

Excavations in the Harran Region

The title of the paper which I am about to read, was selected in the early spring of this year, before our excavating season began; and the fact that it no longer adequately covers the subject on which I am going to speak, must be attributed to one of those twists of fortune which are by no means uncommon in archaeological research.

It was in the spring of 1949 that I took over the directorship of our Ankara Institute. And, during the months which followed, there was much discussion in connection with the choice of a suitable site for our future excavations. In the summer of that year, a start was in fact made with a tentative sounding in a central Anatolian mound, called Polatlı Hüyük, and resulted in a most satisfactory re-analysis of the complete Bronze-Age stratigraphy of that region. This sounding was made in collaboration with the Turkish Antiquities Department, represented by Bay Nuri Gökçe, Director of the Hittite Museum in Ankara; an arrangement which proved so agreeable and satisfactory that it has since been adopted for work on a much larger scale. In the spring of last year, partly as a result of a peculiar predilection on my own part, our attention was directed towards the southern frontier provinces between the Tigris and Euphrates, which, for political and military reasons, have been so comparatively little studied in the past and in particular to the ruins of ancient Harran.

It was of course clear to us at the time, that this gigantic ruinfield with its castle, mosque and mediaeval walls enclosing an area over a mile wide, would itself, as a target for an excavating project, be far beyond the means at our disposal. Yet it was felt that a re-investigation of the city's topography and that of the surrounding area, might bring to light some detached site, whose problems were more within our scope. With this purpose in view, I undertook a new survey of the region in July and August

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of 1950. I was assisted by Mr. William Brice of Manchester University, who re-planned the whole of the ruins in the greatest detail, and has since collaborated in the preparation of a report, published this month in the first issue of the Institute's new journal, "Anatolian Studies".

It is unnecessary here to emphasise the importance of Harran in Assyrian times as one of the two great centres of the old Babylonian moon-cult, or to remind you of its great temple of Sin, E-Hul-Hul, which is referred to so frequently throughout the annals of Assyrian literature. According to most authorities, it was destroyed when Harran finally fell into the hands of the Umman-Manda in 610 B.C., and its rebuilding 54 years later is described in the "Dream of Nabonidus". One's first impulse, in examining the site of Harran, is to look for some indication of where this temple might have stood. But one soon realises that here, in contrast to most other Mesopotamian sites, two thousand years of subsequent occupation have buried the remains of the Assyrian city beneath so many metres of debris, that any such speculation would be mere guess-work. Nevertheless, at Harran there is a second unique circumstance, in that, throughout those twenty odd centuries the city continued, was inhabited by a people who in Arab times came to be called Sabians, and that these people, in the face of every discouragement, continued to perpetuate the more important elements of the old Assyrian religion well into the Middle Age. It was therefore to Chwolsohns great book on the Sabians that one naturally turned for guidance in considering the topography of the city and the possible location of its holy places. In this connection, the evidence from literary sources of all periods have been re-examined in our report and some new conclusions drawn from our own observations.

These conclusions may be very briefly summarised. Among literary references to buildings within the area of the city itself, the only clue to the location of the principal moon-shrine in Sabian times, is to be found in Dimeshki's mention of such a building being destroyed by the

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Fatimites in A.D. 1032. Dimeshki most positively identifies this building with the citadel or castle of his time; and in fact, in examining the ruins of this building, as they exist today, we were forced to the conclusion that it must have been built around the remains of a much earlier structure. We were accordingly much inclined to identify this as the remains of the Sabian shrine and a possible site for E-Hul-Hul.

An alternative theory which has occasionally been put forward in connection with the Assyrian moon-temple, is that it was located outside the actual walls of the city. Indeed in Sabian times, Chwolsohn postulates the existence of two shrines in its immediate neighbourhood, one dedicated to Sin and another to the moon-goddess, Selene or Nikal, the spouse of Sin. The former of these we were able to identify fairly positively by the survival of its ancient name, Der Kadi, with a site just south of the Syrian border called Ain-al-Arûs. The identification of the latter seemed to us a good deal less unequivocal. This shrine is associated with the death of the Emperor Caracalla; for it was from here that he was returning, after sacrificing to the Moon Goddess on 6th April, 987 A.D. when his assassination took place. It has even been remarked that the date corresponds to that of the Goddess' Spring Festival. A clue to the location of this shrine is given by Spartian, who says that it was some distance from Harran on the road to Edessa. It was this fact which drew our attention to the site called Aşağı Yarımca; for here in 1949, five miles from Harran on the Edessa road, peasants had discovered an Assyrian stela bearing the emblem of the god Sin, and a further investigation had uncovered traces of a large stone building.

Our own first full-scale excavating expedition began in April of this year. It was again arranged in collaboration with Bay Nuri Gökçe and the site chosen for a first sounding was Yarımca. The Assyrian stela proved to have been preserved in a building of a much later period. It lay upon
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the stone pavement of an open court, flanked on one side by a columned portico in the classical manner, somewhat resembling those of the Parthian period at Dura Europos. Meanwhile the remainder of the building, traces of which had been found a little higher up the hill to the north, was found to be of an even later period, its final reconstruction being dated by a Kufic inscription to the Ninth Century A.D. Here then, as had been expected, was evidently a Sabian religious building, possibly marking the site of an original Assyrian moon-shrine. But by the end of a fortnight's excavating, it had become clear that its fuller investigation offered the most formidable practical difficulties. Little could be made of the main building, since the "ritual" half of it had been completely quarried away by villagers in search of earth to make bricks, while the remainder yielded no objects. Meanwhile, deep soundings beneath it had encountered mud-brick walls of the sort one would associate with an Assyrian building. But these were mere unplastered foundations, and again no objects or pottery were associated with them to make their identification more certain. The prospect therefore of continuing to trace them beneath many metres of later debris was more than discouraging; and it was eventually decided that the prospects offered by the site would not justify the expenditure of the whole sum of money at our disposal.

Our reconnaissances of the Harran area had now covered all the principal sites such as Eski Harran, Tell Ambar, Anas Hüyük (ancient Dowra) and Sultantepe, where chance finds of Assyrian sculpture or inscriptions have been made in the past; and it was the last of these that was now chosen for further excavation. Again situated on the road from Harran to Edessa, Sultantepe had other attributes to recommend it. On our first visit to the mound, our great interest had been aroused by the enormous size of three basalt column-bases, which were to be seen projecting from the ground, at what appeared to be the approach to the ancient citadel, and in the fragments of Assyrian pottery visible on the surface at approximately the same level. Cylinder seals and other small objects brought

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by villagers, confirmed our impression that the Assyrian Empire was here represented by an important settlement. At the same time, our attention was drawn to the remains of a fine Roman mosaic, lying just beneath the surface, on the outskirts of what must have been an extensive Roman settlement at the foot of the main mound.

The turfed summit of the Sultantepe mound reaches a height of nearly fifty metres above the surrounding plain, and must therefore be considered one of the highest accumulations of occupational debris in the north Mesopotamian area. On starting our excavations, it was accordingly all the more impressive to find that, just as we had suspected, the latest Assyrian occupation occurred only seven metres beneath the summit. The existence of forty-three metres of earlier occupations would indeed lead one to infer that even in prehistoric times, the place must have been a centre of very considerable importance.

Work was started in the vicinity of the citadel-gateway, where a deep recess in the side of the mound made a good deal of preliminary clearing necessary, in order to avoid dumping over the line of basalt column-bases. While this was in progress a step-trench was cut from the summit downwards in order to make a careful check of the post-Assyrian levels. This showed that the last seven metres represented a long and continuous occupation in Hellenistic and Roman times. From a modest beginning, at a time when Seleucid coinage was still in use, the hill-top settlement appeared to have reached its period of maximum prosperity in the second century A.D., where it was characterised by much fine "Pergamene" ware, some pieces bearing dateable potter's stamps. Next, the clearance at the citadel-entrance was carried down to the Assyrian level, where it was found that, in spite of much damage caused by the drainage of surface water and the digging of grain-pits in later times, a monumental gateway could be reconstructed, apparently supported on wooden columns.

While this work was in progress, the appearance of some large baked bricks projecting from the mound on the northwest side, led to the dis-

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covery of the building whose investigation became the main preoccupation of our work for the remainder of the season. Being covered by some metres of later debris, it proved accessible only where exposed by the erosion of the mound. Yet we were able, in the time at our disposal, to clear a succession of chambers, and eventually to obtain a surprisingly clear idea of its plan and character. The chambers were mostly paved with kiln-baked bricks of the normal Assyrian shape, and in two cases these were covered with bitumen. The walls separating the chambers had an average thickness of about two metres and in most cases were painted white over the mud-plaster. Several rooms contained large deposits of late Assyrian pottery and other objects, and our tentative dating of these was confirmed, when, for the first time, three small contract tablets appeared amongst them. One of these has since been dated by an eponym to the year 784 B.C.

By this time, the lateral investigation of the building had been carried a stage further, by cutting a trench across the northernmost extremity of the summit, and by this means, its eastern limits had been ascertained. The next sounding was therefore made outside the actual building, on the northeast side, and it was during the first day's work at this point, that a very large group of cuneiform tablets was encountered just beneath the surface.

The walls of the room in which the tablets lay, ran at an angle of forty-five degrees to those of the main building, and seemed to take more the line of the eastern side of the mound. Its floor-level also proved to be nearly a metre and a half lower than that of the chambers we had hitherto been excavating. Nevertheless the correspondence in time between the new cache of tablets and those already found in the building itself was conclusively demonstrated by certain distinctive objects found in association with both groups.

As clearance proceeded, the shape of the deposit became gradually more clear. A semicircle of large empty wine-jars had been arranged at the foot

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of the wall, and the space thus enclosed was filled with tablets, sculptured vases and other objects, apparently thrown down, or carelessly piled upon each other to a depth of about seventy centimetres. Only a section of the pile could be cleared in the remaining days of our season, partly owing to the familiar difficulty of extracting and handling such tablets in an unbaked state. Yet the greater parts of more than one hundred and fifty documents were recovered and are now under study in the Hittite Museum at Ankara. The remainder of the pile, which, to judge by its shape, should still contain many times the number already recovered, has been sealed-in and left until next season.

The tablets, as I have said, were all of them unbaked and in an extremely fragile condition, being themselves very often softer in consistency than the earth in which they were buried. A word as to their treatment will not therefore perhaps be out of place. The extraction was undertaken by Mrs. Seton Lloyd and the Institute Scholar, Mr. Basil Hennessey, who between them evolved a technique, which appears to have proved satisfactory. Paraffin wax was used sparingly; first in the ground, in order to assure the adherence of small loose fragments; and afterwards in camp, to unite and strengthen the separate parts of each. Wherever possible, the inscribed face was left clean, and the wax fed into the open cracks or applied along the edges. Only in very rare cases, where tablets were too fragmentary to move, was wax applied in large quantities. As a result of this treatment, it has been possible for the epigraphist to make a fairly detailed preliminary reading before baking; and as there has been some delay in obtaining the use of a kiln in Ankara, this has proved a great advantage.