78 Hall à Monsieur E. Pottier hommage d'admiration HH.

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THE BRITISH MUSEUM ARCHÆOLOGICAL MISSION IN MESOPOTAMIA, 1919

By Dr. H. R. Hall, M.B.E., D.Litt., F.S.A.
Deputy-Keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities, British Museum

A meeting of the Central Asian Society was held at the Royal United Services Institution, Whitehall, on Thursday, February 9, the Right Hon. Lord Carnock in the chair. A lecture was given by Dr. H. R. Hall, Deputy Keeper of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities, British Museum, on "The British Museum Archæological Mission in Mesopotamia, 1919."

In opening the proceedings, the Chairman said: Ladies and gentlemen, I should like to announce that since our last meeting nine new members have been elected to the Society, and if any persons here feel disposed to become members, or put themselves up for election, Captain Stephenson, the Hon. Secretary, will be happy to give any information after this meeting about the Society. I am glad to say that we have the pleasure of the presence here of Dr. Hall of the British Museum, who proposes to read us a paper on the British Museum Archæological Mission in Mesopotamia. I think Dr. Hall is sufficiently well known to all who take the slightest interest in that subject to obviate any necessity that I should introduce him. I will therefore ask him if he will kindly deliver his lecture. (Applause.)

The capture of Baghdad in 1917 and the British occupation of the whole of Mesopotamia, with the exception of the Mosul district, that followed turned the attention of British archæologists towards the possibility of starting active excavation in the mounds of Babylonia again as soon as possible, under direct British auspices and while our forces were in occupation of the country. Accordingly, the Trustees of the British Museum, by arrangement with the War Office, entrusted Captain R. Campbell Thompson, M.A., formerly of the Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities in the British Museum, and one of the most eminent British Assyriologists, who was then actually on the spot in Mesopotamia as an intelligence officer, with the task of carrying out the proposed excavations. Captain Thompson was deputed from the Army for this purpose. He began work in the district of Naṣrīyah, and after a week spent on the site of the ancient city of Ur "of the Chaldees," the modern Tell el-Muḳayyar, and examination of other sites in the neighbourhood of Sūḳ esh-Shuyūkh and the Hammar Lake, such as Tell el-Laḥm and Tell ej-Judēidah, he concentrated his efforts on what is in many respects the most interesting site in Babylonia, Tell Abu Shaḥrein, the old Eridu, which the Babylonians themselves

considered to be the most ancient city in their country. Ur and Shaḥrein were sites of old interest to British, and especially British Museum archæologists, as in 1854 they had both been investigated for the first time by Captain Taylor, whose digging results were already in the Museum. At Shaḥrein Captain Thompson worked for a month, using the nomad Arabs who came up to that part of the world in the spring (a sept of the Dhiffīr) as his workmen by arrangement with their sheikh, Hamūd, and, by his method of sinking pits all over the mound, and carefully recording the objects found at different depths, has given us first accurate knowledge of the beginning of culture at Eridu. He also collected a rich harvest of the implements of chert, flint, and obsidian, and the fragments of painted pottery that had been in the course of centuries washed by the winter rains out of the lower strata of the mounds on to the surrounding plain, where they now lie for the picking up. His discoveries have now been fully published in *Archæologia*, vol. lxx. (1920).

His season's work finished, he returned to England, and, in view of the promising results, the Trustees of the British Museum, at the recommendation of Sir F. G. Kenyon, K.C.B., the Director, decided to send me out as his successor, owing to the serious illness of my since deceased colleague and friend, Professor Leonard W. King, who otherwise would himself have proceeded to Mesopotamia to take charge of the work. I was at the same time to place my services as adviser in archæological matters at the disposal of the Mesopotamian authorities so long as I was out. I was accordingly demobilized from the Intelligence branch of the Army and, on my arrival at Basrah under the auspices of the War Office, was attached to the Mesopotamian Political Service with my Army rank of Captain.

In this capacity I proceeded, at the direction of my temporary chief, Lieut.-Colonel A. T. (now Sir Arnold) Wilson, the Chief Civil Commissioner, to Baghdad, and, after a visit to Ctesiphon, inspected the ruins of Babylon and Birs Nimrūd. At the former place I carried out certain works of conservation that were necessary, especially in the "Hall of Belshazzar," with the help of sepoys of the Erinpura Battalion, kindly lent me by Brigadier-General E. W. Costello, V.C., then commanding at Hillah, who always showed great interest in the archæological remains in his command. At the same time I made an inventory of the antiquities then in the German house at Kweiresh, close by, which Professor Koldewey, the German excavator of Babylon, had been compelled to abandon in 1917. The house had been plundered by the Arabs before the arrival of our troops from Baghdad, but luckily the antiquities did not appear to have suffered much; the museum-room seemed more or less intact with its contents. But the others, the living-rooms of the house, had suffered a wild *Verwüstung*, as their owners would have called it. Furniture and household

utensils, boxes and books, were all scattered about, and a pile of rubbish in one room was pathetically crowned by the celluloid dog-collar and *Mantschetten*, or cuffs, of some Teuton (fancy wearing such things in Mesopotamia!), for which obviously the Arab had no use. Reverently these relics were reduced to order and the house tidied up; and when the work of making the inventory of antiquities and writing various reports and recommendations to be transmitted to the Government at Baghdad was completed, and a new roof built to protect the stacks of boxes of architectural fragments which lay in the courtyard, the house was again sealed up, to await the day when, as it is hoped, it may be again opened as a local museum for Babylon, and the living-rooms used as a hostel for architects and archæological students.

At Birs Nimrūd I had to report on the stability of the fragment of the *ziḳḳurrat*, or temple tower, that still stands like a jagged tooth above masses of brickwork, vitrified by some great conflagration, that crown the mound. So fierce must the heat have been that consumed the tower that it may be suggested that crude oil or *mazūt* was used; piles of brushwood soaked in oil were probably heaped up against the tower, and then the torch applied. If, as is probable, the tower was burnt by Elamite conquerors, this seems quite possible.

At Nippur I recommended certain minor works of conservation of walls, etc. On account of the danger of rain and the resulting impassable mud, to get to Sūḳ el-Afej, near which Nippur lies, from Dīwānīyah and back at the beginning of February, was rather a risky proceeding if, as was the case with me, one was hurried. And sure enough after we had got to Afej the rain came down, and I have a vivid recollection of what was probably one of the most sodden, mournful, and miserable days of my life, marooned in pouring rain and squelching mud at Sūḳ el-Afej, which, to say the least of it, does not look its best as a "county town" under such conditions. However, the next day was fine and delightful, and the journey in a *bellam*, with its awning and its picturesque carved prow, *à la* Cleopatra on the Cydnus, up the local canal, and the ensuing ride to Nippur, was an experience as pleasant and interesting as the previons day's had been wretched. But on the return to Dīwānīyah on the following day the Fords stuck in the mud, and only the strenuous energy of Captain Daly, the local political officer, who accompanied us, extricated us from the slough of despond.

Then southwards again, with a Burmese chauffeur at the wheel, beguiling the way with conversation in excellent English about Rangoon and the Shwē Dagōn, *phungyis*, and *pwēs*, and *Nats*, and comparisons between Burma and Mesopotamia, by no means to the advantage of the latter. So to Rumeitha and Samāwa, afterwards notable as chief centres of the revolt on the Euphrates in 1920. A year previously, however, they were peaceful enough, and with their

palm groves and comparatively prosperous look (so different from the miserable Tigris towns on their treeless banks of arid mud, past which I had steamed for so many weary days on the way from Basrah to Baghdad), reminded me more of Egypt than any other part of Mesopotamia ever did.

From picturesque old Samāwa, embowered in its palms on both banks of the Euphrates, to ugly modern Naṣrīyah, looking rather like a new Greek town with its broad shadeless streets crossing at right angles, in a motor-boat, and the scene of excavation was reached. Out in the desert loomed the red bulk of Tell el-Muḳayyar, which was now to be my home for four months. I camped under the shadow of the *ziḳḳurrat*, and got to work on February 14, 1919, with seventy Turkish prisoners of war, kindly lent by the military authorities, and the Arab *reises* whom I had brought from Babylon. The nett results of the excavations were (1) the uncovering of the foundations of Ê-kharsag ("The House of the Mountain"), a palace of the kings Ur-Nammu (or Ur-Engur) and Dungi, of the Third Dynasty of Ur (*circa* 2300 B.C.), and the discovery of Ê-makh ("The Noble House"), a temple of the goddess Ninsun; (2) the clearance of the south-east face of the *ziḳḳurrat*; (3) the discovery of part of the *temenos* wall of the temple, with its cellars or casemates in the foundation; (4) the exploration of some streets of the ancient city, in which later inhabitants had buried their dead in earthenware coffins or *larnakes*. The burnt brick walls of (1) were well and carefully built, usually 5 feet thick, showing that the ancient inhabitants well knew the proper thickness to make a wall in Mesopotamia, to keep out both the heat of summer and the cold of winter. The same people, apparently, who buried their dead in the pottery coffins had re-occupied the site of Ê-kharsag at a later date, probably the Assyrian period (ninth to seventh centuries B.C.), and had built amidst its ruin their own feeble and careless brick constructions, largely utilizing the ancient material. Tablets of this later period, beautifully written in cuneiform, containing legal documents, were found in these later constructions. A deposit of these was unearthed at the moment of a visit from Sir John Hewett, G.C.S.I., late Lieut.-Governor of the United Provinces (then on a mission to Mesopotamia), and his staff; and I was, of course facetiously, accused of having "salted" the dig on his honour! Traces of the great fire, by which, in all probability, Ur was destroyed by the Elamites about 2285 B.C., were everywhere to be seen; and remains of stone statues, smashed to atoms probably by the same destroyers, were also found.

When the desert surface was sufficiently firm to bear the weight of a car, and there was no immediate danger of rain and mud, I went out to Shaḥrein, fourteen miles away, and eventually transferred my work there. From the top of the Ur *ziḳḳurrat* one could see the drab top of Shaḥrein, with its base and ends cut off by mirage, looking like

an airship as it swam in the heat-haze. An hour or so's bumping and lurching over the heath and thorn-covered surface of the so-called desert (in reality a steppe) brought me to the base of the mounds of Eridu, isolated like an island in the centre of its surrounding depression, which was the site of the lake, the "sea" in the midst of which the ancient town of the "beloved abyss" (as the Sumerians called it), once stood. For geological reasons it is improbable that Eridu ever stood on the shore of the Persian Gulf, as used to be thought. The "sea" referred to in the cuneiform texts is this lake.

The top, or rather tip, of this *ziḳḳurrat* rises at the north end of the mounds to the height of 80 feet. It is of crude brick, unburnt, and so keeps its drab hue, whereas Tell el-Muḳayyar, the *ziḳḳurrat* of Ur, is red from the savage fire of the Elamites that once consumed it, like Birs Nimrūd. The fierce rains of winter have worn it down into a curious peaked shape at the summit. All round are the mounds in which Captain Thompson had sunk his pits in the preceding year. I also had the help of his Dhiffīr Beduins, with some of my Turks. My object was not to sink pits for stratigraphical evidence, as Captain Thompson had done, but to select some portion of the ancient city of Eridu itself and dig it out at one level, so as to obtain an idea of the buildings of the city. I accordingly excavated a series of houses and streets of the late Sumerian period, apparently of about the age of Gudea, or perhaps a century or two earlier. These houses were built of rectangular crude bricks faced with coarse lime-plaster, occasionally decorated with horizontal bands of red, white, and black painting. Little was found in them, but the harvest of the surrounding plain, with its stone implements and its painted pottery lying on the surface, was again immense. The stone walls and bastions of the town (an unusual feature in Babylonia) were also explored in part. They are built of a rough coral rag, found not far away to the south, in a ridge which effectively disposes of the view that Eridu once stood on the shores of the Persian Gulf.

The heat at Shaḥrein, for it was now the beginning of May, was great, and it was with relief that I moved away over the desert again, with combined camel and motor-car transport, to the small mound of el-'Obeid, ten miles away to the north and near the railway-line between Ur and el-Khidhr, which was to be the scene of our best discoveries. I had already found this mound in the course of a reconnaissance from Ur, being attracted to it by the identity of the remains lying on the surface around it with those at Shaḥrein, and had tentatively attacked it with men sent out by car from Ur. Now, having shifted camp to it, I set to work to dig out the remarkable "beasts" of copper, the *behaimīn* (monsters) of which we had already found the first traces.

Tell el-'Obeid is what the Arabs of the *rīf* call it; the Beduin name is Tell el-Ma'abed, "the mound of the place of worship," which is per-

haps the original and more correct form. It is the site of a little rectangular building, 110 feet long by 85 feet wide, apparently the platform of a small temple or the base of a small *zikḳurrat*, of the earliest Sumerian time, built of the characteristic plano-convex burnt bricks of the fourth millenium B.C., and with the recessed or panelled exterior characteristic of that time. It was apparently a shrine of the goddess Damkina, the consort of Enki, the god of Shaḥrein. At the south-east end of this construction, beneath a brick platform of the time of Dungi, in a confused heap, as if they had been thrown into a *favissa*, were found the *behaimīn*.

The find resembles in nature and circumstances the famous deposit of gold, copper, and stone figures, *etc.*, of the Old Kingdom found at Kōm el-aḥmar (Hierakōnpolis) in Upper Egypt by Mr. J. E. Quibell in 1897.

Four life-size heads of lions with rudimentary foreparts but little else in the way of bodies, one smaller lion's head, two heads of panthers or cats, and two small bulls about the size of greyhounds: these were the beasts. They were of copper, and their cast heads had been filled with bitumen and clay, while their hammered bodies, or what remained of them, had been rudely nailed over wooden cores, just like the Egyptian copper or bronze (?) statues of King Pepi and his son from Hierakōnpolis (Sixth Dynasty, *circa* 2700 B.C.). The fact of the heads being cast, which appears to be generally agreed upon by the sculptors and metal-workers who have examined them, is very surprising, and is important in the history of metallurgy. The bitumen and clay filling of the heads reminds one of the description of the image in "Bel and the Dragon," that was "brass without and clay within" (*cf.* Dan. ii. 34).

The lion heads had inlaid eyes of red jasper, white shell, and blue schist, teeth of shell, and tongues of red jasper. All were in very bad condition, the copper being oxidized through and through, so that hardly any metal remained; and it is lucky that the bitumen cores reproduce for us, as if they were casts, the appearance of the copper heads. They, too, have suffered, but can easily be put together, while the reconstitution of the copper heads themselves is not beyond the powers of the restorer's art, and, it is to be hoped, may be attempted in the near future. Dr. Alexander Scott, F.R.S., is now studying the proper method of treatment.

Of the bulls, one fell to green powder almost immediately after discovery, but not until after it had been photographed; its head alone remained intact. The other can eventually be restored. An isolated bull's head is one of the finest examples of early Sumerian art in this *genre* known. The gold horn of another bull was also found, of thick hammered and polished gold, stuffed with bitumen again to give it strength. Cheek by jowl with these remains were found a small seated statue of a man, about 2 feet high, made of trachyte, of the usual early Sumerian type, with shaven head, prominent nose, and

enormous eyes, and the torso of another, possibly of the same man, but made of white limestone, and inscribed with a dedication in the most archaic cuneiform characters for Kur-Lil, the doorkeeper of Erech, to the goddess Damkina. These figures date the whole find to the epoch of Ur-Ninā of Lagash, about 3200 B.C. or earlier—a date otherwise deducible from the style of the animal heads.

Finally, as a crown to the whole work, was found close by the remarkable copper slab, 8 feet long by 3 feet 6 inches high, on which in high relief are the crudely cast copper figures of two stags, with heads in the round, walking to left and right respectively, whose tails are grasped by the talons of a lion-headed eagle in full face, who occupies the centre of the relief, while his wings fill up the space above the stags. This antithetical group represents Imgig, the mythical bird of the god Ningirsu, seizing his victims. The relief is the largest example of the group yet known, and is a notable relic of early Sumerian art.

Its excavation and removal was a very ticklish job, on account of the terribly oxidized condition of the copper, already so bad when discovered that the figure of the eagle could only be discovered by the eye of knowledge, since where the stags were we knew the eagle must be, but, sure enough, his wings were evident to settle the matter.

However, by careful labour the work was done, and the whole relief transported *en bloc*, without cutting up, to England, where it awaits the needful treatment and restoration. As a beginning the head of one of the stags has been treated, and is now on view, with the other objects described, in the British Museum.

Other interesting objects were found here, such as pottery rosettes, with petals of red, white, and black stones, on long shanks for insertion in crude brick walls, and pillars, originally wooden, faced with mosaic designs of red sandstone, black bituminous limestone, and mother-of-pearl, fastened by copper wire into a bitumen backing. These are quite new to our knowledge.

And the immediately surrounding tract gave us the same prehistoric stone implements and painted pottery as at Shaḥrein. This pottery is in itself one of the most important results of the expedition. That of 'Obeid differs little from that of Shaḥrein, but is often finer and with more delicate designs. Both are of the same type as that of de Morgan's "second style," found at Susa, and are identical with that found by Pézard at Bushire. At 'Obeid I found a few bits of the "first style." It is not wheel-made, but belongs to the age immediately preceding the invention of the wheel, and may be dated not later than 3500 B.C., in the chalcolithic period of culture, before metal was exclusively used. It is often highly fired, almost vitreous. This ceramic seems to have been common to Mesopotamia, Elam, Northern Persia, and Turkistan at that period, and connects definitely with similar pot-fabrics of somewhat later date in Asia Minor, while further connections may be adumbrated for it, from Thessaly to Honan.

The Sumerian of the historic period, the full age of metal, used a plain drab ware, which persisted, with the sole addition of green or polychrome glaze, till the end of Babylonian culture. The old black-painted vitreous ware was never revived.

I found also at 'Obeid, as Thompson and I had at Shaḥrein, the same votive (?) sickles of hard pottery, the strange curved pottery nails, *etc.*, which had already been discovered by our predecessor, Taylor, at both sites in 1854.

It was now the end of May, and the heat unbearable: 116° F. in the shade. El-'Obeid could not be finished, but still awaits the completing spade, while of Ur, of course, but a sample or two had been taken. It was impossible to go on in that season, and I hoped to return before long. Financial and political considerations have, however, denied us the fulfilment of that hope. It is, nevertheless, still permissible to hope that the work thus begun may eventually be taken up again, and the excavation of this interesting group of ancient sites be carried a step further. Completion of the exploration of such an enormous site as Ur is, of course, a thing of the dim and distant future, and work at Shaḥrein entails peculiar difficulties, notably the want of water, which I had to have brought daily by car in tanks from the railway at Ur Junction, fifteen miles away.

I left Basrah at the end of May, and, after an archæological visit to Upper Egypt and to Jerusalem, reached England again in August, 1919. My work would not have been possible without the help, not only of the Chief Commissioner and his subordinates, but also of the Commander-in-Chief, Major-General Sir George MacMunn, whose interest in antiquities is well known, of Brigadier-General C. E. Sutton commanding lines of communication, and of the railway officers to whose ever ready and cordial assistance we owe so much.

I was alone during most of the work, having a British warrant officer, Sergeant-Major Stanley Webb, to look after the prisoner diggers and help on occasion; he, however, remained permanently at Ur. The Commander-in-Chief kindly lent me an R.E. officer, Lieutenant H. D. O'Sullivan, for a week at the end of the work in order to make proper plans of the buildings discovered. These, with photographs, were published in the preliminary account of the excavation which appeared in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries for December, 1919.

The CHAIRMAN: I do not think that at this late hour I can venture to invite anybody to make any observations, but I think we must all be deeply indebted to Dr. Hall for having allowed us to pass an hour so agreeably and so profitably among the memorials of an ancient past, which has been so beautifully illustrated by the plates he has shown us. I am quite sure that I shall have your entire concurrence in thanking Dr. Hall most warmly for having come here this evening, and entertained and instructed us during his lecture. (Applause.)