

ARCHAEOLOGY

Susa, Oldest City on Earth, Tells About Early Culture

Japheth, as Namesake of First Civilized Peoples, is Now Honored Above His Older Brothers, Ham and Shem

By FRANK THONE

UR of the Chaldees, lately hailed as the oldest city on earth, must yield place to a city that is older still. The home town of Abraham, that stood on the Mesopotamian plain before the Flood, received its first settlers and learned its first civilization from the hill country of Elam to the east, whose chief city was Susa. Before Ur ever arose, before Babylon the great was even dreamed of, Susa was. How large a city stood there under the flank of the Zagros mountains, in the gray twilight before the dawn of history, we do not know; there is not even a tradition of its kings or priests, nor of its conquered provinces if it had any.

But Susa was there, a settled and populous community, with highly developed arts and industries and presumably with a well-organized system of government and a religion. The inhabitants were in the last stage of the New Stone Age, or rather in the transition period between it and the Age of Metals.

Focal Point of Culture

The New Stone Age, as everybody knows, has been given the special name of Neolithic. This last end of it, when the application of metals was gradually being discovered, has recently acquired the name "Aeneolithic" or "Eneolithic," to indicate its transitional character.

Aeneolithic pottery, stones, copper and other artifacts have been found across a vast stretch of territory in Asia, all the way from what is now Turkey to Baluchistan, and there are indications that the culture extended on into interior China. Susa was not the capital of an empire of this extent, but merely the focal point of the highest Aeneolithic culture, like Paris or Vienna in modern Europe.

What were the Aeneolithic people like? Where did they come from? What influence did they have on the develop-

ment of history in the Mesopotamian valley? Have they any modern descendants?

These questions, all highly interesting since they are about the oldest civilized people in the world, are raised by Prof. E. A. Speiser of the University of Pennsylvania, and given at least a preliminary answer in a new book which has just been published by the press of his University.

To answer the questions one by one: The people of the Aeneolithic culture typified at Susa were a definite sub-race that was neither Semitic, Hamitic nor Indo-European. They may possibly have come from farther north, from the region between the Black and Caspian seas. They laid the foundations of the Mesopotamian cultures that later, with other racial additions, became known as Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian. Their descendants are still in the lands of their ancestors, though now naturally of mixed blood for the most part. The wide-headed, serious-minded, frequently quarrelsome Kurds are perhaps the most like the ancient ancestral stock.

When Professor Speiser began to be convinced that in this hill country of the Aeneolithic background he was dealing with a number of peoples who belonged basically to a single stock, descended in all likelihood from a single ancestral tribe, he was a bit put to it for a convenient name to give them. Two of Noah's sons had been called on to father two great racial stocks. Ham, with a not-too-dark skin, gave his name to the Egyptians and other white peoples of Africa; Shem (written "Sem" in the Latin) was the patron of the Semites—Jews, Arabs, and other peoples of the Arabian peninsula, thrust in like a small continent between Asia and Africa. The vast complex of white races in Europe and southern Asia have been rather vaguely lumped as Indo-Europeans.

But this ancient group, to which the original population of Crete and of

Greece also belongs, this first bearer of the lamp of civilization, was not to be identified with any of these three. Several names had been suggested. "Armenoid" was one, but that made a modern people the godfathers of an ancient one; and it is not certain that the Armenians are as full-blooded descendants of this ancient race as are some of their neighbors—their old enemies the Kurds, for example. "Caucasian" was another suggested name, because of the putative homeland in the Caucasus region, but that title has been loosely used for all Europeans—even for all white men of every description.

Named for Noah's Third Son

A Russian ethnologist named Marr had used the name "Japhethite," drafting the third son of Noah, and this name Prof. Speiser adopted, though with several important modifications. "Japhethites," therefore, these earliest of civilized men are. Japheth has waited longest for his sons, but at last has received the highest honors.

The domain of these Japhethites, so far as it has been studied in detail up to the present, stretches along the hill country from eastern Asia Minor down to the Persian Gulf. The extensions beyond are still sufficiently known.



A YOUNG MOTHER

In the world's oldest country. Her children, like their ancestors for thousands of years, will be noted for their remarkable strength and endurance.

Of Elam at least we are sure. It lay near the head of the Persian Gulf, with Susa, its capital and the metropolis of the Aeneolithic world, nestling at the foot of the Zagros mountains. Diggings in Susa have brought up some of the most beautiful pottery ever made in all the world's history. Susa must have been the Sevres of ancient Asia.

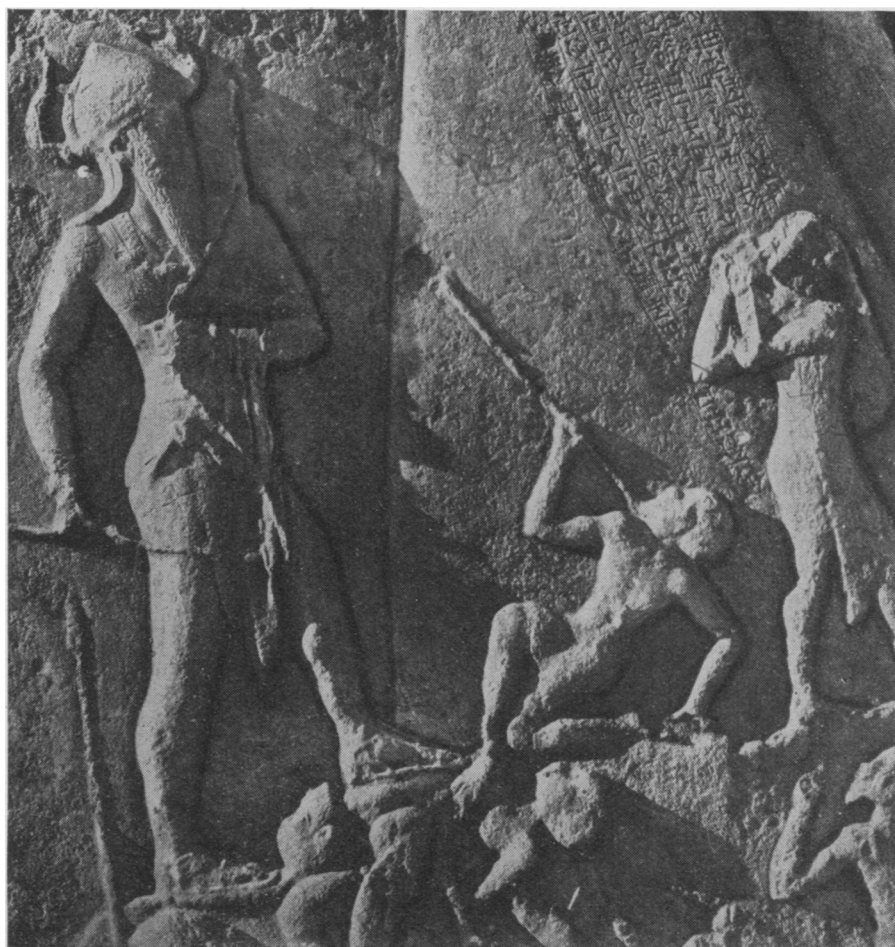
Singularly enough, the pottery found in the lowermost of the two oldest strata in Susa (called Susa I for convenience) is of notably better texture and more artistic decoration than the pottery from Susa II, immediately above it. This is significant: the oldest Susa was already a highly civilized city; its culture was far enough along in years so that a decadence could set in. The beginning of the cycle of civilization thus indicated has not yet been found. Susa is probably the oldest city in the world that we know anything about, but there may be an older city somewhere else, still waiting for the archaeologist's spade.

From Elam, bearing the culture stamped with the mark of Susa, went the first settlers in the lower Mesopotamian valley. At least they were the first we know anything about. For in the recent digs at Ur, the oldest of the Euphratian cities, the excavators went right on through the thick layer of sterile mud that impressively recorded the reality of an extensive deluge of about 3500 B.C., which may perhaps be the Flood of the Bible; beneath it they found abundant relics of human occupation. Most abundant were the masses of broken painted pottery, all of it of the Susa type.

A New People After the Deluge

After the Deluge the region was no longer Elamitic in character. A new people appears on the scene, the Sumerians. Where the Sumerians, the Greeks of the Ancient East, came from, nobody seems to know. Archaeologists point vaguely in the direction of the Persian Gulf, but do not answer many questions. However, these people were certainly not Elamites, and also not Japhethites. They may possibly have been a preliminary wave of the great Mongoloid racial movements of later history which brought into Europe and Nearer Asia such peoples as the Huns, Tartars and Turks. But any opinion is at present a guess.

Farther upstream, the old pre-diluvian Japhethic population was possibly conquered, possibly infiltrated, by Semites from the desert and grasslands to the west, to form the group of city-



SUSA FELL BEFORE A FOREIGN KING

The conqueror ruled over the city for a while, then set up a monument with a picture of his triumph in battle and a bragging inscription to tell the world about it.

kingdoms known as Akkad. Its dominating city eventually came to be Babylon.

The states of Sumer, Akkad and Elam fought each other like Kilkenny cats for many long centuries, back there about 3000 B.C. Sometimes one gained the upper hand, sometimes the other. The conqueror bragged about his successes on inscribed bricks. If he failed he usually said nothing.

But even after Babylon had eaten up all the other city-states and founded a great empire on the two rivers, the influence of the old Aeneolithic culture that had radiated from Susa still governed the lives of the new peoples, regulated their worship of the gods, even set the fashion of their beards. For as Sumer had learned much from Elam, so Babylon learned from Sumer. A people may vanish or be blent beyond recognition, but its traditions and modes of life hang on when even its gods are ghosts.

That other great people of the Mesopotamian region with whom we became

familiar in Sunday-school days, the Assyrians, also were the recipients of Japhethic culture, very likely of some of the racial blood. They got a later start than the Babylonians, for their nuclear city, Ashur, was held back for a long time by the proximity of a warlike kingdom of Japhethic aliens, the Hurri-Mittanni. But when they did get going they became the Romans of the Near East: ruthlessly ambitious, full of military genius, remorselessly cruel to anybody who opposed them. They were more like modern Kurds (when the latter are on a rampage) than they were like any other historic people of the region. The Assyrians represent a fusion of Semites and Japhethites, as do also the Jews. An Indo-European addition to the original Japhethite population of Asia Minor produced the Hittites, a mighty people of old, whose empire contended against both Egypt and Assyria, and clashed sometimes with the Kingdom of Israel.

Of the several other peoples besides the Elamites who (Turn to page 382)

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made up the Japhethite stock, one may be singled out for brief mention because of a strange misconception that has grown up about it, which Prof. Speiser is the first to explode. This was the tribe known as the Guti. When the Babylonian and Assyrian kingdoms became well established in the valley and the wealthier people could afford servants, a lively slave trade sprang up. Gutians from these hills were in great demand, because they were so healthy and strong. Kurdish porters in the same region today amaze visitors with their ability to carry horse-size loads.

Several written contracts with slave-dealers have been discovered and interpreted. They specify the kind of slave wanted, and add that he or she must be "namru." Earlier philologists tried to puzzle out what kind of a person a "namru" slave might be. An older meaning of the word, they found, was "bright." Hence they jumped at the conclusion that "namru" meant blond. Thereupon, borne on the shoulders of a few slaves, the whole myth of the Noble Nordic invaded ancient Assyria.

Prof. Speiser has re-examined this

"namru" business very carefully, and cannot find that the word has any meaning other than strong, healthy, or in good condition. It is rather difficult to see why a hard-boiled Assyrian slave-dealer should have preferred blonds, any more than did his nineteenth century successor, Simon Legree.

As for the probable modern descendants of these same hill people of six or seven thousand years ago, Prof. Speiser points strongly at the Kurds, Lurs and their relatives. The Guti, he says, were also known in antiquity as Qutians. In connection with the latter name a slightly modified form, Qurti, appears in some of the records; whether as a neighboring and related tribe or simply as a variant of the name Qutians. In later years, Xenophon speaks of the Carduchi, other Greek writers of the Kurtioi. All these spellings and pronunciations fall around the modern "Kurd," like shots around a bull's-eye. There is little doubt, Professor Speiser concludes, that "Guti" has become "Kurd," and that the Kurds are the offspring of the Guti.

This gives us living samples of the ancient stock for physical anthropologists to measure and photograph. But, cautions Prof. Speiser, there are Kurds and Kurds. The stock has become considerably mixed where they have come into contact with outsiders. The best chances, he thinks, are to be found in isolated communities in the hills, where there has been little traffic all through the centuries. Here a reasonably close inbreeding will have kept intact the stock of the ancient Japhethite people, who first taught men how to dwell together in cities.

Science News Letter, December 13, 1930

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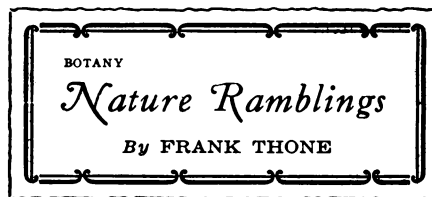
PALEONTOLOGY

Alaskan 'Prehistoric Animal' Declared Merely Whale

THE supposed "prehistoric animal" reported to have been discovered preserved in ice in Alaska is almost certainly a whale. Dr. Barnum Brown of the American Museum of Natural History, New York, has advised Science Service that the reported presence of flippers and the dimensions of the skull indicate the carcass is that of the familiar mammal of the sea. Scientists of the U. S. National Museum, Washington, also express the same opinion.

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It is estimated that there are two million child slaves in China.



Teazel Pods

ON walks along autumn roads and across dry pastures you have no doubt seen them; tall, hard-looking, stiff brown weeds, with a few of their harsh, dried leaves still clinging to their rigid stalks, and each stem crowned with a thing that looks like a miniature porcupine—a big bur-like affair radiating long, hook-ended bristles.

This is the teasel, a sturdy vegetable outlaw that has wandered into this country from its native home in Europe and is becoming increasingly established in waste lands. They are interesting, and not wholly unattractive, when viewed at a little distance, but if one endeavors to walk through a teasel patch wearing woolen garments, the innumerable little hooks can make themselves a pretty bad nuisance.

Their ready tenaciousness was once a virtue in the teasel heads, for the ancient and honorable guild of fullers, who dressed and finished cloth after weavers had woven it, used teasels in large quantities, nailed to wooden rollers, to raise the nap on woolen fabrics. Of recent years this work has been stolen from the teasel by machines using brass spring wires, but there are still a few woolen mills where teasel frames have not wholly passed out of use. Occasionally one finds their broken bristles buried in cloth.

There are also a few teasel farms of a few acres each where the yearly crop is harvested, one stalk at a time, with scissors or knives. The demand for teasels diminishes year by year, at least relatively to the great growth of the weaving industry. But as their useful life diminishes they are apparently being pensioned off as ornaments; for gilded and painted teasel heads are now popular as parts of winter bouquets.

Science News Letter, December 13, 1930