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EXCAVATIONS IN PERSIA¹

JOHN P. PETERS

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, NEW YORK

From the head of the Persian Gulf extend two great plains, the one stretching northwestward along the Tigris and Euphrates, the other northeastward along the Karoun. These two plains constitute Turkish and Persian Arabistan respectively. They were the seat of one of the earliest and most highly developed civilizations of the world, or perhaps rather of two competing and rival civilizations. Once the region teemed with a vast population. Now it is largely desert. Both plains depend for their fertility not upon the rain, but upon the rivers which flow down from the mountains. When these were diked and dammed and carried every-whither by irrigating canals, the Babylonian plain and the steppe of Persian Arabistan were immensely fertile, capable of sustaining by their own products an enormous population. Now dikes and dams are broken and canals choked and the life-creating water runs to waste, part of the year causing inundations and turning vast regions into lakes and swamps, and the remainder of the time moving seaward through a single channel, shrunk far below its banks.

In ancient Babylonia there were at each succeeding epoch many famous cities, centres of political power or religious influence, such as Nippur, Erech, Eridu, Ur, Sippara, Babylon, Seleucia, Ctesiphon; and, in the Caliphate, Kufa and Baghdad and Bassorah. In the steppe of Persian Arabistan, on the other hand, there was but

¹Le Palais de Darius I^{er}. A Suse Ve. Siècle Av. J. C. Simple Notice par M. L. Pillet, architecte diplômé par le Gouvernement. Paris (Geuthner), Mai, 1914.

one great dominating city, so far as we now know, from the earliest period to the time of its final destruction, namely, Susa. The site of this ancient capital was discovered by Loftus in 1851, when attached to the commission for the delimitation of the Persian-Turkish boundary. His excavations there, as at various Babylonian sites, while hasty and superficial, were remarkably successful, both in determining the names and locations of the ancient cities and also in furnishing valuable architectural and inscriptional material for more scientific study. After Loftus Susa lay fallow until 1884, when M. and Mme. Dieulafoy commenced the excavations which enriched the Louvre with those beautiful enamelled bricks, the frieze of the lions and the frieze of the archers.

It was the German excavations in Babylonia in the following decade which revealed the source of this branch of the ceramic art, carried to such a degree of excellence by the Persians, the manufacture of ornamental enamelled bricks, constituting friezes, representing animal and human figures, for the ornamentation of palaces, temples, and streets. The German explorers found such friezes in use in the Babylon of Nebuchadrezzar for the decoration of gateways and in the processional street of Ishtar. These friezes were composed of bricks of two sorts, representing an earlier and a later period of the art, separated only by a few years, evidence of the creation and development of the industry at that great period of Babylonian development. From Babylon the industry was transferred to Persia after the conquest, and it is the Persian Empire and its capital, Susa, which have furnished us with the most remarkable and the best developed specimens of this ceramic art. From the ancient Persians in turn the art was passed on to their successors, and until the seventeenth century certainly Persia and the Persians were famous for their tiles and glazed pottery.

The Dieulafoy excavations were remarkably successful in procuring for the Louvre picturesque museum articles, and in revealing the peculiar and barbaric magnificence of Persian art and architecture; but they yielded little of historical importance in the way of inscriptions of the Persian period and absolutely nothing from an earlier date. Even their architectural and artistic results, striking as they were, were imperfect. The excavation of the Persian palace was not completed, and from the Dieulafoy excavations it was impossible to restore it with any sort of detail.

On a voyage of observation in 1891 De Morgan, known at that time as an Egyptian explorer, became impressed with the importance of the site of Susa, and marked it as a place to be explored scientifically and completely. For this purpose and for other work to be achieved later in Persia, he developed a plan which won the support of the French government, and in 1897 the *Délégation Scientifique en Perse* was organized to undertake the investigation of the mounds of Susa, under a monopoly granted to the French government, by which France and France alone was empowered to conduct archaeological investigations in Persia. De Morgan found at Susa three principal mounds: the Mound of the Palace, on which Loftus and Dieulafoy had conducted their excavations; the Acropolis, on part of which stood an ancient Mohammedan shrine and place of pilgrimage, the Mosque of the Prophet Daniel; and a third hill, which he designates as the Mound of the Royal City, larger in extent than either of the other two. These three mounds almost surround a great open place which he designates as the *Place d'Armes*, or the Bazaar. The French commenced their excavations with the intention of permanence, and at the present time there stands on the Acropolis not only the Mosque of the Prophet Daniel, above referred to, but also a structure which might be mistaken for a mediaeval

Arabic castle, and which is really a stronghold—the combined fort, storehouse, and residence of the French explorers.

De Morgan's excavations have been remarkably successful in results and thoroughly scientific in method. The collections which the *Mission* has sent to France embrace not only monuments, inscriptions, objects of art, utensils and jewelry of every sort and every material, but palaeontological collections, geological collections, and collections in the field of natural history. Several halls in the Museum of the Louvre are full of historical and artistic objects found at Susa. A number of the prehistoric objects collected by the same *Mission* may be found in the Museum of St. Germain, while geological and natural history collections from the same source are exhibited in the Museum of Natural History and School of Mines in Paris.

No excavations have been more scientifically and elaborately conducted than those of De Morgan; and the French *Mission* has excelled all others in this, that the publication of results has followed discovery with remarkable rapidity. Inscriptions found have been transliterated and where possible deciphered, and text, transliteration, and translation published almost at once in noble quarto volumes, at a price and in a manner to make them accessible to scholars. Objects of art have been treated in a similar manner and put at the disposal of the artistic and archaeological world in facsimile and description at the earliest possible moment. Consequently it has been possible for the world of scholars to follow the French excavations and assist in their interpretation, as they have not been able to do elsewhere. The earlier English explorations in Assyria and Babylonia were conducted primarily with a view to securing objects for museums, and especially inscriptions, in which they were remarkably successful. The French from the

outset showed a greater inclination to conduct really scientific work, as witness the excavations of Thomas, Place, and Botta at Khorsabad, and Oppert's ill-fated scientific *mission* to Babylonia. Earlier excavations also even the singularly successful American expedition to Nippur, were spasmodic and hence able to explore but a small part of any one site; only the French explorations in Tello constituted a partial exception to this lack of continuity. The German excavations in Babylonia and Assyria, at Ashur, Babylon, and now at Erech, under the *Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft*, begun about twenty years ago, and the French excavations at Susa, under the *Délégation Scientifique en Perse*, mark a new era in the exploration of those regions, by their permanence and thoroughness, combined with their scientific methods.²

De Morgan's excavations have revealed to us the existence at Susa of a civilization as early as that of Babylonia. Before he began his work we knew indeed from Babylonian inscriptions of contests at an early period between Elam and Babylonia, confirming Bible references. Our idea of the Elamites had been, however, of a semi-barbarous, outside, hostile force, invading and overrunning Babylonia from time to time, as the Huns overran middle Europe or the Danes England, rather than of a people substantially in the same stage of civilization as the Babylonians, their rivals in the struggle for empire. We now recognize the Persian Arabistan and the Turkish Arabistan, to which must be added also Assyria, as parts of one larger civilization, competing and struggling with one another for the mastery, differing in language and in certain details of civilization precisely as Germans

²Such was the honorable rivalry of Germans and Frenchmen in the field of archaeology before the present unhappy war. That, it is to be feared, will put an end for many years, so far as those peoples are concerned, to the finer arts of peace, including explorations in Persia and Babylonia. All the more it behooves Americans to take up that work; and especially the Universities of Pennsylvania and Chicago should resume their long-suspended excavations in Babylonia.

and French differ from one another, not however in markedly different stages of civilization, the one semi-barbaric, the other cultured, but rather at about the same level.

De Morgan's excavations have given us our first real knowledge of the inhabitants of Elam, the country of which Susa was the capital, by the discovery, among their other remains, of numerous inscriptions, the so-called proto-Elamite, of the period before and about the time of the Babylonian Sargon, and the Elamite of the Kassite period, more than a thousand years later. Both classes of inscriptions make use of the cuneiform signs which were common property in Elam and Babylonia. These inscriptions show us movements of races and peoples in Elam as in Babylonia, now one race and one language dominant, now another, all using the same cuneiform script; and before that script was invented, the pottery displays the same shifting of peoples and culture, one replacing another, sometimes destroying, sometimes building upon its predecessor. The civilization of Elam as of Babylonia was composite, stratum upon stratum, and the excavations in the two regions reveal a practical identity of development, similar influences working at about the same time in each. At times Elam was the aggressive and dominant power, overrunning and exploiting or subduing Babylonia; at times it was beaten and pushed back. When Babylonia was united, it was stronger than Elam; but Elam had the advantage through all of its history of a relative unity under one great city, while Babylonia was mostly divided among a number of great cities, each struggling with the others for the mastery. So in general Elam was the aggressor; only when one city succeeded in dominating the rest in Babylonia were the Elamites driven out, or in their turn conquered. This was notably the case in the time of the great Hammurapi, who brought Babylon to the

front and united all the lower country of the Tigris and Euphrates into an empire more solid than any which had existed theretofore. He seems to have subjugated Elam utterly, but in doing so to have prepared the way for new invaders of Babylonia, and for a new race of Elamites. So when a couple of centuries later the weak Babylonian kings of his dynasty were supplanted by Kassites, Babylonia began to suffer once more from the invasions of Elamites, whose inscriptions show them, however, to have spoken a different language from their predecessors of a greater antiquity. It was only with the absorption of Babylonia in the great Assyrian Empire of the Sargonids that this Elam was finally subjugated and destroyed. The Assyrian great kings perceived that to maintain dominion in Babylonia they must not only drive the Elamites out of Babylonia, but must also conquer Elam itself. Even this, however, proved insufficient. Again and again Elam rose in revolt, alone or in conjunction with Babylonian insurgents, until at last, under Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal, Susa was utterly destroyed and blotted out. But by this policy of creating a vacuum the Assyrians in fact prepared the way for a new Elam, and for the final conquest of Babylon by Susa. They destroyed the buffer states to the east, which had held back the Iranian invasion.

It is after the fall of Assyria and the creation of the new Babylonian kingdom, under Nebuchadrezzar's weak successor in Babylon, Nabonidus, that Susa again comes to the front as the capital of the little kingdom of Ansan, the home of the conquering Cyrus; but it was Darius who first made it the capital of the Persian Empire. A new race now occupied the ancient site, inheriting the ancient civilization and the old cuneiform script. This latter they adapted to their language in such a way as to make it almost an alphabet, a procedure typical of their treatment of the entire civilization of the past which

they had inherited. Then for two centuries Elam was the centre of empire and the centre of oriental culture, until the conquest of Alexander the Great finally destroyed its glory. He seems to have applied the torch to Susa as to Ecbatana—at least the French investigations show nothing of importance at Susa after his time—and in the Parthian and Sassanian, as in the succeeding Arabic period, Darius' great palace was nothing but a place of interment for the dead. The Mohammedan conquest completed the desolation of Persian Arabistan, which had begun earlier with the Greek conquest. There was no population by which or for which to maintain the dikes and dams. There was no great city in the steppe, like Seleucia and Ctesiphon and Kufa and Baghdad in Babylonia, and so the Persian Arabistan was allowed to go to waste before its twin sister of the Tigris and Euphrates became the desert that it now is.

Because it was earlier laid waste, therefore certain remains of antiquity have been preserved in Susa which have apparently vanished from the older Babylonian cities, and indeed Susa has been the means of preserving some of the most precious Babylonian antiquities. In their invasions of Babylonia the Elamites at different periods carried off immense numbers of gods and goddesses, temple treasures containing objects of gold, electrum, silver, and copper, and also priceless inscriptions. Numbers of these were recovered and returned to Babylonia at a later date, especially in the Assyrian invasions; others were destroyed along with the Elamite temples; others, however, were buried and thus preserved, in the destruction of those temples. The most famous and most important individual discovery, made by De Morgan at Susa in 1902, was that of Hammurapi's Code of Laws. This was a huge stele, some nine feet in height, which had been set up by Hammurapi in Sippara, dedicated to the Sun-God, the local deity of Sippara, who is

represented on the stele as imparting those laws to Hammurapi, much as in the Old Testament God is represented as imparting to Moses laws for the Hebrews. This is the most ancient code of laws yet discovered. It stood in the same relation to previous codes as in England the Laws of Alfred stood to older laws and customs. Hammurapi collated and made use of former codes, adding to them new laws adapted to present conditions, and thus laying the foundation of the jurisprudence of the Babylonian and Assyrian Empires and their dependencies. Apparently similar steles were erected in other places, but of these only the merest fragments have been recovered. All the others perished in one way or another. This stele, which was carried off by the Elamite invaders in the Kassite period, as the Germans carried away antiquities from Peking, was by that very act of vandalism strangely preserved for futurity.

Next in importance to this among individual objects found at Susa we should perhaps reckon the monument which depicts Naram Sin's expedition of conquest through and over the eastern mountains. This is a striking piece of work, promise of a development of the plastic and pictorial art which never reached fulfilment. It was carried off from Babylonia to adorn the great Elamite temple and thus preserved to us. When Ashurbanipal ravaged and destroyed Susa, he carried back numerous monuments and steles, as his predecessor Sennacherib had done, but fortunately not all. What they carried back is lost; what they left behind has been preserved. The Acropolis and the Tel of the Royal City yielded to the excavators stratum upon stratum of civilization, people following people, conquest after conquest, destruction and renewal, from a prehistoric period down to the Grecian era.

Quite otherwise was it with the Mound of the Royal Palace. Here, as at Khorsabad, the city of Sargon of

Assyria, a huge artificial mound had been built up above the level of the surrounding country, a sort of a concrete foundation of stones and gravel, firmly welded together, containing absolutely no antiquities, virgin soil in that regard, although artificially constructed. When Darius I made Susa his capital, he built this terrace in the same manner and on the same principle as the Assyrian kings of old had built like terraces for their palaces. The palace was half within, half without the city, a method of construction which prevailed in the east to a late date, as witness the famous palace of the Byzantine emperors at Constantinople. As in its foundation, so also in its superior construction Darius' palace resembled in general the palace of the Assyrian Sargon above referred to, and the constructions which the Germans have found in Babylonia. Darius was the heir not only of the Elamite, but also of the Assyrian-Babylonian civilization. So, in spite of the change of religion, from Babylonian to Persian-Zoroastrian, we find at the doors of Darius' palace guardian genii, curious sphinx-like creatures with human heads and winged lion bodies. Above these is exhibited the winged disc in Persian form, the symbol of Ormuzd; but the emblem of the Babylonian Marduk is also in evidence on the side walls. These genii and the divine symbols at the doorways were to guard the entrance against hostile spirits. We have also in Darius' palace the same long and narrow rooms as in the palace of Sargon at Khorsabad, grouped around courts. Some one hundred and ten rooms in all have been excavated, grouped about three larger and three smaller courts. The important passages and hallways in these groups were beautified by the friezes of enamelled bricks, to which reference has already so many times been made. The art of making such bricks was not known at the time of the construction of the Assyrian palaces, where the friezes were made of slabs of limestone or alabaster.

The friezes of enamelled, figured bricks are, as already stated, an inheritance and a development of the later Babylonian art of Nebuchadrezzar's period. In general at Susa as in Babylonia, architectural effect depended upon mass and color rather than form. The usual material of construction was unburned brick; but one exception there was to this, namely, the great throne hall, made of stone, utterly unlike in this respect any Babylonian structure with which we are familiar, or even the Assyrian palaces; in which latter stone was used, but, except in the matter of the colossal genii at the doors or statues here and there, only for purposes of facing, not as an independent building material, least of all in the form of columns. That is the special feature of this throne-hall, the Apadana. It is a hall of columns. In this it resembles the Persian remains at Persepolis. Naturally it has suffered more from vandalism than any other part of the palace. The stones have been excavated and broken in pieces. Little is left but foundations and fragments of columns, peditments and capitals here and there, by means of which and by comparison of the ruins of Persepolis, the skilful archaeologists and architects of the French *Mission* have restored the general plan and architectural design of this building; in which we find a divergence from and an advance upon the preceding architecture and art both of Assyria and Babylonia, a new contribution of the Persians, in the use of stone, and especially of stone columns, of a style and in a manner peculiar to themselves.

In connection with this great palace the explorers believe that they have found signs of a paradise or garden, such as is described in the biblical Book of Esther, as connected with the palace then occupied by King Xerxes. Oddly enough, the little brochure which has been put forth by M. Pillet as a sort of guide-book for the ordinary

man, and which is the excuse for this present notice, treats the Book of Esther as historical, and bases upon its statements and allusions some of the interpretation of the plan of the palace. Esther is really a book of very much later date than the time of Xerxes, and such traditions as it contains of Susa and its palace have passed through so many generations and such diverse hands that no biblical scholar of the present day would venture to base any scientific conclusions thereon. The relation of Esther to the Palace of Darius (which, built originally at about 500 B.C., was burned down in the time of Artaxerxes I, about 440, restored by Artaxerxes II, as inscriptions show, about 420, to be finally destroyed by fire in the time of Alexander the Great, about 323 B.C.) is practically the same as that of the Mosque of Daniel to the Acropolis on which it now stands.

With this exception M. Pillet's little brochure is scientific as well as illuminating and intensely interesting. Its object is to put before the ordinary reader a general description of the palace which Loftus began to explore in 1851, the excavation of which the Dieulafoys resumed in 1884, which was attacked again at the commencement of M. De Morgan's work in 1897 under M. Jéquier, and which was only finally completed, if such an excavation can ever be said to be complete, last year. This has not been the most fruitful or valuable part of the excavations in other regards, but architecturally the palace is the only building at Susa which it has been possible to restore with any degree of completeness.

The work is well illustrated, with various maps and plans and with some charming little sketches and photographs made by the author on the spot.