



Figure 1. Two of the rock-carved cones from Turkey's "Coneland" with their lava caps. See page 45, footnote.

A "FULBRIGHT" IN TURKEY

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Early in September 1951 I came to Istanbul as the first Fulbright Research Scholar appointed by the United States Educational Committee in Turkey. For practically a whole year, until late in August 1952, I worked in Istanbul's Museum of the Ancient Orient, studying and copying the Sumerian literary tablets in the Nippur collection of its Tablet Archives. The pages to follow will attempt to sketch briefly the purpose and nature of these researches and summarize some of their results.¹

One of the more significant archaeological contributions of the past hundred years to the humanities consists of the discovery, restoration, and translation of the Sumerian literary documents, the oldest group of belles lettres in the history of civilization. Inscribed more than thirty-five hundred years ago in the cuneiform script on some four thousand clay tablets and fragments, they include a varied assortment of man's first recorded myths and epic tales, hymns and lamentations, proverbs and essays. Long before the Hebrews wrote down their Bible, and the Greeks their *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the Sumerians, who were neither Indo-Europeans nor Semites and whose original homeland may have been in the steppes of Central Asia, created a rich and mature literature, largely poetic in form, which was copied, translated, and imitated all over the ancient

¹ This is not to deny the great debt we owe even in this highly specialized field of cuneiform research to such institutions as the British Museum, the Louvre, the Berlin Museum, and the Ashmolean Museum; the material from these museums copied and published by such scholars as Zimmern and De Genouillac, King, Langdon, and Gadd have proved to be invaluable for the restoration of the Sumerian literary documents. Moreover in view of the new discoveries of tablets by the Joint Expedition to Nippur, and the highly penetrating quality of recent Sumerological studies by Thorkild Jacobsen, the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago no doubt stands to play a leading role in this field of research in the days to come.

civilized world. Nor has it failed to leave its mark on the thought and spirit of modern man, though how and to what extent will long remain a matter of scholarly research and debate.

Now in this process of the restoration of the Sumerian belles lettres, Turkey and America happen to play a leading, coordinate, and mutually supplementary role. For by far the greater number of Sumerian literary tablets and fragments were excavated by the University of Pennsylvania some fifty years ago at the site of ancient Nippur, the cultural center of Sumer, and these are now located primarily in the Istanbul Museum of the Ancient Orient and in the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. These are the two institutions therefore that have been largely responsible for the copying and publishing of the Sumerian literary material in order to make it available to scholars and humanists the world over.

In the decades following the excavations of the Sumerian literary tablets from Nippur more than one scholar, realizing to some extent the value and importance of their contents for oriental studies, examined and copied some of them. To be mentioned are George Barton, Leon Legrain, Henry Lutz and David Myhrman, all four of whom contributed to this task to some extent. Hugo Radau, the first to concentrate much time and energy on the Sumerian literary material, prepared careful and trustworthy copies of more than thirty in the University Museum. Moreover, though unfortunately the time was not ripe, he worked diligently on the translation and interpretation of the texts, and did make some progress in this direction. The well-known Anglo-American Orientalist, Stephen Langdon, picked up in a sense where Radau left off. Over a period of years he copied close to a hundred pieces from the Nippur collections of both the Istanbul Museum of the Ancient Orient and our own University Museum. Langdon, unfortunately, had a tendency to copy very fast, and not a few errors have crept into his work. Moreover his attempted translations and interpretations have failed to stand the test of time. On the other hand he did succeed in making available in one form or another a number of very important Sumerian literary texts which might otherwise have remained stored away in the museum cupboards, and by his zest and enthusiasm helped to make his fellow cuneiformists realize the significance of their contents.

One of the outstanding contributors to the field of Sumerian literature and indeed to Sumerological studies as a whole is Arno Poebel, the scholar who put Sumerology on a scientific basis with his publication of a detailed Sumerian grammar in 1923. In his monumental and invaluable publication, *Historical and Grammatical Texts*, which contains superb copies of more than one hundred and fifty tablets and fragments from the Nippur collection of the University Museum, there are close to forty inscribed with parts of Sumerian literary works. But it is the name of Edward Chiera, for many years a member of the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, which is preeminent in the field of Sumerian literary research; he had a clearer idea than any of his predecessors of the scope and character of the Sumerian literary works and of the fundamental need of copying and publishing the pertinent Nippur material in Istanbul and Philadelphia. In 1924 he traveled to Istanbul and copied some fifty pieces from its Nippur collection. A number of these were large and well-preserved tablets, and their contents gave scholars a fresh insight into the scope and character of the Sumerian literary works. In the years that followed he copied more than two hundred literary tablets and fragments from the Nippur collection of the University Museum. All in all he made available to his fellow cuneiformists more of these texts than all his predecessors put together, and it is largely as a result of his patient and far-sighted "footwork" that the true nature of the Sumerian belles lettres finally began to be appreciated.

My own interest in this highly specialized field of research stemmed directly from Edward Chiera's contributions, though I actually owe my Sumerological training to Arno Poebel with whom I was privileged to work closely for a number of years in the early thirties. For when Chiera was called to the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago as head of its Assyrian Dictionary project, he took his copies of the Nippur literary tablets with him, and the Oriental Institute undertook to publish them in two volumes. Upon Chiera's untimely death in 1933, the editorial department of the Oriental Institute entrusted me with the preparation of these two volumes for posthumous publication. It was in the course of carrying out this task that the significance of the Sumerian literary documents dawned upon me, as well as the realization that all efforts to translate and interpret the documents would remain largely futile and

barren until many more of the uncopied Nippur tablets and fragments in Istanbul and Philadelphia had been made available.

From that day to this, for almost two decades now, I have devoted most of my scientific efforts to the copying, piecing together, translation, and interpretation of the Sumerian literary compositions. In 1937 I traveled to Istanbul as a Guggenheim Fellow and, with the full cooperation of the Turkish Directorate of Antiquities and the authorized museum officials, copied more than one hundred and seventy tablet and fragments inscribed with portions of Sumerian literary works, from the Nippur collection of its museum. These copies have now been published with a detailed introduction in Turkish and English. The years which followed were spent largely in the University Museum. Here, with the help of several generous grants from the American Philosophical Society, I studied and catalogued the hundreds of unpublished Sumerian literary documents, identified the contents of most of them so that they could be attributed to one or another of the numerous Sumerian compositions, and copied a number of them. In 1946 I traveled once again to Istanbul and copied another hundred odd pieces, practically all inscribed with portions of myths and epic tales; these are now being prepared for publication. But this still left, as I knew only too well, hundreds of pieces in the Istanbul museum uncopied and unutilizable. It was for the purpose of continuing, and if possible, completing this task that I applied for, and was awarded, a Fulbright Research Professorship to Turkey.

WORK DONE

Upon arrival in Istanbul, I called immediately upon Mr. Aziz Ogan, the Director of the Archaeological museums of that city, who informed me that the Directorate of Antiquities, located in Ankara, had once again generously granted me permission to continue my research. As in the case of my earlier visits, the genial and sympathetic director gave his enthusiastic approval and cooperative support to the highly specialized project, for he fully realized that not only did it promise to result in a not insignificant contribution to humanistic studies, but it also served as an