Huge Carvings Are Dug From Palace of Ancient Assyrian King

Archaeology

By Dr. Edward Chiera

IN the spring of 1929 the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago started a campaign of excavation at Khorsabad, in Iraq. Khorsabad is the name of a small village about twelve miles from Mosul. Its mud-brick houses, with thatched, sloping roofs face a large flat space which serves as a city square, a gathering place for the flocks, and a playground for children. When the expedition first went there, this flat square was broken by three pools of stagnant water and by those inevitable refuse heaps which have been made known to us as the place of refuge of the biblical Job.

Its inhabitants, as poor and unkempt as Iraq peasants generally are, eke out a miserable living from their fields and flocks, hoping to be fortunate enough to escape malaria, which constantly threatens them. The great majority of the houses are built on the plain, close to the ditch that gives impure water to quench the thirst of man and beast. Some others are perched on top of a low hill which affords them some measure of protection against the ravaging mosquitoes. A touch of the picturesque is given in summer by the many storks that nest unmolested on the roofs of nearly all houses and by the brightly colored dresses of the women. All things considered, there is nothing really remarkable about Khorsabad.

And yet its name is famous in the annals of archaeology. The village stands close to the magnificent city and palace of Sargon of Assyria, a place partly excavated by the French toward the middle of last century and sharing with Niniveh the honor of giving to the world the first fruits of Assyrian discoveries.

As our knowledge progressed, we came into closer touch with Sargon himself, who had then been known to the world only through a casual reference in the book of Isaiah. We learned that he was the king who conquered Samaria, deported over twenty thousand Israelites from that city, and replaced them with foreign peoples who began to practice idolatry and thus became objects of hate to the orthodox Jews. Centuries later it took the moral courage of Jesus to propound the parable of the Good Samaritan and to have personal dealings with them.

But if the capture of Samaria might have seemed important to Sargon, it was only because it came at the very beginning of his reign (*722* B. C.). In other respects it was just one of the many incidents in his very adventurous life, and he would have been very much surprised, had some one told him that the capture of that city would have given him a name—and a bad one at that—for ages to come.

Though he boasted of his great military achievements, still these were a matter of course for all the Assyrian kings. They had to fight either to increase or to defend their far-flung empire. Could we have asked Sargon himself, he would have told us that his name was certain to be remembered by future generations through the great city he had built and called after his own name—Dur-Sharrukin, "the walled city of Sargon"—and through the magnificent palace which adorned it. And he is certainly right when he tells us that no one of his predecessors had ever conceived or executed anything so great.

The city was a large square, the sides of which measured about a mile and one-half in length; it was surrounded by an immense wall, defended by towers placed at regular intervals. Eight magnificently decorated gates gave entrance to it. Anticipating modern city-planning, the streets in Dur-Sharrukin were straight as in American cities. Stealing a march on the Romans, Sargon had a wide road, paved with huge blocks of stone, to connect the city with the rest of his world. Still further anticipating agricultural experimental stations, he built a large park in which he planted all sorts of trees from far distant countries. This he also beautified with artificial lakes and with a building which he calls a "Hittite house," but which really resembles a Greek temple.

But the palace itself was the real wonder. The temple of Solomon could have stood comfortably in one of its courtyards, and its walls were embellished with about sixty thousand square feet of stone reliefs, without counting mural decorations in glazed tiles and in colors. For the building precious woods and stones were carried from great distances by boat, the famous cedars of Lebanon contributing their due share. It baffles our imagination to think of how many workmen had to be employed in making bricks, leveling ground, and cutting stone; and one wonders how the Assyrian king could have mustered the large number of artists that the stone reliefs alone must have required.

But Sargon would have been sadly disappointed had he known that all of his work had been done in vain. The palace was hardly finished when he died in battle. His son Sennacherib did not want to remain in a palace and city that spoke of his father's glory. He began to build other and bigger palaces for himself.

Plunderers began to strip the then new structures of everything worth removing; for lack of attention the roofs began to let the rain in, and in no time at all the walls, built of unbaked bricks, cracked and fell. It is reasonable to suppose that the inhabitants of the city proper did not leave their houses in such great haste. But they were mainly foreigners, brought by Sargon from all lands to populate his newly-made city, and they had no love for the place. Little by little they abandoned their new home, and the fate of the city followed that of the palace. For many centuries no one ever knew either the name or the site of Dur-Sharrukin.

In the middle of the nineteenth century some peasants pointed out to Botta, who was excavating at Niniveh, that sculptured stones resembling those he was finding there were to be found also near the village of Khorsabad. Botta, who must have been an alert and energetic man, followed the lead and started excavations in Khorsabad also. He was amply rewarded for his efforts; and the splendid finds at Khorsabad, together with those of Niniveh, announced to the world that the seat of a long lost civilization had been discovered.

But circumstances prevented completion of the excavation. The city itself was hardly touched; and of a second palace of the same king, situated a few hundred yards from the first, only two or three rooms were uncovered. Then the excavators left; and slowly even the traces of their work were effaced, and the peasants of Khorsabad resumed sowing their barley over the ruins of the ancient city.

In the spring of 1928, while in Iraq, I received the information that some antiquities had been uncovered by the natives on the ancient mound. A hasty survey brought out many interesting facts. A portion of the *tell* had been used by the villagers as a stone quarry. Numerous fragments of relief were lying about, more or less hidden by the barley which had been planted there. A little excavation brought out the fact that the "quarry" had been located over a corridor, which had originally been adorned with a double register of small reliefs. There was no time just then to do anything more than protect the place from further damage by having a large amount of dirt dumped upon it. It was learned also that the inhabitants of the near-by village of Fadhaliah had dug up two huge Assyrian bulls from one of the city gates and converted them into lime. The "mayor" of Khorsabad volunteered information that in the very courtyard of his house another Assyrian bull had been found. After serving as a plaything for the village children, who used to jump on its back, it had finally been taken out.

Right in front of his house was a large round grinding-stone made of a huge block of gypsum. It was at least half a meter thick and much too big to have come from a relief. No one knew where that huge block had come from, and the mystery was not solved until a year later, after excavations had been started. But there was no doubt at the time that some Assyrian bull had been taken from the gate which he had been steadily watching and was now turning round and round, pulled by a miserable donkey, and grinding barley. *Sic transit gloria mundi.*

Reliefs had been put to other useful work also. One huge slab of basalt formed a bridge over an irrigation ditch; a smaller one made a good step for a well; and the bearded head of one of Sargon's officials was used as a block for cutting wood. When the axe had failed to strike right and had hit on the poor head, it naturally left a deep mark on it. But the head was still in good enough condition to be saved for a museum, and it was quickly acquired.

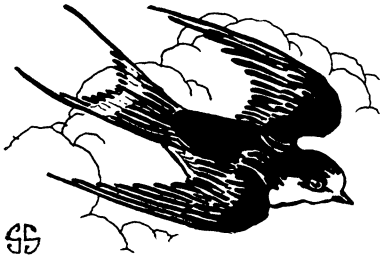
Then the natives, in the hope of gaining some easy money, indicated a place where some other pieces had been hidden. From this "cache" came out three other heads, all chiseled away from their bodies, and also fragments which, when put together, made up the heads of two horses. We might say the head of *a* horse, since of the second one, behind the first, only its upper part was visible. The first piece found was the actual head, in natural size, cut away at the jawbone. But its workmanship was perfect. There was so much life in that small piece of sculpture that it was evidently the work of a master. The surrounding ground was combed very carefully and produced other fragments with the splendid head ornaments and part of the trappings. The upper right portion of the relief could be reconstructed in its entirety. Since the season was already advanced and the heat oppressive, the survey work had to be closed. Back in America a study was made of the work of the early French explorers, and the place from which those heads had been taken could be definitely ascertained. The bodies must still be in position, and probably in good condition, for the hill at that point was rather high and no stone was showing through. The Iraq Museum, in dividing the finds, had given the horses' heads to the Oriental Institute. Would it not be possible to complete the piece by excavating for the bodies? Professor James H. Breasted, the Director of the Oriental Institute, decided that it was worth while trying. The next spring I was sent back to Khorsabad, and regular excavations were started.

It would be impossible, in the brief compass of this article, to give even a rough description of the work done by the first campaign. Suffice it to say that its results surpassed our fondest expectations. The bodies of the horses were found, and in sufficiently good condition. They will soon be reunited with their (*Turn to page* 302)

An Awesome Assyrian Statue Moves At Last

NATURE RAMBLINGS

By Frank Thone



Swift Wings

ONE of the favorite sentimental songs of our mothers—and of the younger generation among our grandmothers—was "When the Swallows Homeward Fly." As music that song was mighty good (ask Dad; he knows), but as ornithology it can have no standing at all.

For it envisaged, sadly, as all the good old songs liked to do, these swift-winged birds flying away to some unknown home in the South, leaving the northern skies as desolate and empty as a disappointed lover's heart. But as a matter of fact when the swallows fly southward in autumn they are going away from home. Their home is here, among our own chimneys and cliffs, and when the swallows homeward fly they are coming back to us. And that is what they are doing now.

The swallow, with his cousin the swift, does not come north quite so promptly and in defiance of chances of late snowstorms as do the robins and redwinged blackbirds. He is an early comer, but a safe one, and when you see him circling in the air it is safe to call spring an established fact.

Swallows and swifts are not identical, though they are usually lumped into one by the average citizen. They look a good deal alike, and their habits in flight are very similar, so that only the most meticulous of scientists would find fault with this popular confusion in nomenclature. As a matter of fact, one of the most notable of early American ornithologists called the chimney swift a swallow.

Both swallows and swifts are "wing feeders," catching their insect prey on the fly. That explains their swoopings and circlings and occasional eccentric dartings. They do fly for fun a part of the time, but a great part of their energetic wing work is involved in the serious business of getting a living.

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King Sargon—*Cont'd*

heads and will make one of the most beautiful examples of Assyrian art. And the Assyrians, in my opinion, have surpassed even the Greeks in their representations of animals. This cannot be said of the human figures, because there they followed too closely their own artistic conventions.

The "quarry" was carefully excavated, and we were able to save for science several important slabs. One of these represents two small horses and three attendants, all perfectly preserved. We excavated in a large, well-paved courtyard, and there we had the prize find: six large slabs of stone, two and one-half by three and one-half meters (about eight by eleven and a half feet), each one representing two immense figures of eunuchs bearing gifts to King Sargon. Four of these six slabs, and the most interesting ones at that, had never been seen by anyone since Assyrian days. A number of small objects also were salvaged, among which the most notable are a group of clay labels that had been used in closing cloth bags. Against the clay seals could still be seen the impression of the cloth, and imbedded in the clay was still the cord which had been used in tying them. Most of these labels were impressed with Assyrian seals; but one of them had an inscription in early Aramaic, and another in the still unreadable Hittite characters.

The published plans of the palace were improved upon, at least for the portion of it that could be excavated during the first campaign. Last, perhaps, in scientific interest, but first for its popular appeal, was the discovery and transportation of a huge Assyrian bull, weighing about thirty-five tons. He is one of those hybrid figures, with the head and beard of a man, the wings of an eagle, and the body of a bull, that used to watch the gates of the palace to ward off evil spirits. He lies now, well protected in strong cases, under the north stand of the football field at the University of Chicago. When the new building of the Oriental Institute shall have been completed, he will resume his duties, interrupted for twenty-seven centuries. Though six thousand miles from his original location and among strange people, he will have at least one consolation: the new building will never be permitted to fall over his head, for scientific interest will outlive the whole Assyrian Empire.

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World System—*Cont'd*

progress of condensation of the nebulous matter, we descend to the consideration of the Sun, formerly surrounded by an immense atmosphere, to which consideration we can also arrive, from an examination of the phenomena of the solar system, as we shall see in our last note. Such a marked coincidence, arrived at by such different means, renders the existence of this anterior state of the Sun extremely probable.

Connecting the formation of comets with that of nebulæ, they may be considered as small nebulæ, wandering from one solar system to another, and formed by the condensation of the nebulous matter which is so profusely distributed throughout the universe. The comets will be thus, relatively to our system, what the meteoric stones appear to be relatively to the earth, to which they do not appear to have originally belonged. When these stars first become visible, they present an appearance perfectly similar to the nebulæ; so much so, that they are frequently mistaken for them, and it is only by their motion, or by our knowing all the nebulæ contained in our part of the heavens, that we are able to distinguish one from the other. This hypothesis explains, in a satisfactory manner, the increase of the heads and tails of the comets, according as they approach the sun, and the extreme rarity of their tails; motions of the comets, which are performed in every direction, and the great eccentricity of their orbits.

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