have an opportunity to inspect these. Some of them are documented in the *Polish Report*.

Reconstructed Buildings

We were informed that some bricks with inscriptions of Saddam Hussein have been removed as souvenirs, but we did not have time to inspect the locations.

Saddam's Palace

We were shown evidence of looting and damage in Saddam's recently-built palace that overlooks the site. It was agreed that this should be the subject of a separate report by the Iraqi side.

C. Conclusions

1. In the early days after the war, a military presence at Babylon served a valuable purpose in that it prevented the site from being looted. But it is regrettable that a military camp of this size should then have been established on one of the most important archaeological sites in the world. This is tantamount to establishing a military camp around the Great Pyramid in Egypt or around Stonehenge in Britain.
2. A full-scale international investigation should be launched into the damage done to the archaeological site of Babylon during its occupation by coalition forces. The findings of this investigation should be supported by detailed plans, descriptions and photographs.
3. All disturbed areas should be investigated, recorded and published by archaeologists appointed by the Iraqi Board of Antiquities and Heritage.
4. All mines and ordnance should be cleared from the area of the site.
5. The Iraq Government should be urged to propose Babylon for inclusion on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites as soon as possible. Now more than ever Babylon needs the care, attention and advice that being a World Heritage Site would ensure it received.
6. Many areas around the site have been covered with gravel, sometimes compacted and chemically treated, to be used as a helipad and to create spaces for vehicle parks, accommodation, storage, etc. These areas are now flat, but the extent of the levelling operations before the gravel was laid down is unclear. It is estimated that c.300,000 sq. metres of the site have been covered with gravel in this way. All the gravel has been brought in from elsewhere, and will of course work its way into the archaeological deposits. This is extremely unfortunate from an archaeological point of view, as previously undisturbed archaeological deposits on the site will now be contaminated. The status of future information about these areas will therefore be seriously compromised.
7. There is evidence of environmental pollution (fuel seepage) in the area of the Fuel Farm. This is likely to have a deleterious effect on the archaeological deposits beneath.
8. We were shown about one dozen trenches of various sizes and about one dozen cuttings into existing tips or mounds, all of which appeared to be of recent origin. Some of the trenches were clearly cut into previously undisturbed archaeological deposits, and amongst the spoil from these trenches was observed pottery (including a complete vase), bones and fragments of brick with cuneiform inscriptions. Some of the cuttings have been made into spoil-tips from earlier excavations, but others have apparently been made into previously undisturbed deposits.
9. There is damage to 9 of the moulded brick figures of dragons in the Ishtar Gate, in one case serious damage to the body of the figure.
10. The brick pavement in the south part of the 6th century BC Processional Way has been broken by driving a heavy vehicle along it.
11. Parts of the roof of the (reconstructed) Ninmah Temple have collapsed.

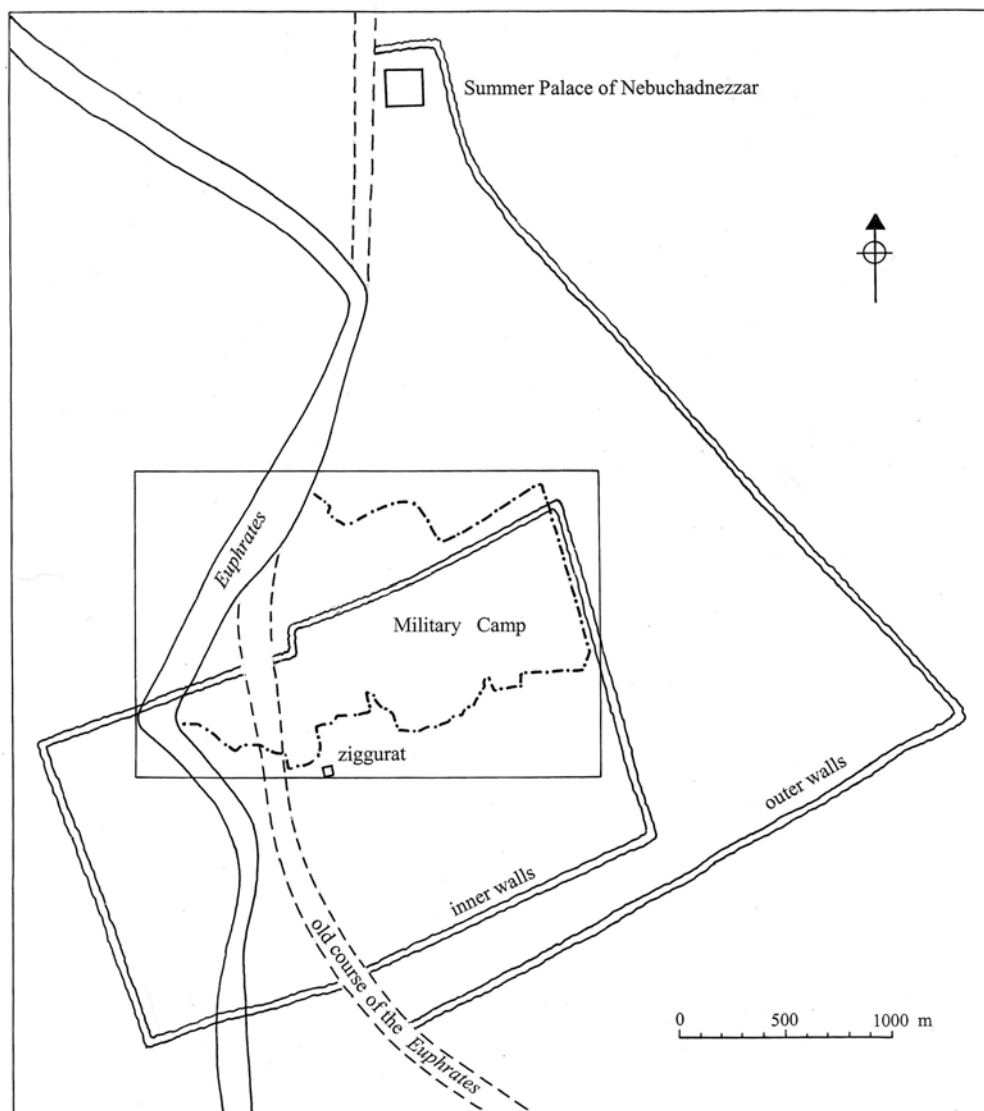
12. Around the site there are thousands of sandbags and HESCO barriers/conix containers (gigantic fabric bags in wire mesh containers that are filled with earth or sand). Originally these sandbags and HESCO barriers were apparently filled with earth scooped up from the Babylon archaeological site, and the presence of sherds and bones in the bags is a testimony to the archaeological nature of the deposits used. I was informed that on 3rd November 2003, an order was issued requiring that the bags should only be filled with sand and earth brought in from outside Babylon, but this is in effect substituting one problem for another. By bringing in large quantities of sand and earth from elsewhere (some of these probably in themselves archaeological deposits), the deposits at Babylon will be irrevocably contaminated.

13. In many parts of the site are wheel marks deriving from the movement of heavy vehicles. These ruts and depressions are in themselves a source of damage, but more worrying is the extent to which heavy vehicle movements on the surface will have damaged fragile archaeological remains below. Without further investigation the nature of this damage cannot be qualified or quantified, but the movement of heavy vehicles on the surface is generally regarded as very bad practice on an archaeological site.

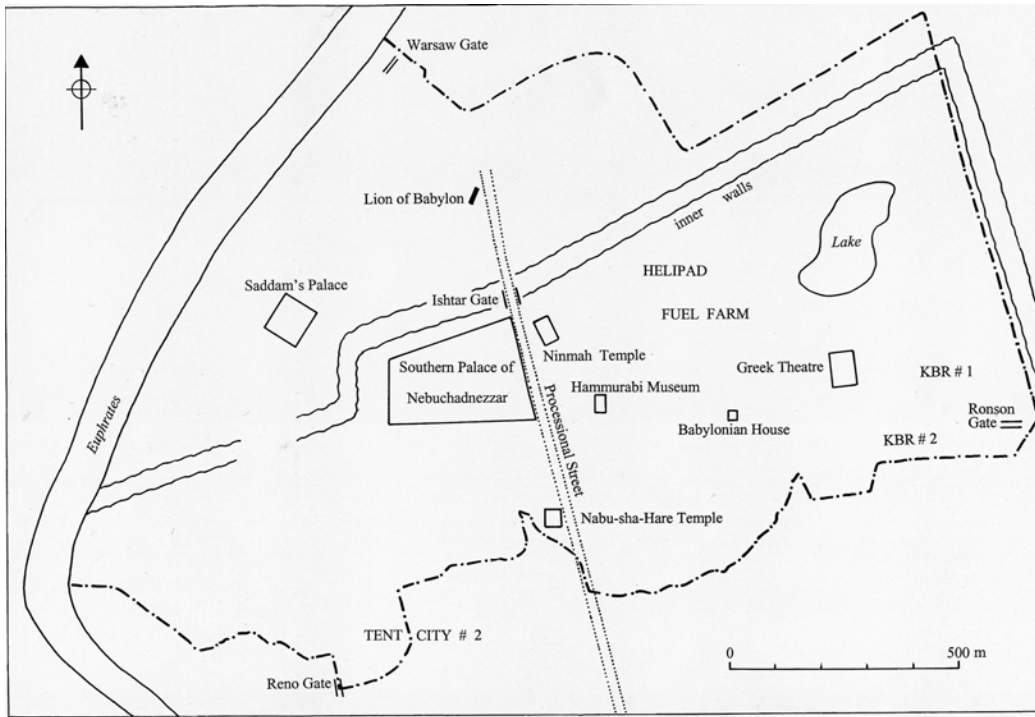
14. The same considerations (outlined in 11) apply to helicopter movements, which are likely to be harmful to fragile archaeological monuments.

15. Once there has been a proper assessment of the damage, the international community should provide every assistance to the State Board of Antiquities and Heritage to enable them to draw up a site management plan for Babylon.

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Greater Babylon showing position of military camp.



Inner city of Babylon showing camp and ancient monuments.

