

main design is usually on the bottom of the plate that it might be enjoyed when the plate was hung against the wall. On some plates there are painted lines below the handles which apparently imitate the handles of baskets. A selection of these plates is shown in Plate VII.

E. H. D.

*The Sabean
Collection*

THE recent reinstallation on the upper floor of the Museum has permitted the display of a collection, purchased several years ago, of objects from the ancient Sabean kingdom in southern Arabia. According to Dr. Legrain, who has prepared a monograph to be published on this collection: the key to Africa and the mother of Abyssinia, the kingdoms of South Arabia bordered on the oldest civilizations of Babylon and Egypt and commanded the sea roads from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf and to India. Of the four Arab kingdoms of the south known to the Romans: the Sabean, Minean, Hadhramut and Kataba, scarcely more than the names of their principal cities and of a few of their kings have survived. Practically a forbidden country, the region is made inaccessible both by the intense heat and by the fanaticism of semi-barbarous, nomadic tribes intolerant of all foreigners.

The few objects recovered by local Arabs in modern times are, for the most part, funeral monuments, in stone or metal, buried with the dead and found in their graves. They may be dated between 150 B. C. and A. D. 200. Historically, they belong to the last period of the South Arabian independent culture before the birth of Islam, which sternly proscribed and destroyed them. The sculptures are inscribed in the South Arabian Sabean, or Himgarite.

The characteristics of the Sabean sculptures are absence of proportions, short legs, thick neck, and broad shoulders. Much finer in execution and richer in detail than some of the other examples is the limestone statuette shown in Plate VIII. It is

completely carved in the round and is probably the best and the oldest piece in the collection. The Sabean art is reminiscent of the Sumerian sculpture of the lower Euphrates—as is well illustrated by the very interesting head shown in Plate IX. The statuettes are always symbols, never real portraits; they, together with the other sculptures and the inscriptions on them, present an important addition to our knowledge of Sabean art and history.

*A Collection from
Tell Billa and
Tepe Gawra*

SOME of the outstanding specimens which have been obtained by the expedition to Tell Billa and Tepe Gawra, in Mesopotamia, are now on display in the gallery to the left of the center hall on the upper floor. Pottery, clay figurines, and copper and bronze objects of various periods form a representative collection and evince the high degree of culture that was attained by the different peoples who successively inhabited these sites.

Of the objects on exhibition, few have greater historical significance than the painted incense burner and the model shrine from Tell Billa, the discovery of which was reported in the *Bulletin* for December, 1931. Both belong to the same period, about 1500 B. C., having been recovered from the stratum assigned to the Hurrians, who were the early inhabitants of the region, preceding the Assyrians. The incense burner is especially important in that its decoration links up with the art of western Syria and of the Aegean basin, proving that the Hurrians formed a cultural bridge between Asia and Europe. As for the shrine, the almost intact condition in which it was recovered enables us to gain valuable insight into the architectural conventions of the period, while of added interest are the incised decorations on the individual bricks. The relative positions of the two objects when found were especially noteworthy: the censer was discovered resting on top of the shrine, an arrangement undoubtedly of religious significance.



SABEAN FUNERARY STATUETTE, SOUTH ARABIA



ALABASTER HEAD FROM THE SABEAN KINGDOM, SOUTH ARABIA