

Ancient Arab Customs

Scientists puzzling over cuneiform documents and ruins of Babylonian cities may turn to the living Arabs of the countryside for new light on customs of ancient Babylonia. This is the finding of Dr. Raymond P. Dougherty, who has spent several months making an archaeological survey of southern Mesopotamia, while on leave from Goucher College at Baltimore.

Dr. Dougherty, who has returned to this country to become professor of Assyriology at Yale University, reports that the study of existing Arab life in southern Mesopotamia, including the customs of the Marsh Arabs, indicate that the present is saturated largely with the past.

"A striking proof of this was noted in structures with slanting sides and recessed panels, reminding one of the old Sumerian and Babylonian temple towers," he said. "Other evidences of the survival of ancient ways of doing things were found in existing methods of soil cultivation, irrigation, and navigation. So clear are these resemblances to old practices that cuneiform documents, recovered from ruined cities and deciphered by scholars, gain new meaning from a study of present conditions."

The area explored by Dr. Dougherty was centuries ago an important part of Babylonia. The survey was for the purpose of determining the archaeological possibilities of the region, and he reports that numerous sites, some known before, others freshly discovered, are capable of yielding rich rewards to the excavator's spade. Some objects of antiquity, such as seal impressions, seal cylinders, decorated pieces of pottery, stone implements and worked flints, were obtained and brought to America for future study.

"Scores of city mounds, some of them representing debris from 3,000 to 4,000 years old, were visited and investigated," said Dr. Dougherty. "For many days the expedition waded its way through a district which was very populous in antiquity, because it was irrigated by the Euphrates river and its branches. Now the land is barren and deserted, due to the absence of water in old channels and artificial canals.

"During the last week of the survey there was opportunity to study the picturesque life of the Marsh Arabs who dwell in reed huts in the swampy sections of southern Mesopotamia."

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Football In Good Old Days

For as concerning football playing I protest unto you that it maie rather bee called a friendlie kinde of fight than a plaie or recreation; a bloudie and murtheryng practise than a fellowlie sporte or pastyme. For doeth not everyone lye in waight for his adversarie, seekyng to overthrow hym and to picke hym on the nose, though it bee uppon harde stones, in ditch or dale, in valley or hill? In what place so ever it bee he careth not, so he mav have hym downe: And he that can serve the moste of this fashion, he is counted the onlie fellowe, and who but he? So that by this meanes sometymes their neckes are broken, sometymes their backes, sometymes their legges, sometymes their armes, sometymes one parte thrust out of joynt, sometye another; sometye the noses gush out with bloud, sometye their eyes start out; and sometymes they are hurt in one place, sometymes in an other. But who so ever escapeth awaie the best, goeth not scotfree, but is either sore wounded and bruized, or els scapeth every harlie. And no marvaile for they have sleightes to meet one betwixt two, to dash hym against the harte with their elbowes, to hitte hym under the shortte ribbes with their griped fists, and with their knees to catch hym upon the hip, and to picke hym on his necke, with an hundred such murtheryng devices: And hereof groweth envie, malice, rancour, cholour, hatred, displeasure, enmitie, and what not els? Any sometye fightyng, braulyng, contention, quarrell pickyng, murther, homicide, and great effusion of bloud, as experience daily teacheth.

—Philip Stubbs,
Anatomy of Abuses
(Sixteenth Century)

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MEDICINE

After 500 Years

It is recorded of Methusalem, who, being the longest liver, may be supposed to have best preserved his health, that he slept always in the open air; for when he had lived five hundred years an angel said to him: "Arise, Methusalem, and build thee a house, for thou shalt live five hundred years longer." But Methusalem answered and said: "If I am to live but five hundred years longer it is not worth while to build me a house; I will sleep in the air as I have been used to do."

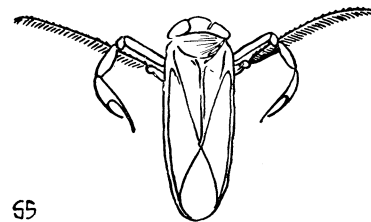
—Benjamin Franklin.

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NATURE RAMBLINGS

By FRANK THONE



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Autumnal Arthropods

On the whole, aquatic insects survive longer in autumn than do those of the land, probably because water radiates its acquired heat more slowly than do soil and rock, thus giving its lesser cold-blooded denizens a longer lease of life. Among the last of the insects to disappear is the water boatman, and when he does vanish it is only to hibernate in the slime at the bottom of his pond, so that on mild and iceless winter days he may sometimes come up to the surface for a look around.

The water boatman should have been christened the submarine boatman, for he does but little skimming of the surface. Every couple of hours he comes up for air, for he is still as much an air-breather as a butterfly, for all his diver's life. But the rest of the time he spends on the bottom, clinging to stems and roots with his tong-like middle pair of legs, while he scoops up quantities of ooze with his front pair, which are spoons. He spills this unsavory-seeming mess in front of his face incessantly, and out of it he sorts tiny animals and plants with his mouth.

The third pair of legs are what give him his distinguishing name, for they are perfect oars. Straight and stiff on the sweep, they are pulled forward on the return with but little resistance. And their feet are equipped with automatic paddles which set themselves athwart the water on the stroke, but fold up on the return—a faultless "feathering" arrangement.

But some of the multi-legged creatures of the land do survive. Which of us, young or old, does not remember the incantation proper to the finding of a Daddy-Long-Legs:

"Grand-daddy-long-legs, where is my cow

"Tell me right now

"Or I will surely mash you!"

And all too often we young savages used to carry into effect this sanguinary threat, in spite of the fact that

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