

NIPPUR AGAIN

I.—SUMERIAN HEADS

AMONG the treasures of the Babylonian Section are now exhibited two small but valuable Sumerian heads, cut in hard stone in the round, which add considerably to the importance of our collection of originals. One is a Gudea turbaned head, of that classical period of 2400 B. C. so richly represented in the life size statues of the Louvre Museum. The other is an older type of Sumerian sculpture, with inlaid eyes and incised eyebrows in a bald head, of an attenuated grace, which may be fairly dated to the time of King Sargon, or shortly after, about 2600 B. C.

Both come from Nippur, and their discovery is neither new nor unknown. In fact it was reported over forty years ago by John H. Haynes, who then directed the Third—1893-1896, and the Fourth—1899-1900, Expeditions sent to Babylonia by the University of Pennsylvania. Both were first published in 1903 in a pamphlet, entitled "Bel Temple zu Nippur", being a lecture given by Dr. H. V. Hilprecht before German Court and University circles, pp. 52 and 66, which was translated into English the following year, 1904, for the benefit of an early publication of this Museum: *The Transactions of the Department of Archaeology*, Vol. I, Part II, pp. 45 and 57. After the death of Dr. Hilprecht, a part of his private collection was bequeathed to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which graciously lent the two heads, with other important pieces from Nippur and Fara, to the University Museum.

The Gudea heads are such a landmark of Sumerian sculpture that, in 1927, having no specimen on exhibition, the Museum authorities decided on the purchase of a very fine example, for a considerable sum, from antique dealers in New York. Curiously enough, the rest of the body, minus the head, was left in Mesopotamia, and has become the property of the Baghdad Museum, who obligingly sent us a cast, restoring to our eyes the complete seated squat statue of Gudea, a votive offering to his God, Nin-gish-zi-da. (Cf. *Bulletin*, May 1937, p. 7.)

When the purchase of the Gudea head was reported in the *Museum Journal*, Sept. 1927, pp. 241-245, a picture of the Nippur head was added as an illustration, from an old negative of Haynes, with a quotation from his diary on August 1st, 1899. So far for the Gudea Head.¹

As for the bald Sumerian head,² two negatives of it are also preserved

in the Museum files: Nos. 350 and 364. And in a typewritten report of Haynes, composed by order of the Committee, on his work at Nippur during the Third Expedition (2 copies: Nippur Archives, Nos. 229-230), he gives an interesting description of it:

"The head alone measures two and five-eighths inches in height including the remnant of the neck left in front, it is two and seven-eighths inches in extreme height. The head is well balanced. The face is pyriform. Except for a thick nose the features are regular and pleasing. The corner of the eye is inlaid ivory, set in a slightly protruding rim of lead to mark the lids.

"It seems probable that the custom of coloring the edges of the eyelid prevailed in the sculptor's time, otherwise the contrast in color between the dull lead and glistening ivory would have been too great. Both pupil and iris are wanting. The right eye is entirely missing. A curving incision made on a level and producing shadow in different lights, fairly represents the arching brow. It is possible, and indeed it seems highly probable, that some substance to imitate the hair of the brow was fixed in the bevelled slit or incision, which is admirably cut to retain such an imitation of the human brow.

"The idea of such a material and literal imitation of nature is in perfect harmony with the treatment of the eyes, and seems to have been a detail of the facial expression."

Unfortunately, today the inlaid eye is wanting. The white was probably not made of ivory, but more likely cut in a piece of shell. And we cannot be sure that the mounting was really lead. The eyebrows must have been inlaid with black bitumen, as well as the hollowed pupils.

II.—ARCHAIC ENGRAVED STONE PLAQUE³

THIS famous "Incised limestone representing a goddess of the Ur-Enlil type sitting on a bird" is entered by Haynes in his catalogue of negatives of the Fourth Nippur Expedition, under the number 229. Unfortunately, the negative is wanting in our files. It was first published by Hilprecht in "Exploration in Bible Lands", p. 274, in 1904, and was since discussed in many scientific publications.

It represents a common scene of introduction of a worshipper to a sitting goddess, as found on many seals. But the fact of its being engraved



PLATE IV. The Grudea head discovered at Nippur.

PLATE V.

Old Sumerian head of Sargonid Style,
Nippur third Expedition. Inlaid eye still
in original setting.



Same head today. Inlaid eye
missing.

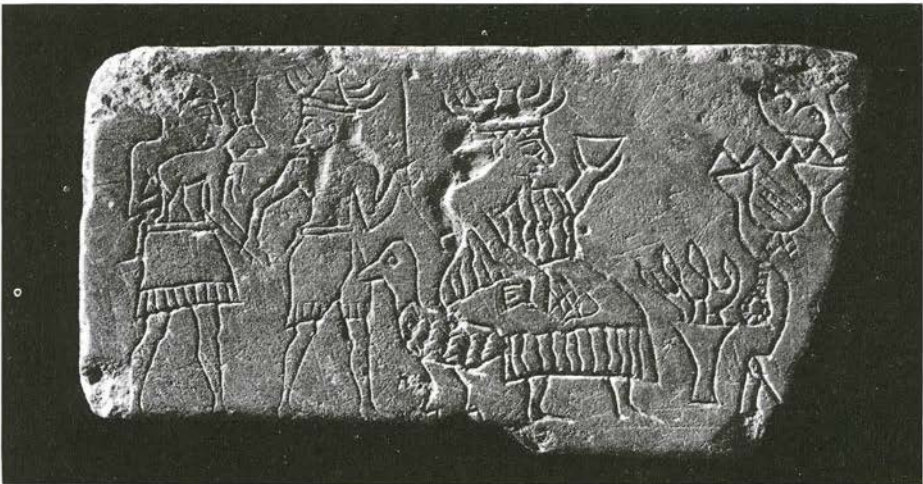


on a limestone tablet, and its archaic details, give it a special value. It may be fairly in the Sargonid period, 2700 B. C., if not earlier.

It was reproduced by the learned historian, Edward Meyer, in "Sum-erier und Semiten", 1906, pp. 98-99. He added to his interpretation an opinion of Dr. H. Schafer, according to whom the last figure on the right was that of "a nude woman seated, legs apart and arms erect, possibly in the pangs of child-birth."

Both engraved scene and opinion were reproduced by Dr. Morris Jastrow, Jr., in his "Bilder Mapped", 1912, No. 86.

Finally they were discussed by the present curator of the Babylonian section in the Museum Journal, December 1929, pp. 231-232, who could not see in the curious figure anything but a tripod supporting an offering table. Similar tripods are found on an archaic engraved shell plaque, Museum Journal, June 1927, p. 150, and on a more recent seal, Museum Journal, Dec. 1929, p. 295, No. 79.



Fragment of a perforated plaque—Worshipping of the goddess Ninâ, Nippur Fourth Expedition.

The presence of the original limestone plaque, lent, like the two heads, by the Philadelphia Museum of Art, allows for the first time a closer inspection of the finer details not easily discerned on the previous illustrations.

It is now clear that the seated goddess holds in her right hand not a whisk, nor an ear of corn, but a fish, a symbol which may help to identify her with the goddess "Ninâ", known by the sign of the fish. What hangs like a bag from the upper part of the table, may be a net, tied with a looped rope. A similar looped belt on a tripod on the engraved shell plaque, is the symbol worshipped by the nude Sumerian libator "all shaven and shorn."

The fragment is the upper left corner of a perforated plaque, about 10 x 10 cm. originally. Traces of the central perforation still exist below the feet of the seated goddess. And consequently we may restore a second seated deity across the tripod, and a lower register with interesting details of a boat or fisherman's life.

Archaeology is a slow and endless process of scrutinizing every detail, on the originals preferably, and that is what museums are made for.

L. L.

¹Marble. Registered: L. 29. 212 (and F. 29-6-361). Diam. 65 x 55 x 55 mm.

²Marble. Registered: L. 29. 213 (and F. 29-6-355). Diam. 78 x 65 x 54 mm.

³Registered: L-29-346 (and F. 29-6-286): 73 x 40 x 14 mm.

A FRAGMENT OF A LIMESTONE RELIEF

Presented to the Third Nippur Expedition of the Museum in the last decade of the 19th Century by Hamdy Bey, then Director of The Imperial Ottoman Museum in Constantinople.

Although there is no information as to the circumstances of its discovery, there can be but small doubt that it comes from Persepolis, Persia—possibly from the great stairway to the Hall of Darius.

It is in the stereotyped tradition of Persian Sculpture, marked by a complete disregard for individuality in representations of persons. It must have been but one of hundreds of similar units that formed a geometric pattern on the walls of the stairway.

Its style and size indicate that the figure, of which we have only the head, was one of the famous 10,000 Immortals. A Persian, not a Mede or Susian, who are differentiated by their beards and head-dress.

C. B.

