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Materiality, Writing, and Context in the Inana Temple at Nippur: The Dedicatory Objects from Level VIIB

1 Introduction to the Inana Temple at Nippur

From early times, Nippur (modern Niffar or Nuffar), had a religious significance. The city remained a holy center throughout Mesopotamian history, and rulers consequently sought recognition from Nippur for legitimate rule, first over Sumer and Akkad and later over Babylonia and Assyria. Such recognition depended on the dedication of precious objects, wealth, and property to the E-kur, the temple and ziggurat of Enlil, and other temples in the city. This practice was one aspect of a larger system of dedicating objects to Mesopotamian temples.

The religious nature of Nippur prevented it from suffering most of the destructions that befell other cities. Excavations in the Inana Temple area, located just southwest of the Temple of Enlil, were undertaken during the fifth through the eighth seasons—from 1955 to 1962—of the Joint Expedition of the University of Chicago and the American Schools of Oriental Research.¹ The excavations provided the longest continuous archaeological sequence for a Mesopotamian site. Some twenty building levels, dating back to the Middle Uruk period (4th millennium BCE), were exposed. The Inana Temple itself was in existence by the Early Dynastic period (2900–2350 BCE) and thereafter was continuously rebuilt until the Parthian period (247 BCE–224 AD), some three thousand years later.

Efforts to produce a final publication for the Inana Temple excavations have been multi-generational. The excavations were conducted under the direction of Richard C. Haines. After Haines passed away in 1977, the publication was being prepared by Donald P. Hansen at the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University. After Hansen passed away in 2007, the excavation records were archived at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. The final manuscript of the Inana Temple excavations subsequently was edited and prepared by Richard L. Zettler, Karen Wilson, Robert D. Biggs, and the present author under the direction of McGuire Gibson. The final publication will appear in multiple Oriental Institute Publications volumes over several years.

When reference is made below to unpublished Inana Temple objects, the field number assigned during excavation is cited in order to allow these objects to be identified in the forthcoming publications.

¹ Hansen/Dales 1962; Gibson/Hansen/Zettler 2001.

The inscribed materials retrieved from the Inana Temple excavations at Nippur provide an excellent opportunity for the study of inscription, object type, and archaeological context, which was the central focus of the “Materiality and Writing” workshop out of which this contribution grew. The focus here is on the inscribed objects dedicated during the time of Inana Temple level VIIB, which is dated to the Early Dynastic IIIA period on the basis of Fara-type tablets.² The categories of inscribed dedicatory objects from level VIIB are presented first according to archaeological context and then according to object typology. The contribution concludes by considering how a text and materiality approach might offer insight into the dedicatory objects retrieved from the Inana Temple.

2 Contextual Overview of Inana Temple Dedicatory Objects

The architectural remains encountered in the earliest excavated levels of the Inana Temple area (levels XIX–XV), dated to the Uruk period, were domestic in nature. The remains of the succeeding Jamdat Nasr period (levels XIV–XII) continued to have a domestic quality. By the end of the Jamdat Nasr period (level XII), a portion of a large structure with an orderly arrangement of rooms and courts was uncovered.³ The remains revealed neither architectural characteristics nor material finds distinctive enough to reveal the function of level XII. The Early Dynastic I remains (levels XI–IX) followed earlier plans but grew increasingly complex.

In Inana Temple level IX, divided into the earlier IXB and the later IXA construction phases, the excavators were struck by the large quantities of mud plaster used on the walls, floors, and installations of the central rooms (IT 257 and IT 258 of level IXB and IT 246 and IT 248 of level IX A).⁴ The rooms were in a location corresponding with the later sanctuary area of the Inana Temple. The mud-plastered installations also resembled those common to Early Dynastic temples and included furniture typically described as altars, offering tables, and benches. The excavators therefore maintained that the level IX remains represented the first temple in the Inana Temple sequence.

² Porada et al. 1993, 107.

³ Wilson 1986, fig. 3.

⁴ See Zettler et al. (forthcoming); see also Zettler 1992, figs. 4–5; Gibson/Hansen/Zettler 2001, fig. 3.

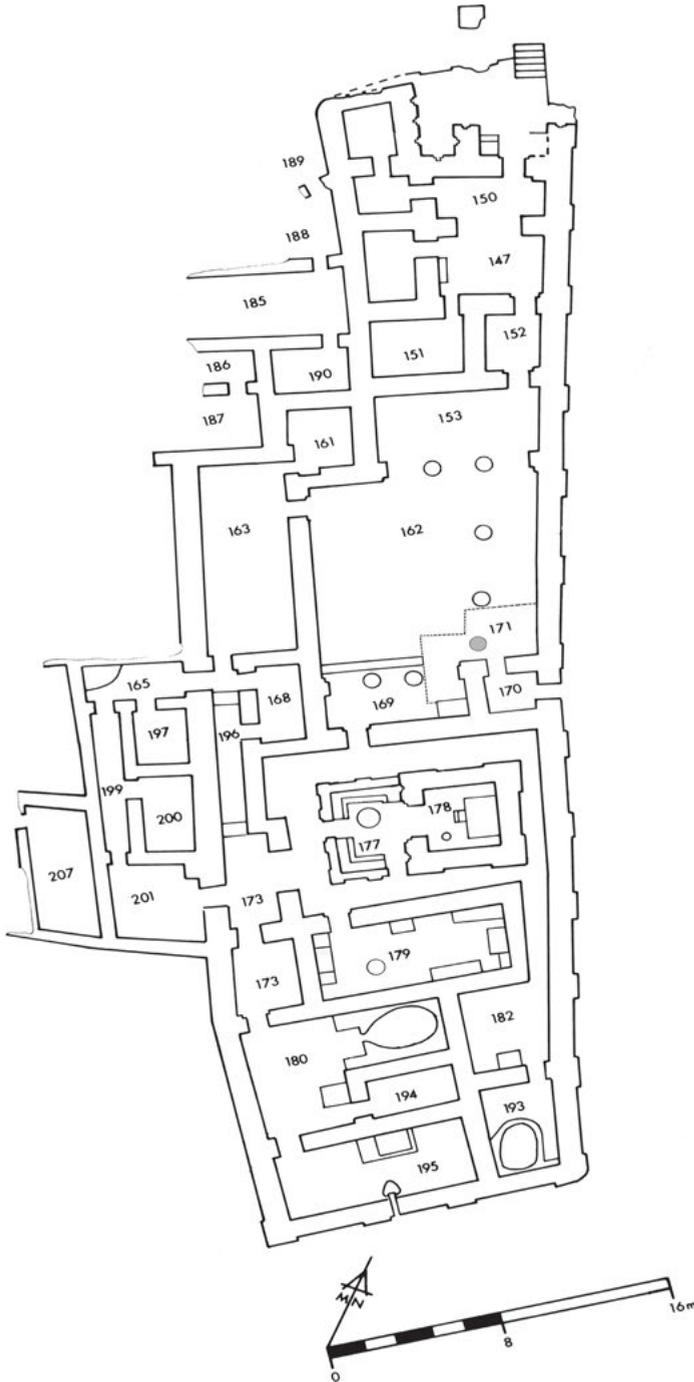


Fig. 1: Nippur, Inana Temple level VIIB, plan representing various subphases (adapted by Jean M. Evans; Courtesy of the Nippur Publication Project).

The level IXA walls of the Inana Temple subsequently were razed, and the area was roughly leveled. Level VIII was constructed on a low mud-brick platform.⁵ At the core of the level VIII structure was a court with two free-standing sanctuaries. One sanctuary had a bent-axis approach typical of Early Dynastic temple architecture, and the other sanctuary had a straight-axis approach. Fragments of inscribed stone vessels (7 N 399, 7 N 405) and a fragment of an inscribed stone door plaque (7 N 251) were retrieved. None of these level VIII inscriptions, presumably dedicatory in nature, were complete enough to determine the divine recipient.

The first unequivocal dedications to the goddess Inana were from the succeeding level VIIB of the Inana Temple.⁶ The plan of level VIIB followed that of level VIII, but the temple was larger and its internal divisions were more complex (fig. 1). Cultic functions appear to have been concentrated to the north of the central sanctuary area, with work functions concentrated to the south. Specifically, activities involving liquids were located in the north, an inference derived from the number of wells, drains, and other installations, and large ovens were located in the south.⁷ The northern and southern portions of level VIIB of the Inana Temple were linked by a long corridor west of the central sanctuary area.

Stone vessels, statues, door plaques, and pegs comprise the categories of inscribed dedicatory objects retrieved from the Early Dynastic levels of the Inana Temple.⁸ One notable object type missing from the Inana Temple assemblage of inscribed dedications is the stone mace head. Even uninscribed stone mace heads are rare among the Inana Temple assemblages; level VIIB yielded only two. During the Early Dynastic period, surviving inscribed mace heads were all dedicated by male donors, and the greatest quantity of mace heads, in general, was retrieved from a temple with a male resident deity.⁹ Perhaps the lack of inscribed mace heads in the Inana Temple should be linked with the special relationship that female patrons had with the temple, discussed below, particularly since maces are dominant in the warrior iconography of Inana (Ištar).

The majority of inscribed dedicatory objects retrieved from level VIIB were found in hoards comprised of groups of buried objects. The clearest examples of hoards in the Inana Temple are those buried below floors, such as below the earliest level VIIB floor in sanctuary IT 179 (fig. 2).¹⁰ Other hoards in level VIIB include the group of dedicatory objects built into an installation for liquids in IT 173 (fig. 2). The objects built into the IT 173 installation were also reused as construction material, whereas the objects

⁵ Zettler 1992, fig. 6; Gibson/Hansen/Zettler 2001, fig. 4.

⁶ Goetze 1970; Braun-Holzinger 1991.

⁷ Zettler in Zettler et al. (forthcoming).

⁸ Braun-Holzinger 1991.

⁹ Delougaz/Lloyd 1942, 266ff. (Tell Agrab, Shara Temple); Braun-Holzinger 1991, 28.

¹⁰ Hansen/Dales 1962, 79.

below the IT 179 floor appear to have served no additional function. That is, the hoard below the IT 179 floor served only as a method of disposal.¹¹

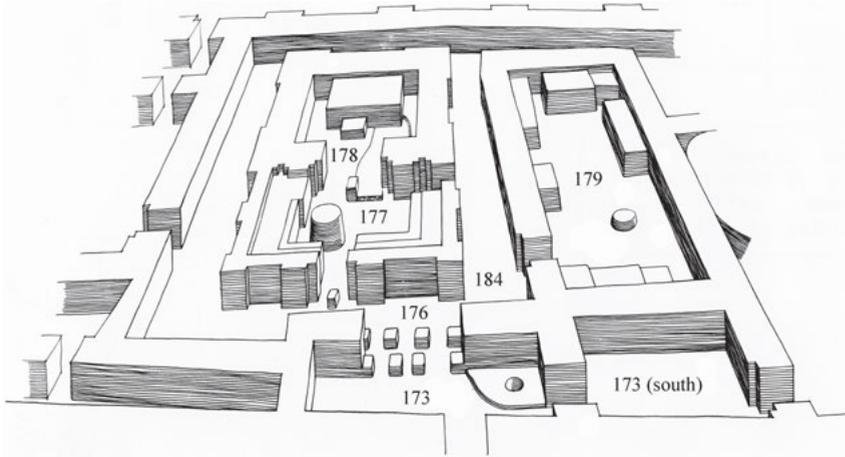


Fig. 2: Nippur, Inana Temple level VIIB, isometric drawing of the sanctuary area representing various subphases (adapted by Jean M. Evans; Courtesy of the Nippur Publication Project).

Another group of dedicatory objects from level VIIB were laid out on the benches against the short west wall of sanctuary IT 179 and covered with mud plaster (fig. 3). It is unclear from the excavation notes whether the objects in the IT 179 benches comprise a hoard. That is, it is unclear whether the objects were gathered and buried at one time as opposed to, for example, whenever a periodic re-plastering of the benches occurred.¹² The statues in the bench of sanctuary IT 179 therefore do not necessarily comprise a single group of objects gathered at one distinct point in time.



Fig. 3: Nippur, Inana Temple level VIIB, some of the dedicatory objects in situ which had been laid out on the benches against the short west wall of sanctuary IT 179 and covered with mud plaster (Courtesy of the Nippur Publication Project).

¹¹ Hansen/Dales 1962, 79; Braun-Holzinger 1991, 9–11.

¹² Zettler in Zettler et al. (forthcoming).

Certainly, some of the stone dedicatory objects gathered in hoards and buried below the earliest floor of level VIIB may have originated in level VIII. In general, temple dedications form a category of object which is curated.¹³ Nevertheless, level VIIB still contains the majority of stone dedicatory objects retrieved from the Inana Temple. For example, four sculpture fragments were catalogued from level VIII proper of the Inana Temple. In contrast, some sixty statues and statue fragments, many of which formed joins, were retrieved from level VIIB and from hoards below the earliest floor of level VIIB. Level VIIA of the Inana Temple yielded few finds overall and only four sculpture fragments. To cite another example, seven relief-carved stone plaques were retrieved from level VIII of the Inanna Temple. In contrast, eighteen relief-carved stone plaques were retrieved from level VIIB. No relief-carved stone plaques were retrieved from level VIIA of the Inana Temple.

3 Stone Vessels

Richard Zettler¹⁴ studied the some 285 stone vessels and vessel fragments retrieved during the Inana Temple excavations. Of these, some 230 stone vessels are from the Early Dynastic levels (XI–VII), and some 100 are specifically from level VIIB.

A quarter of the level VIIB stone vessels were inscribed. The majority—some twelve vessels—were dedicated by women.¹⁵ One of the female donors is described as the wife of the ensi of Nippur. Two VIIB stone vessels were dedicated by a male and female donor together. Six were dedicated solely by male donors. The majority of inscribed stone vessels from level VIIB are bowls.

Five level VIIB stone vessels were incorporated into installations for liquids associated with libations or washing. Two of these five level VIIB stone vessels were inscribed. The first example is a stone beaker (7 N 119)¹⁶ inscribed “dInana”. The beaker was retrieved from IT 201, where it had been sunk into a lime-plastered area of the floor northwest of the doorway leading into IT 173 (fig. 1). The rim of the beaker was flush with the floor. The inscription on the beaker therefore would not have been visible. It cannot be discounted that the beaker might have been reused in this position. That is, the beaker may have been an independent container for liquids before it was incorporated into the IT 201 installation.

The second inscribed stone vessel incorporated into an installation for liquids is a bowl (7 N 639)¹⁷ bearing a dedication to Inana by an individual with the title of sanga.

¹³ Evans 2012.

¹⁴ Zettler in Zettler et al. (forthcoming).

¹⁵ Goetze 1970, 39; Braun-Holzinger 1991, 96.

¹⁶ Goetze 1970.

¹⁷ Goetze 1970.

The bowl was retrieved from an installation for liquids in the southeast corner of IT 173 (fig. 2). The IT 173 installation was comprised of a low bitumen-coated platform. The bowl was sunk below the surface of the platform at the center. The inscription therefore would not have been visible. Part of the rim was broken, however, which might suggest that the bowl was reused in the platform. Therefore, as with the beaker (7 N 119) discussed above, the bowl may have been an independent container for liquids before it was incorporated into the IT 173 installation.



Fig. 4: Nippur, Inana Temple level VIIB, sculpted and inlaid stone vessels (7 N 010, 7 N 014, 7 N 178, 7 N 207) (Courtesy of the Nippur Publication Project).

In general, Inana Temple relief-carved and sculpted stone vessels, including bowls with a protome as a pouring spout, vessels supported on the backs of recumbent animals, and multi-compartmented stone “cosmetic” containers, are not usually inscribed (fig. 4). One exception from level VIIB is the relief-carved steatite beaker probably imported from the Iranian highlands (7 N 120).¹⁸ The beaker is inscribed “^dInana pa4-nun”. Perhaps it is noteworthy that this inscription as well as two other inscriptions on sculpted stone vessels (7 N 399 from VIII and 6 N 422 from VIIA)¹⁹ different from the majority of dedicatory inscriptions on level VIIB stone vessels which are not sculpted. First, the inscriptions on the three sculpted stone vessels are not written in cases. Second, they do not contain a verb of dedication. Finally, two of the

¹⁸ Goetze 1970; see Majidzadeh 2003 for parallels.

¹⁹ Goetze 1970.

three inscriptions appear to be inscribed only with the name (and, in one example, a title?) of the goddess, understood as “to” or “for” Inana.

It is possible to observe that among the stone vessels of the Inana Temple, the vessel generally will either have an inscription or sculpted imagery but will not have both. Cosmetic containers, which refer to a type of stone vessel with multiple small receptacles in the top, are an important exception (fig. 4). This vessel type forms more than a quarter of the stone vessel corpus in Inana Temple level VIIB. Cosmetic containers are so-called since residual pigments were occasionally present in the receptacles of the Inana Temple examples and were also found in comparable vessels from Bismaya and Ur. Cosmetic containers, regardless of whether or not they are sculpted, are seldom inscribed. The one inscribed example from the Inana Temple (6 N 422) has “^dInana” scratched on its side. The lack of inscribed examples raises the question: are all stone cosmetic containers objects of dedication?

4 Sculpture

As discussed above, some sixty statues and statue fragments, many of which formed joins, were retrieved from level VIIB and from a hoard below the earliest floor of level VIIB of the Inana Temple. Some eighteen female figures and sixteen male figures are preserved, and one additional statue is of a male and female figure seated together. Other sculpture fragments are too poorly preserved to determine the gender of the donor.

Six statues from level VIIB are inscribed. Five of the inscribed examples are comprised solely of the name and title of an individual, presumably the individual who is represented and who donated the statue (7 N 136 + 155, 7 N 170, 7 N 171, 7 N 202, 7 N 205). This practice contrasts with the level VIIB stone vessels inscribed solely with the name of the goddess Inana. That is, as a general rule, a statue may have an inscription comprised solely of the name and title of the donor whereas a stone vessel may have an inscription comprised solely of the name of the goddess. Perhaps this contrast in practice can be tied to ideological aspects of the alan as bearing some essence of the individual represented.²⁰

The inscribed statues from level VIIB of the Inana Temple all represent male donors. Four inscribed male figures are associated with IT 179, the bent-axis sanctuary. Of the inscribed statues associated with IT 179, two were found buried among a hoard of objects below the earliest level VIIB floor and two were laid out on the benches against the short west wall and covered with mud plaster sometime during the time of level VIIB. The other two inscribed male figures were built into the IT 173

²⁰ Morandi 1988; Beran 1989; Bonatz 2002; Bahrani 2003.

installation for liquids. They were found, along with stone vessel fragments, door plaque fragments, a mace head, and a furniture attachment, underneath the baked mud bricks forming the low platform of the installation. The stone medium of the objects might have facilitated the drainage of liquids.

Despite the utilitarian aspect of using stone as a construction material in an installation for liquids, there is some evidence that the stone dedicatory objects built into the IT 173 installation were not randomly selected. A total of eight sculpture fragments—two inscribed and six uninscribed—were built into the IT 173 installation for liquids. Seven of these eight sculpture fragments are from male figures; the eighth fragment is a base (fig. 5). One of the only two mace heads retrieved from level VIIB was also used in the IT 173 installation. As noted above, mace heads are a type of dedicatory object associated with male donors. In addition, as discussed above, the vessel set in the center of the IT 173 installation was dedicated by a male donor with the title of *sanga*. Finally, as discussed below, a fragment of a plaque dedicated by a male donor was also buried in the the IT 173 installation.



Fig. 5: Nippur, Inana Temple level VIIB, excavation of IT 173 installation, with objects that had been buried in the installation in the foreground (Courtesy of the Nippur Publication Project).

That stone dedicatory objects were purposefully selected for the IT 173 installation is reinforced by the depositional pattern of the sculpture fragments belonging to the statues buried therein. Five of the eight sculpture fragments built into the IT 173 installation were comprised of the majority of the statue in IT 173 with additional smaller fragments of the statue in IT 194. The pattern suggests a purposeful separation of the

sculptures to separate loci. IT 194 contained a bread oven in the northwestern corner and a large number of object fragments in general. It is unclear why the fragments had been collected there.

Reinforcing the gendered selection of dedicatory objects for the IT 173 installation is the presence of another context in level VIIB from which only statues of female figures were retrieved. Given the large quantity of sculpture and stone vessels dedicated by female donors, it has often been observed that the Inana Temple at Nippur had a special relationship with female patrons.²¹ Four fragmentary statues of female figures were found lying on a bitumen-coated pavement surrounding a well in IT 171, which constituted a secondary entrance to the Inana Temple in level VIIB (fig. 1). The stone of additional sculpture was in such poor condition that the statues could not be preserved; although they were not catalogued, mention is made of them in the field notes. Perhaps the IT 173 installation for liquids was a sphere of male cultic activity and therefore only dedications by male donors were buried within it. In contrast, the sculpture on the IT 171 pavement might signify a sphere of female cultic activity.²²

5 Door Plaques

All the plaques included in this category are a specific type that is rectangular in shape with a central hole. A raised border frames a relief-carved or worked area, beyond which unworked stone may be present on all four sides. The relief-carved decoration is typically divided into three horizontal registers. During the Early Dynastic period, the main subject of such plaques is that of a banquet in which seated figures in the upper register are attended upon. A procession is typically depicted in the lower registers.²³

Building on an earlier study by Hansen,²⁴ the functional role of this plaque type was demonstrated by Zettler²⁵ through a study of Ur III sealing practices in level IV of the Inana Temple. The Ur III sealings indicated that a peg driven through the center of the plaque would have secured a cord or hook, which in turn secured a door. Together, the stone plaque and the peg thus formed a locking device for doors. Some Early Dynastic archaeological evidence also supports the function of these types of plaques as locking devices for doors. A plaque (7 N 408) from level VIII of the Inana Temple was found in IT 219 near the north doorway. In the Early Dynastic level IV of the North Temple at Nippur, a plaque was found upside down on the floor, by the

²¹ Hansen/Dales 1962, 80.

²² Evans 2012, 197, 201.

²³ Boese 1971.

²⁴ Hansen 1963

²⁵ Zettler 1987.

doorway, where it had presumably fallen from the wall (fig. 6).²⁶ Donald Hansen²⁷ suggested that a peg would have been inserted through the small central hole in the knob still affixed to the North Temple plaque.

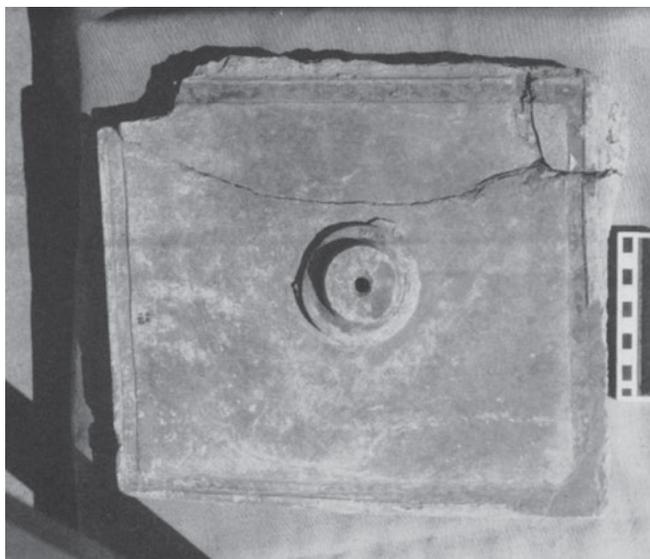


Fig. 6: Nippur, North Temple level IV, Early Dynastic door plaque (4 N 186) with central knob (Courtesy of the Nippur Publication Project).

In addition, some plaques have small dowel holes in the stone beyond the relief-carved or worked area of the plaques. The dowel holes support the installation of the plaques vertically, since they would not be necessary if the plaques were to be laid horizontally. An earlier hypothesis that the plaques, laid horizontally, served as supports for standards or maces therefore is untenable. When set into a wall, presumably the unworked stone, when present, was plastered over so that only the relief-carved area was visible.

The door plaques retrieved from the Inana Temple are, with few exceptions, from levels VIII and VII. However, because Zettler²⁸ identified the reverse impressions of door plaques on level IV clay sealings, we know that door plaques continued to be utilized in the Inana Temple. The door plaques identified from the level IV clay sealings appear to have lacked relief carving but were inscribed. The preserved portions of the

²⁶ McCown/Haines/Biggs 1978.

²⁷ Hansen 1963, 147.

²⁸ Zettler 1987.

inscriptions are a duplicate of the Shulgi building inscription found either on baked bricks or on pivot stones in the Inana temple.²⁹

Three of the stone door plaques retrieved from Early Dynastic levels of the Inana Temple were inscribed (7 N 133 + 134, 7 N 251, 7 N 309).³⁰ A door plaque fragment from level VIII (7 N 251) has an illegible inscription and was found on top of either the altar or bench in sanctuary IT 218.³¹ The fragment preserves the upper right corner in which a seated female banqueter is attended by a standing female figure; a portion of a bull rearing up against vegetation is also preserved.

In level VIIB, a small fragment from a slate plaque with an inlaid border (7 N 309) around the central worked area is inscribed “^dInana”. The fragment was retrieved from IT 194, in which, as noted above, was found a quantity of objects perhaps gathered as raw materials to be recycled.

The best preserved of the inscribed door plaques (7 N 133 + 7 N 134) was reconstructed from fragments retrieved in level VIIB from both IT 194 and from within the IT 173 installation described above. It is inscribed: “To NIN.sar, Lumma, the chief stone cutter, dedicated (this)”. The separation of the plaque fragments between IT 194 and the IT 173 installation follows the pattern established by the statues of male figures, discussed above, and supports the hypothesis that the IT 173 installation may have been a sphere of male cultic activity. Of all the plaques from the Inana Temple, the plaque dedicated by Lumma best represents the banqueting and procession iconography typical of Early Dynastic door plaques.

Many of the door plaques from level VIIB were subject to reuse. For example, a total of three door plaque fragments were built into the IT 173 installation. In addition, three door plaque fragments (7 N 104–106) were built into a stone table in IT 176, the part of the courtyard west of sanctuary IT 177/178 (fig. 2). A large fragment from an additional plaque (7 N 112), according to the excavation notes, formed part of a container that was built into the IT 176 table while smaller fragments of the same plaque were found on top of the table. It is unclear whether or not the smaller pieces had been used to form the surface of the table. Another fragmentary door plaque (7 N 252) was used as paving in IT 177.

6 Peg

Level VIIB also yielded the only inscribed example in the Inana Temple of a type of peg (7 N 199) ending in an animal protome (fig. 7). The Inana Temple peg ends in the

²⁹ Zettler 1987, 219.

³⁰ Goetze 1970.

³¹ Asher-Greve 1985, pl. 29, no. 565; Zettler 1992, fig. 6.

head of a bull. The eyes and triangular inset in the forehead would have been inlaid. Perhaps the horns had been attached separately. The peg was among the objects laid out on the benches against the short west wall of sanctuary IT 179 and covered with mud plaster. The inscription is difficult to read.³²



Fig. 7: Nippur, Inana Temple level VIIB, Early Dynastic peg (7 N 199) ending in a bull protome (Courtesy of the Nippur Publication Project).

The shaft of the peg is roughly-hewn. Its diameter is comparable to that of some of the central holes of the Inana Temple door plaques. The shape of the shaft, an oblong rectangle, also resembles the shape of some of the central holes of the door plaques. As discussed above, a peg driven through the center of a door plaque would have secured a cord or hook, which in turn secured a door. If 7 N 199 were driven through the center of a door plaque, only the finished area of the peg would have been visible.

It is plausible therefore to suggest that peg 7 N 199 is essentially a sculpted version of a more functional item retrieved from level VIIB and referred to as a “knob” or “nail” (for example, 7 N 318, 7 N 369). The stone plaque found in the North Temple at Nippur, discussed above, preserved such a knob over its central hole (fig. 6). Hansen³³ noted that the circular mark or depression around the central hole of a few of the Inana Temple plaques may have been made when such a knob was attached to the plaque (fig. 8). The finished area of peg 7 N 199 ends in a similar knob-like shape, and the roughly-hewn shaft has a smaller diameter. Peg 7 N 199 therefore might have left a similar circular mark or depression when driven through the central hole of a plaque.

³² Goetze 1970.

³³ Hansen 1963, 147.



Fig. 8: Nippur, Inana Temple level VIIB, Early Dynastic door plaque (7 N 308) with circular mark or depression (Courtesy of the Nippur Publication Project).

7 Conclusion

The inscribed dedicatory objects from the Inana Temple raise several interrelated issues worth considering. To begin, what is the significance of the lack of inscribed objects in the Inana Temple before level VIII? One possibility is that the appearance of inscribed objects in level VIII signals a functional shift. That is, the archaeological remains in the Inana Temple area had not yet assumed the function of a temple before level VIII. Arguing against this, however, are the plastering practices and installations associated with the central area of the preceding level IX, described above. Wilson,³⁴ however, noted that if level IX did indeed constitute the earliest Inana Temple, the material assemblage did not change from earlier levels. In other words, nothing in the level IX material assemblage would suggest a functional shift to a temple context.

Another possible significance of the lack of inscribed objects in the Inana Temple before level VIII is that the Early Dynastic tradition of dedicating objects to temples does not begin earlier. In the Early Dynastic temples in the Diyala region, however, the stone dedicatory objects common to Early Dynastic temple practices are attested

³⁴ Wilson in Zettler et al. (forthcoming).

in small numbers—albeit uninscribed—from the Early Dynastic I period onwards.³⁵ In Inana Temple level VIII, a small number of the stone dedicatory objects common to Early Dynastic temple practices do appear. Nevertheless, in comparison to the Diyala region, the object typologies common to Early Dynastic dedicatory practices arrive rather late to the Inana Temple at Nippur. This is in marked contrast to the usual observation that the Diyala material culture exhibits a time lag in comparison to southern Mesopotamia.

Karen Wilson³⁶ has also observed that level VIII yielded an increase in amulets, many in the form of reclining quadrupeds. Here it is worthwhile to note that some early ED levels of Diyala temples—pre-dating level VIII of the Inana Temple—also yielded large quantities of amulets (as well as beads and cylinder seals).³⁷ In level VIII of the Inana Temple, a group of objects including shells, beads, amulets, and other objects was found on the floor in the northeast corner of IT 225, which represents the area of the court north of sanctuary IT 223/224.³⁸ Stone vessels, three of which are sculpted, as well as two sculpture fragments (the feet and base of a statue and a head) and two fragmentary relief-carved stone door plaques were also present in IT 225. By association with these Early Dynastic dedicatory objects, it might be inferred that the shells, beads, and amulets were also dedicated. While beads and amulets continue to be attested among level VIIB hoards, the stone dedicatory objects common to Early Dynastic temple practices dominate the hoards associated with the level VIIB central sanctuary area.

Sculpture, door plaques, and pegs are not attested before level VIII, nor are sculpted stone vessels. Plain stone vessels, however, are attested in the Inana Temple before level VIII. None of the pre-level VIII stone vessels are inscribed. Are the pre-level VIII stone vessels nevertheless dedicatory objects? This raises a second issue worth considering when examining the inscribed dedicatory objects from the Inana Temple. Must an object be inscribed in order to be designated a dedicatory object?

In general, inscribed and uninscribed objects retrieved from temples are assumed to have the same significance.³⁹ Statues, plaques, pegs, mace heads, and other objects are designated dedicatory objects on the basis of inscribed examples. In Early Dynastic temples, inscribed and uninscribed objects are generally hoarded and buried indiscriminately with one another. But other object types found in large quantities in temples are not considered dedicatory because no inscribed examples have survived. For example, numerous shell inlays—often of indeterminable function or potentially inlaid into furniture, tableaux, or otherwise—are retrieved from Early Dynastic

³⁵ Delougaz/Hill/Lloyd 1942.

³⁶ Wilson in Zettler et al. (forthcoming).

³⁷ See Delougaz/Lloyd 1942, 136–42 (Khafajah, Sin Temple II, III, and IV); Evans 2012, 177.

³⁸ Zettler 1992, fig. 6; Gibson/Hansen/Zettler 2001, fig. 4.

³⁹ Braun-Holzinger 1991, 2.

temples but are not considered dedicatory objects. In some cases, the dimensions of the inlay from level VIIB of the Inana Temple are similar to or surpass those of some of the sculpture and thus would comprise a competing visual program. Inlay thus forms a major category of imagery in the Inana Temple. Are the Inana Temple inlay, none of which are inscribed, objects of dedication? In a similar vein, regarding the large numbers of stone vessels commonly retrieved from temples, were certain stone vessels dedicated whereas other stone vessels were part of the temple inventory and acquired through other means?

In addition to signaling that an object type is a category of Early Dynastic dedication, the presence of an inscription might signal when an object has been subject to reuse. This was suggested, for example, in the discussion above of the stone vessels set into the level VIIB installations. The inscriptions on these stone vessels would not have been visible once the object was set into the installation. Thus, current scholarship would suggest they are no longer within the phase of their primary purpose.

It is possible, however, that too much emphasis is placed on the inscription when evaluating the life of a dedicatory object within the temple. It is unclear, more generally, whether a dedicatory inscription had to remain visible in the temple once the act of dedication had occurred. It should not be discounted that an inscription may have served its purpose once the object entered the temple. It may not be correct to assume that any great length of time separated the act of dedication from the subsequent use of the vessels in the level VIIB installations.

In terms of visibility, it should be noted that at least one level VIIB stone bowl (7 N 128) was inscribed on the interior and thus would not have been visible when the bowl contained something. In contrast, the one inscribed Inana Temple peg and the stone door plaque dedicated by Lumma suggest that efforts were made in order to place inscriptions in areas that could be considered visible. In both these examples, parts of the object are only roughly finished. These areas, according to our understanding of the function of the object, were not meant to be visible. It was therefore in the visible, finished area in both these instances that the inscription was placed.

Nevertheless, that we might place too much emphasis on the inscription when evaluating the life of a dedicatory object is suggested by some texts which record offerings made by the Early Dynastic queens of Lagash.⁴⁰ We know, for example, that during the malt-eating festival of Nanshe, the Early Dynastic queen Baranamtara made offerings to deities and cultic objects. On two separate occasions, these offerings included eight units of dates and oil for “the statues of the inner room, of which there are eight” (literally “eight of them it is”). That the identity of the represented individual was known in other examples on the same occasion is attested by, for example, a statue identified as that of the ruler Urnanshe of Lagash which also received offerings.

⁴⁰ Evans 2012, 131–137.

Both a royal statue and eight statues potentially uninscribed therefore received offerings from the queen of Lagash.

In the Inana Temple, the evidence for the purposeful selection of stone dedicatory objects as building materials supports the significance of this phase in the life cycle of the object. The IT 173 installation had a stone substructure built from the dedicatory objects of predominantly male donors. The male donors represented by the stone construction materials suggest that such secondary acts of deposition can in fact tell us something about the context from which they were retrieved. As I suggested above, perhaps the IT 173 installation was a sphere of male cultic activity.

As a final issue regarding inscribed dedicatory objects, it should be noted that these objects were subject to reuse beyond that of construction materials, such as in the example of the IT 173 installation. The majority of statues from the Inana Temple have drill holes present at the neck suggesting that heads—or bodies—were easily replaceable.⁴¹ For these and other reasons, we should not assume that the inscription played a continual role in the life cycle of the object. If we are correct in understanding that recycling sculpture, evidenced in the example here of drill holes, meant recycling and reconstructing the human figure for a different donor, then the inscription was truly a material object. That is, the material presence of the inscription was voidable and in a different reiteration of the alon the human image could assume a different identity.

In this respect, the materiality of the dedicatory inscription can be reconciled with modern notions of materiality. Here I mean a consideration both beyond noting the presence and/or absence of an inscription and beyond noting the placement of the inscription. If the Early Dynastic system of dedicating objects is understood as a means of making the donor present in the temple, the life cycle of the object suggests the temporality of this presence. That is, the reuse of dedicatory objects suggests that the presence of the donor comprises just one phase in the larger life cycle of the stone medium from which most of these objects were fashioned.

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⁴¹ Evans 2012, 137–143.

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