

The Excavations at Babylon.¹

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ENGLISH readers have now the opportunity of studying Dr. Koldewey's own account of the excavations which he has carried on at Babylon since 1899. The results of fourteen years' hard work are gathered up into a volume of 335 pages, as lavishly illustrated as the most exacting could desire; the translation is fluent and readable; and the publishers have given the book every chance by the way in which they have produced it. Until further excavations bring new facts to light, this must stand for our knowledge of Babylon; and even then the volume will still be indispensable as the record of a most important stage in the growth of information.

Yet withal there can be no question that the result of so much patient labour is somewhat disappointing. The blame does not lie with Dr. Koldewey, save in one particular, to be referred to later. It lies first with Sennacherib, whose methods of dealing with recalcitrant cities were of a thoroughness which might earn the approval even of the German Great Staff, and who made an example of Babylon in 689 B.C.; next, with the various conquerors who since the days of Nabuna'id have devastated the town; last, with the native brick-diggers who, for many years, have made the mounds of Babel a quarry. It is fairly certain that nothing of importance has escaped the explorers in the portion of the ruins with which they have dealt—after all, only a half of the total area; the things were not there to find—that is where the disappointment comes in. Particularly is this the case with regard to objects of artistic interest. It is scarcely credible that a site so extensive, occupied for so long by such a race, should have yielded nothing more than the pitiful fragments which are all that have rewarded the explorer's efforts. The work once was there, for the decoration of certain parts of the Southern Citadel is undeniably good, though not so brilliant as one would have expected; but the process of destruction has been carried out with a thoroughness which has left next to nothing for even the most patient investigator.

The area of ground recognized as having

¹ *The Excavations at Babylon.* By Robert Koldewey (Macmillan; 21s. net).

certainly come within the enclosure of the great city, embraces five principal mounds—Babil, on the extreme north of the site; the Kasr, in the centre; Amran-ibn-ali, on the south; with Merkes, a little east of the line between the Kasr and Amran; and Homera still further to the east. In addition, the low-lying area known as Sachn, or the Pan, has proved of the utmost importance. Previous excavation under Layard, Oppert, and Rassam had accomplished very little; though Rassam's work in the southern part of the site yielded a multitude of business documents, particularly those of the great banking house of Egibi, and the precious Cyrus Cylinder describing the capture of the city. The sites, in particular, were in hopeless confusion, each explorer having his own fancy as to the location of the various buildings of historic fame. Koldewey's work, though admittedly only a beginning, has at least put an end to some of this uncertainty, and certain of the points which have long been in dispute may now be regarded as settled—particularly the position of the Great Tower of Babel, and possibly also that of the Hanging Gardens, though here there is still uncertainty.

Herodotus' description of the vast enclosing wall of Babylon is familiar to all. The circuit of the walls, he says, was 180 stadia, the breadth of the wall 50 royal cubits, its height 200 cubits, while on the summit of the wall stood a number of buildings of one storey, leaving space before them for a four-horse chariot to turn on the wall. One hundred gates with brazen or bronze posts and leaves pierced this great *enceinte*, and an inner wall, not much inferior to the outer one, formed a second line of defence. Investigation shows that in some respects Herodotus was not so far out as has been supposed. His circuit, of course, is monstrously exaggerated; in fact, it looks very much in this and in other instances as though the ancient writers had mistaken the measurement of the whole circumference for that of one side. Thus divided by four, most of the measurements would work out fairly well.

The outer wall of Babylon was a most formidable structure. The fosse was faced on its inner side

by a wall of burnt brick 3·3 metres in thickness. Then came the main outer wall, also of burnt brick, and 7·8 metres thick, then an interval of 12 metres, and then an inner wall of crude brick, 7 metres thick. The 12-metre space between the two walls was filled in with brick rubble, so that the whole formed one tremendous structure over 80 feet in thickness. Not even the walls of Tiryns can compare with this. The inner wall had cavalier towers at intervals, which would show a single storey above the outer wall, just as Herodotus says, and the broad surface of the military road along the top quite bears out his statement as to the chariots. Koldewey remarks that two four-horse chariots could pass each other readily on the top of the wall. The height of this great wall of course remains unknown, and the estimate of Herodotus is no doubt an exaggeration; but in any case it must have been a stupendous and imposing defence.

Within the walls the main interest of the excavations gathers around two points—the Southern Citadel in the Kasr mound, and the Tower Etemnanki and Temple Esagila in Sachn and the adjacent part of Amran. Up the midst of the great triangular area between the walls and the Euphrates, there runs the main artery of ancient Babylon, the Procession Street. The middle section of this noble roadway is paved with fine limestone blocks 1·05 metres square, while the side-walks are formed of 66-centimetre blocks of red breccia, veined with white, each block bearing upon one of its edges an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar. On either side the street is lined with lofty defence walls, so that it could be made a mere death-trap for hostile troops; and these walls are adorned with lions in low relief in enamelled brick. Half-way up the street the roadway is bestridden by the great Ishtar Gate, guarded by double towers adorned with enamelled reliefs of bulls and dragons. On the eastern side of this gate lay the Temple of Ninmach, on the western the great complex of the Southern Citadel. The *ensemble* of this gate, with its rows of gaily coloured creatures, its bronze lions and dragons, and the huge flanking temple and palace must have been magnificent.

A gate on the west side of Procession Street gives access to the first courtyard of Nebuchadnezzar's great palace of the Southern Citadel. Around the open space are many chambers

opening on the courtyard—probably, as Dr. Koldewey conjectures, offices of the administration. Multitudes of inscribed bricks here leave no doubt as to the building being Nebuchadnezzar's; but the explorer becomes almost pathetic in his complaint that the inscriptions are in all cases identical. 'Such numerous and monotonous repetitions are very vexatious for the explorer. He would be better pleased if the texts varied on the different bricks, and afforded him an opportunity of acquiring more details of building achievements, and their nomenclature and purpose. But this desire for information on the part of later scholars was evidently not foreseen by the king of Babylon.' It is Dr. Koldewey's opinion, at present, that this Southern Citadel occupies the site of the very earliest settlement, Babilu or Babilani, the Gate of God, or Gate of the Gods.

North of the first court stands the building which the explorer inclines to identify with the famous Hanging Gardens. It presents the remains of fourteen cells, which have been roofed with strong barrel-vaulting, while one of them still contains a remarkable triple-shafted well adapted for producing a continuous flow of water. Dr. Koldewey suggests that the Hanging Gardens were raised on this vaulting and watered from this well. If so, we must revise our ideas of their splendour. Strabo and Diodorus state that the quadrangle of the gardens measured 4 plethra, or about 120 metres on a side; the actual measure is 30 metres, again exactly one-fourth. The Hanging Gardens, therefore, if this building represents them, would compare rather unfavourably with the roof-garden of an average New York hotel.

Passing westwards, a fine oblong court of 53 metres by 60 gives access to the great throne-room of the Southern Palace, the stateliest chamber so far found in Babylon. It measures 52 metres in length by 17 in breadth. 'If any one,' says Dr. Koldewey, in one of his very scarce Scripture references, 'should desire to localize the scene of Belshazzar's eventful banquet, he can surely place it with complete accuracy in this immense room.' The decoration of this chamber is striking, and enough of it has fortunately been preserved to enable a good idea to be formed of its general effect. (It should be noticed that Figs. 64 and 80 have been transposed, and that it is Fig. 80 which really represents the decoration of the throne-room). The whole area around the

throne-room belongs to Nebuchadnezzar's Palace, west of which lies that of his father Nabopolassar. Within its walls there was discovered a remarkable burial of a person who had been adorned with golden ornaments and dressed in rich gold-spangled garments. The explorer conjectures that the body may be that of Nabopolassar himself.

Between Nabopolassar's palace and the former bed of the Euphrates stands the great river-wall which Dr. Koldewey would identify with the famous 'Imgur-Bel' of Babylon, the companion wall 'Nimitti-Bel,' being in his view the inner wall of the city, whose mound still runs parallel with Procession Street at some distance east of it. The identification of Imgur-Bel is certain from bricks *in situ*, bearing the following inscription: 'Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, the exalted prince, the nourisher of Esagila and Ezida, son of Nabopolassar, King of Babylon am I. Since Nabopolassar, my father, my begetter, made Imgur-Bel, the great Dûr of Babylon, I, the fervent suppliant, worshipper of the Lord of lords, dug its fosses and raised its banks of asphalt and baked bricks mountain high.' In the case of the inner city-wall, the identification with Nimitti-Bel is not quite so certain, as the cylinder which gives it was not found *in situ*, and may refer to either of the double walls near which it lay.

Leaving aside the work at the principal Citadel, where excavation has scarcely done more than to indicate that there is much to be discovered, we turn to the zikurrat Etemenanki, 'the foundation-stone of Heaven and Earth,' the historic 'Tower of Babel,' whose ruins lie in the hollow called 'Sachn' or 'the Pan,' almost due south of the Kasr. Here we have an enormous enclosing wall of crude brick forming an almost perfect square. In the south-west angle of the enclosure rose a huge tower, whose core of burnt brick still survives, with a great ramp, or perhaps stairway, leading up to it from the southern side. The dimensions are gigantic. The enclosing wall measures on the east side 409 metres, and the core of the tower is 90 metres in length on a side. The peribolos wall is double, with chambers between the two components all round. On the east side, the great gate is bordered by two large buildings with open courtyards, apparently store-houses; while on the south the wall is lined with a range of large buildings which must have been priests' houses.

To the south of the enclosing wall stands the

great temple of Marduk, Esagila, whose identification is rendered certain by bricks of Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal, and Nebuchadnezzar naming it. Here, then, is the whole complex of building described by Herodotus (i. 181-183). Etemenanki is what remains of his eight-staged tower; Esagila is the *κάρτω ἱγῶς* in which stood the golden statue of 'Belus,' i.e. Marduk. Dr. Koldewey, however, questions very pronouncedly the general idea formed from Herodotus' description of the zikurrat as a stepped tower, formed of successive gradually diminishing storeys. 'He speaks,' says Dr. Koldewey, 'of eight towers standing one above another, but he does not say that each was smaller than the one below it. I myself desired to accept the general conception of stepped towers, but I know of no safe ground for such a conception.' The actual words of Herodotus are as follows: 'In the midst of this precinct is built a solid tower of one stade both in length and breadth, and on this tower rose another, and another upon that, to the number of eight.' The historian does not expressly state that the eight towers are arranged in successively diminishing stages; but surely that is the only possible construction. If Dr. Koldewey can find 'no safe ground' for such a conception, it may be suggested that no architect would find safe ground for the perpetration of such a monstrosity as a tower consisting of eight towers all of the same diameter, piled one upon the top of the other. The explorer should remember that Nebuchadnezzar was not building in days of steel-framed sky-scrapers. The probability is that the description of Herodotus is quite accurate, and that the universal deduction from it of a stepped tower is perfectly justified.

It is rather refreshing, however, to find Dr. Koldewey incidentally destroying another cherished illusion. He believes the summit of Etemenanki to have been used for purposes of astronomical observation, the reason for the choice of such an elevated position being the thickness of the Babylonian atmosphere! 'The greatly renowned clearness of the Babylonian sky is largely a fiction of European travellers, who are rarely accustomed to observe the night sky of Europe without the intervention of city lights.'

Space forbids more than a mention of the excavation of Epatutilla, the Temple of Ninib, whose foundation cylinders bear the name of Nabopolassar, and are of historic interest because

in their inscriptions Nabopolassar specifically claims to have broken the yoke of the Assyrians from off the neck of Babylon.

It was in the mound called Merkes, which apparently covered the remains of part of the business quarter of the city, that the excavators came upon the traces of the most ancient Babylon. At a very considerable depth were found tablets, mainly business documents, with an admixture of omen literature, dating from the time of the First Dynasty of Babylon, and bearing the names of the immediate successors of Hammurabi—Samsuiluna, Ammiditana, and Samsuditana (2250 B.C.?). The seals found in Merkes, as usual in Babylonia, are of fine quality. 'Glyptic art in Babylon,' remarks Dr. Koldewey, 'is always in advance of the other contemporary plastic arts.' And then he permits himself an observation which is certainly true, but surely highly unnecessary. 'Babylonian plastic art in the round never attained the excellence of the Greek masterpieces of about the fourth century B.C.'! One rather fancies not! Neither Babylonian nor Assyrian plastic art in the round ever came within a thousand miles of even the Egyptian masterpieces of 3000 B.C., let alone Greek art of the best period. Such a statement as that of Dr. Koldewey, made with all solemnity, suggests a grave defect, either of humour or of artistic perception.

It must be admitted, however, that Dr. Koldewey has the *flair* of the genuine explorer, and a true instinct for putting two and two together. His excavations at the northern part of the mound of Homera revealed no building—nothing but a tremendous mass of débris almost entirely consisting of broken brick-work, with some Nebuchadnezzar stamps, and some Greek remains. A disappointment? Not in the least. The explorer remembered how he had been surprised at the absence of débris around the ruined core of Etemenanki. At the great tower the remains of a huge building, practically without débris; at Homera, débris without building. What could be the link between these two facts? A passage from Strabo stating that Alexander the Great intended to rebuild the tower, and spent 600,000 days' rations in having the

débris removed. The mystery is solved. Homera is the débris of the Tower of Babel, and you have a link with Alexander the Great into the bargain. It is by such marshalling of his materials that the great explorer is revealed; and one can imagine something of Dr. Koldewey's gratification when the pieces of his puzzle came together so neatly.

One remark must be made about the whole volume. In his preface, Dr. Koldewey mentions the work of Rich, Layard, Oppert, and Rassam, dismissing it with the brief comment that this work is so entirely superseded by his own that it would be hardly worth while to controvert the numerous errors of the earlier explorers. That is no doubt true, though it might have been more pleasantly expressed. But in one important point Dr. Koldewey might have learnt even of these despised explorers. Some of them—Layard, for example, supremely—even Rassam, higgledy-piggledy as is his *Asshur and the Land of Nimrod*—could make their books interesting. Surely exactness need not always be purchased at the expense of vivacity. No man ever had a finer opportunity for the exercise of the historic imagination than the man who has laid bare Nebuchadnezzar's Throne-Room, the Tower of Babel, and the Procession-Street of Babylon. Yet in the whole of his volume Dr. Koldewey only permits himself one purple patch. The reader will find it on page 196; I do not quote it because its tint is so faint as only to be perceptible in the absolute colourlessness of its own surroundings. The facts of such a writer as Layard may be long since out of date; but he will always be read as the great classic of exploration, simply for the absorbing interest of his narrative. It may safely be said that no one will ever read *The Excavations at Babylon* for interest. It will always have to be read—as a record of facts; but it might have been so much more. Dr. Koldewey has missed a great opportunity, and we have still to wait for the man who will do for modern Babylonian and Assyrian exploration what Layard did for it in the forties and fifties of last century, and what Sir Gaston Maspero is still doing for the exploration of Ancient Egypt.